

# I am Scott Livingston. I am not a book

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**Abstract.** Public libraries strive for deeper and greater community engagement. At the same time, ecommerce and social media have established new expectations around personalized and customized service. OCLC's Wise takes a different approach to library management and community engagement workflows by designing them around people - not books. In doing so, OCLC Wise provides libraries with the tools and data to tailor programming, messaging and collections to meet the unique needs of their local communities.

Keywords: OCLC wise, library books, public library, communication, library management system, library collections

In a 2010 survey [1], three out of four Americans said “book” is the word that best describes libraries. That’s no surprise. American public libraries have a combined collection of over seven hundred million books [2]. The book has been, and continues to be, integral in how many people define a public library.

And yet, despite this deeply held belief of the symbiotic relationship between libraries and books, data from the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services (IMLS) shows that circulation *per capita* has been declining in American public libraries for the past several years [3]. Perhaps not surprisingly, though, IMLS data also shows that people visit public libraries less often [4].

When looking at circulation and library visit statistics, it can be tempting to think that U.S. public libraries are in big trouble. As a society, we are visiting public libraries less often, and when we do we are checking out fewer books. And if libraries are just about books, this really is quite bad news. But as with many things, the truth is more nuanced - and much more interesting.

And something interesting came to light when the Urban Library Council (ULC) analyzed the mission statements of the largest public libraries in the U.S. [5]. While topics such as “reading” and “books” were certainly part of these libraries’ missions, there was a significantly greater emphasis on themes such as community, learning, and people.

It’s an intriguing idea that libraries are about people as much as - or perhaps more than - they are about books. An idea that has merit. For example, if you look at IMLS statistics on library programming [6], it’s clear that attendance for library programs has steadily increased over the past decade.

What we start to see then is an expanded view of the role of (and needs of) public libraries. And this view begs several questions. How are libraries able to properly work in this environment when so many of the tools they use (like their library management systems) are built around books? What would it mean if a library management system was built around people rather than books? What would it look like if library tools enabled libraries to truly focus on engaging with their communities in more meaningful and impactful ways?

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These questions have driven OCLC to introduce OCLC Wise®, the first community engagement system for U.S. public libraries. While Wise includes many of the functions of traditional integrated library systems (ILS) such as circulation, acquisition, and discovery; it is designed around people, not books. As a result, Wise offers a holistic approach that includes customer relationship management (CRM), a marketing workbench, and robust analytics.

Yes, many libraries use specific solutions for several of these functions, and this often means moving sensitive data among various systems. Wise fully integrates these capabilities to support libraries with streamlined, timely, and data-driven decisions.

Here are two brief examples that show this in practice. Let's say a library wants to offer a program on organic gardening. Typically, staff would create the program and promote it through a newsletter or other homogenous communication channel. This broad and undifferentiated audience means many people who may have little interest in organic gardening are notified. Frequently mistargeting audiences results in lower engagement with library communications - a disadvantage to both the library and its patrons.

Wise empowers libraries to send targeted messages to patrons who have expressed an interest in this sort of engagement. Library staff can create an invitation list based on a variety of demographic and transactional factors (e.g., individuals over the age of eighteen who have checked out a gardening book in the past six months). The ultimate result: more attendance and reduced communication fatigue.

Wise places a high importance on patron privacy. It is important to note that neither library staff nor invitees can see any personally-identifiable information. Likewise, libraries and patrons have control over who participates in this sort of targeted invitation, based on library policy and patron preference. And, patrons always have the option to opt out of these types of communication from their online account.

Evidence-based collection management is another example of how Wise supports a true customer-centric approach. Wise relies on aggregated, anonymized circulation data to help libraries better balance and maintain collections overall, and at the branch level. Staff can use this information to make informed decisions about how to grow or not grow their collection, redefine their library space, and even how to improve programming.

For example, libraries can set a circulation threshold after which a book needs to be manually reviewed to determine if it is damaged and should be replaced. Wise can also look at circulation by subject within and across branches to notify library staff about popular subjects that are underrepresented in any given branch.

Wise is designed around people and driven by data. It provides libraries with the tools and information they need to better serve the changing needs of their communities and have more impact on people's lives. For more information about Wise, please visit: [oclc.org/wise](https://oclc.org/wise).

## **About the Author**

Scott Livingston is currently an Executive Director at OCLC where he leads the product management team for Library Management Services, which includes WorldShare Management Services, Worldshare Platform applications, EZproxy and CONTENTdm. He also leads OCLC's product operations and market segment strategy team.

Prior to joining OCLC, Scott was Senior Vice President at Cision and was responsible for global product planning and marketing as well as US public relations, specialized sales and customer service operations. Previously, Scott was Vice President at LexisNexis Group and headed the public records solutions for legal

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Scott began his career as an academic law librarian. He has extensive experience in big data, taxonomies, business development, strategic planning (with a particular emphasis on turn around strategies), acquisition integration, social media and publishing. He received his BA from the University of Michigan, and both his JD and MBA from the University of Detroit. Scott has frequently lectured at major universities, FTSE 100 and Fortune 500 companies. Telephone Number: +1 (614) 761-5165; E-mail: [livingss@oclc.org](mailto:livingss@oclc.org).

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