

360 Counter Helps Colgate University Improve Return on Investment



Michael Poulin, Digital Resources Librarian and Coordinator of Digital Initiatives at Colgate University Library, manages over 30,000 unique electronic journal resources. The 2,800 students of Colgate University have been using Serials Solutions 360 Core and 360 Link services for years and now access well over 300,000 full text views per year. To ensure that Colgate has the right resources in its collection, it is crucial that Mike has accurate information to assess cost and usage.

Close to 70% of the library's budget is spent on serials (49% on electronic resources), so it was imperative that the library have a good grasp of which publications were being used. The high cost of some of the publications made knowing the use patterns especially important. Therefore, Mike needed to compile accurate journal usage data.

The first challenge was gathering information. The data needed comes from multiple sources, and is received in inconsistent formats. For example, a subscription to the *Journal of Politics* has usage data from six different sources. Because it is difficult to predict which version of the publication students use (e.g.: some students use the publisher copy), Mike wanted to look at cumulative usage. Because he wasn't able to get a comprehensive look at the usage data for individual journals in any one place, he would spend hundreds of hours of his own time pulling the information together. It would take even more time to compile a usage report after collecting and cleaning the data. All analysis and reporting had to be done manually, another difficult and time-consuming chore that only provided half the usage answer. Associating and analyzing cost with usage to complete the picture would be even more complex.

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Michael Poulin

It was clear to Mike that he needed a tool to help him organize and analyze accurate usage data for his collection. He conducted an analysis of two potential solutions, and made the decision to use Serials Solutions 360 Counter. While the other solution had much to offer, Mike chose 360 Counter because the other solution was three to five times more expensive and, using that solution, it was hard to arrive at the same quality of analysis provided by 360 Counter.

Since he began using 360 Counter in January 2008, Mike says he has clearly seen many benefits. The ability to sort journal titles by use enables him to see low use titles and the filters in the product eliminate those journals that are not part of the library's subscription base. The ability to easily manipulate cost and usage data helps the library assess which journals make the most effective use of the budget.

Before using 360 Counter, Mike never had an easy way to combine the data from multiple vendors. Now he has a number of ways to manipulate and sort data to obtain accurate use statistics in much less time and in a much more efficient manner. With the correct formatting Mike can quickly process data and make individual journal decisions based on incremental data.

"Soon after purchasing 360 Counter we were able to make a major purchase decision based entirely on interpretation and analysis of the information revealed by the product", said Mike. "For years, we only had the *Science* magazine archive available online. Current issues were available in print only. This was because it costs six times more to subscribe to the online format than the print. We were not willing to incur that kind of cost – that is until we were able to track the usage of *Science* using 360 Counter."

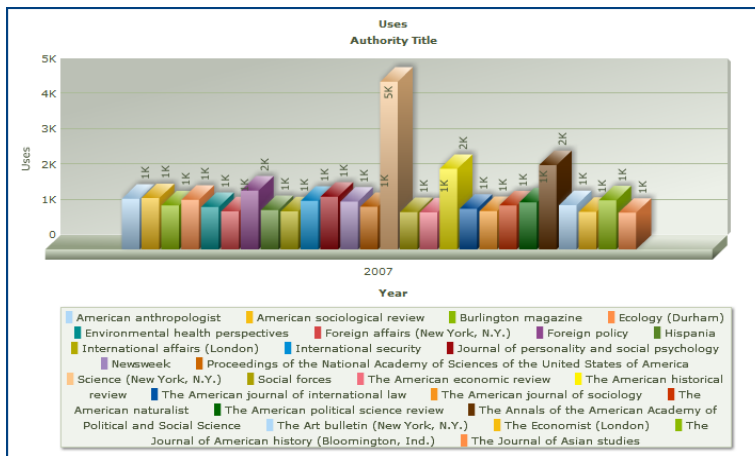
What Mike discovered was that *Science* was used twice as much as any other title, and that was just the archived edition. Knowing this gave him the knowledge needed to make an informed decision and upgrade the digital subscription to include current issues too. This gave the library a better return on investment and enabled it to offer better service to the students.

In the months since Mike has been using 360 Counter, he has been impressed with the results. He has added a weighting factor to the data for those titles that the library subscribes to individually as well as those that are listed as part of packages. For these titles, by clustering (summing) the Authority title, Mike gets usage data that has been aggregated by title from a variety of sources. He no longer has to aggregate usage data from different providers because he can get a picture of the total use of a title quickly and easily. He has also added the cost data for individual subscriptions and databases which all add to the benefits of using 360 Counter.

Prior to using 360 Counter, the individual journal (JR1 etc.) use statistics were hard to look for. Now, it is possible to sort by journal and cost per use. Mike claims, "We could never do this before as combining it manually was beyond our staffing resources. This will help us make much more informed decisions about where to spend our resources to best effect."

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Usage reports help you to easily compare how much each journal is being used. Mike gets a better picture of the true impact of use – he can get subtotals for each journal based on its total use, discover expensive titles that are poor performers and review them for possible cancellation.

As an example, Mike points to the journal *Africa*: "Now we can see the journals we pay for individually. I can see the sum of uses of Africa from all the different providers. From this information, I get a good feeling for the total impact of the journal. Because it is weighted by the title of the journal, all the information appears together. So if it is something we paid for as a one-off, all the usage shows regardless of the vendor. While we could always see the use from JSTOR, MetaPress, or Sage individually, we could never combine it with the EBSCOhost use, nor could we determine which service the users would select."

Several years ago, the library did a study that resulted in a large cancellation of journals. It was a huge project that required Mike to take spreadsheets from a number of sources, combine the information from the spreadsheets into a database, and produce clustering and summations. All this took many months to complete. Now, using 360 Counter, a similar project will take much less time. Mike can look at and sort data in a number of ways and create custom reports. He can then do an analysis of the data and present good business arguments that faculty can understand. The library has the facts in-hand to make informed decisions regarding restructuring the collection in order to make it more dynamic, more cost effective, and better utilized.

In addition, Mike spends far fewer hours collating requests from supervisors. This frees his time for his other job responsibilities. "There are always more requests for journals than there is budget to fulfill so real use statistics play a pivotal role," he says. "By using 360 Counter we are able to get management data for individual journal titles that we could never get before and make much more intelligent decisions as to where we want to put our resources."

Find out more!
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