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Tulsa libraries see fewer visits as e-traffic, circulation rise

The 23 branches saw about 60,000 fewer visits, but data also show circulation is up.

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Pati Wilson checks out the iPad lounge in The Librarium in downtown Tulsa. Officials say physical traffic is down at the Tulsa City-County Library system as more people take advantage of material for their electronic devices. STEPHEN PINGRY/Tulsa World file

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Posted: Wednesday, March 12, 2014 12:00 am | Updated: 7:47 am, Wed Mar 12, 2014.

By NOUR HABIB World Staff Writer |  1 comment

The increase of e-book holdings and new policies aimed at "reducing barriers" at the Tulsa City-County Library are among the reasons people are making fewer physical visits to their branches, library CEO Gary Shaffer said.

Year-to-date traffic numbers presented to the library commission last month show that excluding the closed Central Library and the newly opened Librarium the system's 23 permanent sites have seen traffic decrease by about 4 percent so far this fiscal year.


The numbers, reflecting data through December, show that there were nearly 60,000 fewer visits to the 23 branches than during the same six-month period last year.

Shaffer said a couple of policies implemented last year eliminating fines for children's material and lengthening the checkout period of DVDs to become standard with all other materials may be part of the reason people are visiting the library less frequently.

Although both of those policies are aimed at reducing barriers for using the library, they also reduce the urgent need to get back to the library immediately.

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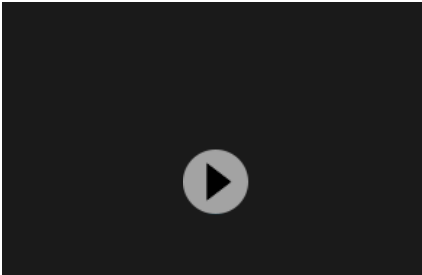
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"But circulation is up," Shaffer said. "People are borrowing more books."

And that, he says, is what's ultimately important.

Last month's report shows that circulation is up 2 percent through the system. Nearly 3 million items were circulated during the six-month period ending in December.

From a business perspective, businesses don't care how many times customers come into their physical stores, as long as they are buying the product and are satisfied with

the experience, Shaffer said.

Focusing on the customer service aspect of the library is what is driving the increase in circulation, Shaffer said.

"People are using us more," he said.

That use may be a little different, in what Shaffer refers to as e-traffic.

About 100,000 digital items were checked out through new services offered at the library, including songs and magazines. Year-to-date numbers show that digital book checkouts increased by 34 percent, continuing the upward trend seen over the past five years.





Digital book checkouts make up 7 percent of the total circulation so far this year, compared to 5 percent last year.


"The increase in e-book holdings, the downloadable magazines, the downloadable music, the Homework Help all of those things that I don't need to go to the library for," Shaffer said.

"We're meeting the customer where they are."

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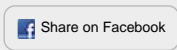
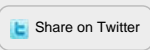
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Ann McWhortor posted at 8:37 am on Wed, Mar 12, 2014.



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I use the audio and the e-book system often. I also try and take kids to the library once a week. Each child has to find 2 books to check out and most the time they ask if they can check out more.

They also join the reading program that is offered to kids each summer.



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Fewer sign up for health plans

• The industry would likely get to the "point of no return" by 2018.

• But a federal report says that the number of people who sign up for health plans is expected to decline in the coming years.

• The report says that the number of people who sign up for health plans is expected to decline in the coming years.

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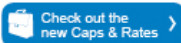
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