

## DIKTUON: *WEB-BASED STATISTICS TRACKERS*

*By Hannah Rozear*

Many libraries have discarded their tick and tally sheets in favor of electronic or web-based statistics trackers. The widespread popularity of the tick and tally method was probably due in part to the speed and simplicity with which one could record a reference question. The downside of tick marks, however, is how little they say about the nature and variety of questions handled by library staff over time.

A few notable advantages to making the switch to an electronic or web-based statistics tracker:

- 1) It is a one-stop shop for housing your library's reference and instruction statistics.<sup>1</sup>
- 2) It gives you the ability to run reports and analyze desk transactions based on different variables, thus giving you a more nuanced view of your desk traffic.
- 3) The growing archive of questions entered into your statistics tracker can double as a training tool and staff knowledge base.

### TRACKING & COLLECTING

At a very basic level, a statistics tracker allows you to record your reference transactions in *one* place. Unlike a paper tally sheet, statistics can be entered once into a time-stamped web form and then accessed at any point from any computer. When designing your statistics form, you will need to spend time planning<sup>2</sup> which categories of information you are most interested in tracking. Common fields might include location, patron type, question type, time spent, and question format. The tracking form does not need to be complex and may mirror the information collected on paper forms. Most statistics trackers are highly customizable and can conform to the unique needs of your library. Take patron types, for example. In a theological library, you may decide you want to capture data on how many questions you get from local pastors or students enrolled in a new program in your seminary. Libraries in a university setting might be interested in distinguishing questions that come from undergraduates, PhD students, or the general public. You might also choose to add categories to your form for research consultations, departmental visits, or technology workshops. The ability to customize and fine-tune your statistics tracker allows you to capture the "off the desk" work that you do in a more meaningful way.

### REPORTING & ANALYZING

What do you want out of your reference statistics? When switching to a new statistics tracker, it's important to think about what you plan to do with your data. The benefit of having your stats online is that they can be viewed at any point by managers or staff looking for a quick snapshot of daily activity, or a longitudinal view of desk transactions over time. Statistics can be easily pulled together or sliced and diced to conform to the

<sup>1</sup> The focus here is on reference and instruction statistics tracking, but libraries are using statistics trackers for many other areas of library services: circulation, reserves, interlibrary loan, etc.

<sup>2</sup> For ideas on creating and designing a tracking system, see David Lakly, "Introduction to Our Reference Statistics Tracking System," *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 61 (2007): 163-166.

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requirements of ARL, ATS/ATLA, or other organizational reports. The structure of your forms will serve as one way to control and keep your stat-tracking consistent, but you can also run queries and reports based on different variables (e.g., time of day, librarian, location, etc.). If tracking your questions in real time (which is ideal), most tools automatically add a timestamp. The more robust reference tracking tools (e.g., Gimlet, Desk Tracker, or Reference Analytics)<sup>3</sup> allow you to add tags or query the database by keyword for more complex reporting and analysis. You could have a tag or search for “EndNote,” for example, to see how many EndNote questions you’d received in the past year.

## STATISTICS TRACKER AS KNOWLEDGE BASE

In addition to the rich collecting and reporting features of a statistics tracker, the tool can also serve as an internal knowledge base. As such, it has the potential to contribute to staff training, information sharing among staff, and the day-to-day archiving of your library’s activity. When librarians switch shifts at the desk, they can easily review the questions that had arisen during the previous shift. And when new staff members or library interns are trained, they will have a body of questions to refer to for common questions (and answers). The documentation may also allow supervisors to provide better feedback and assessment of library staff.<sup>4</sup>

## OVERVIEW OF SOME POPULAR STATISTICS TRACKERS

A growing number of tools have cropped up over the years that make the transition from paper to electronic statistics tracking much easier. One concern libraries might have about statistics trackers is the cost. While some of the more robust systems do have a price tag, there are a wide variety of free or low cost options.

**Desk Tracker:** <http://www.desktracker.com/>

A commercial statistics tracker with customizable forms and flexible reporting

(+) robust reporting functions; highly customizable; web-based (no installation required); hosted and supported by Compendium

(-) Not free (request a quote from the website); not easy to edit after the fact; doesn’t allow you to view question log

**Gimlet:** <http://gimlet.us/>

Another commercial statistics tracker with customizable forms and flexible reporting

(+) robust reporting functions; web-based (no installation required); hosted and supported by Gimlet; option to tag entries; full-text searchable

(-) \$10/month

**Google Forms:**<sup>5</sup> <http://www.google.com/google-d-s/forms/>

Part of the Google Docs suite, Google Forms is a simple web form builder

(+) Nothing to install; free; easy

(-) Google forms provide some reporting functionality (data gathered in a Google spreadsheet), but it is limited.

<sup>3</sup> Gimlet, built by the creators of [LibStats](#), Desk Tracker, and Reference Analytics are a few popular statistics trackers. See more details in the Overview section.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion on using stats trackers for staff assessment, see John Weaver, “Assessing the Reference Librarian as a Collaborative Knowledge Worker (Refereed Reference Panel),” *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 61 (2007): 172-177.

<sup>5</sup> See Sunshine Carter and Thomas Ambrosi, “How to Build a Desk Statistics Tracker in Less Than an Hour Using Forms in Google Docs,” *Computers in Libraries* 31, no. 8 (2011): 12-16.

**Libstats:** <http://code.google.com/p/libstats/>

A simple web-based app for tracking library reference statistics

(+) Free; open source; allows you to edit entries and backdate questions; allows you to view the list of recent questions or query the archive of questions by keyword.

(-) Developers left to start Gimlet; reporting functions are limited; you provide the IT integration and server space.

**Reference Analytics:** <http://help.springshare.com/refanalytics>

A web-based statistics tracker from Springshare (creator of LibGuides & LibAnswers)

(+) For those libraries using LibGuides the interface will be familiar; robust reporting functions; hosted and supported by Springshare

(-) Not free (request a quote from the website); set-up is time-consuming<sup>6</sup>

**Notable mentions:** MS Excel and Access are also great tools for tracking statistics.

## CONCLUSION

As libraries continue to think about how to demonstrate their value through ongoing assessment, these tools provide one way to record and analyze library services. The decision-making that goes into setting up a statistics tracker, or even a review of your current statistics-tracking practices, provides a great opportunity for library staff to think about what they are tracking and how the data can help them improve upon their service to patrons.

## FURTHER READING

Garrison, Judith S. "Making Reference Service Count: Collecting and Using Reference Service Statistics to Make a Difference." *Reference Librarian* 51, no. 3 (July 2010): 202-211.

Todorinova, Lily, Andy Huse, Barbara Lewis, and Matt Torrence. "Making Decisions: Using Electronic Data Collection to Re-Envision Reference Services at the USF Tampa Libraries." *Public Services Quarterly* 7, no. 1/2 (2011): 34-48.

More detailed reviews of Gimlet, Desk Tracker, Reference Analytics, and MS Access are available from the blog, [MARS: Emerging Technologies in Reference Section of RUSA](#).



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<sup>6</sup> Full review here: <http://etmars.wordpress.com/2012/02/10/reviews-tracking-stats-with-reference-analytics/>