



**userful**<sup>TM</sup>  
DESKTOP

## Using Useful Desktop\* to Cut Costs and Improve Services in OPACs



**“Userful saved us thousands of dollars and months of hard work with their Useful Desktop\* system. It is rare to find a vendor that actually comes through with what they promise, but Useful is one.”**

Monique Sendzel,  
IT Manager,  
Johnson County Library

### The Library

Johnson County Library comprises a Central Resource Library and 12 branch libraries in Johnson County, Kansas. Each year, Johnson County Library has more visitors than the Kansas City Royals, the Kansas City Chiefs, and the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art combined. Johnson County Library checked out five million items for the first time in 2001, and will check out more than five million items this year. Established in 1952 by volunteers, the library has developed into an important county service, serving the entire Kansas City Metro Area.

### The Need

Prior to adopting Useful Desktop\*, Johnson County Library used new PCs as OPAC stations. The cost of each PC included the hardware purchase, the Windows operating system and locked-down software to harden the OPACs against hacker attacks and to limit the web browser to the library catalog. The IT staff had to install and configure the locked-down software on each new computer. This was done by ghosting, rather than by making changes on each individual machine, but it also meant that any configuration adjustments had to be made to a master image, and each computer had to be re-ghosted in order for the changes to be implemented.

OPAC computers, which appeared to provide full public computing services, but were in fact limited to OPAC use, also confused patrons and caused additional work for desk librarians who had to explain them. The total cost of ownership thus included purchase and set-up of new PCs; purchase, installation, configuration and maintenance of the Windows OS and browser; purchase, installation, configuration and maintenance of the locked-down software; plus associated staffing costs.

While using new, locked-down PCs worked as an OPAC solution, it increased the total cost of ownership beyond what the library needed to pay. Further, as the area's population grew and patrons demanded more Internet access and other services, Johnson County Library needed more OPAC stations to satisfy public demand. Since Johnson County Library, like all libraries, operates on a limited budget, using expensive, new PCs was not the optimal solution. The library considered two options to lower the cost of their OPAC system. Their first choice was to use older computers as OPAC stations. They reasoned that, since OPAC stations are essentially only web-browsers with security, it might be possible to make do with obsolete PCs. However, they found that the older computers would not run a current Windows web browser, and so would not work even for this purpose since the library's ILS required a current browser to access its online catalog.

Johnson County Library also considered introducing a thin client system to replace their aging OPAC PCs, but rejected this option because of the high cost. While the library could have re-used their computer monitors, keyboards and mice, the CPUs still would have gone to the landfill or recycler, and the cost of purchasing servers and licenses for a thin client system turned out to be higher than the cost of replacing all the PCs. Library IT staff would also have needed training on operating and maintaining the thin client system.

Lastly, the thin clients would have had difficulty supporting some of the graphics that the library's OPAC system required, resulting in an unacceptably slow response time. Since the library's goal was to reduce the cost and effort associated with providing OPAC stations, the IT staff rejected thin clients as a step in the wrong direction.

\* Formerly DiscoverStation

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