

Behind the Numbers:

Customer Acquisition and Re-engagement Trends for Public Libraries

Spring 2023



The Savannah Community saw increases in attracting new cardholders in 2022 over 2021 and continued to re-engage lapsed users, reversing the tide of COVID losses.

Introduction

While 2022 continued to be another year of upheaval from the pandemic for public libraries, usage, acquisition and retention started to look more familiar. OrangeBoy looked at three variables across the Savannah Community to see how the year 2022 compared to 2021. These variables include market penetration, cardholder acquisition and re-engagement of inactive users. OrangeBoy also looks at the year over year (YOY) comparison of messages sent and the relationship they have with re-engagement to further analyze the role communication played on the numbers.

Market Penetration is Steadily Climbing

Savannah Community Median Market Penetration

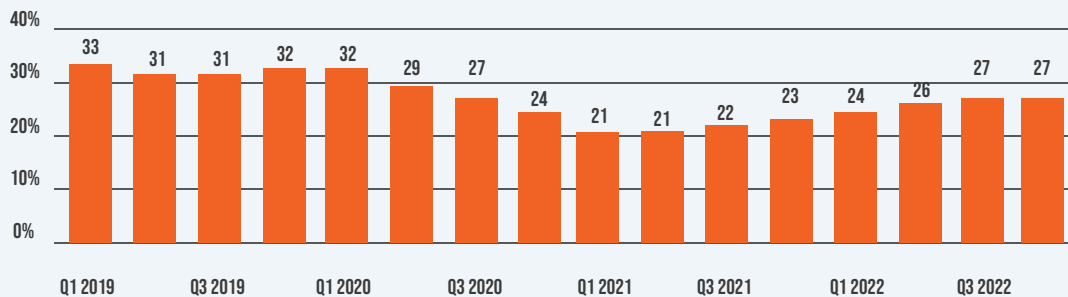


Figure 1¹

After nearly all the nation’s libraries were forced to close their doors at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, market penetration is returning to pre-pandemic levels.

In early 2021, market penetration – the portion of households with at least one customer who has used the library within the last year – hit a low. In 2019, one in three households were home to an active library user, and at the height of the pandemic in early 2021, that number dropped to one in five.

Libraries rebounded, fortifying their digital collections, offering contactless book borrowing and reimagining programming for a remote world. These efforts paid off and market penetration began to rise steadily by the end of 2021. The year 2022 closed out with a median market penetration of 27 percent, and the hope is that this upward trend will continue, a measure that libraries have strong market reach in their communities.

New Users Are Finding Their Way to the Library



New cardholder signups soared in 2022

In 2022, Savannah libraries gained 2.05 million new cardholders, a 16 percent increase over 2021.² This can be attributed to a number of factors, including a renewed focus on acquiring new cardholders, resuming library programs and services and more community outreach efforts that stalled during the pandemic. Many libraries started putting more marketing efforts toward acquisition of new cardholders, and these efforts are paying off.

Perhaps Most Importantly, Libraries are Keeping New Users at a Rate Exceeding Pre-Pandemic Levels

Savannah Community New Cardholder Retention

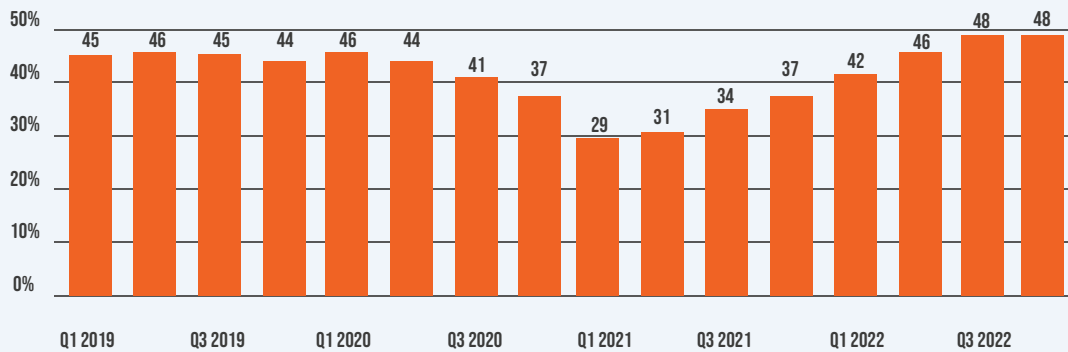


Figure 2³

New cardholder retention, the portion of cardholders who signed up between 12 and 24 months ago that are currently active (i.e., used the in the past 12 months), is at a historical high of 48 percent. This means that about half of cardholders who signed up last year or the year before are still using the library. At the height of the pandemic, fewer than a third were still engaged.

Inactive Users are Returning

Savannah libraries brought back 1.57 million inactive cardholders in 2022, which is slightly lower than 2021's 1.69 million – a result of libraries successfully re-engaging users in the year following the worst of the pandemic.⁴

Libraries that are connecting with occasional and lapsed users through targeted messaging are bringing those users back to the library. Messages can be automated so that when a library user lapses in their use, they receive an email reminding them of everything they are missing.

The numbers show that consistent communication with lapsed users wins them back, and the less time that has gone by, the better the chance of encouraging a return to the library. In other words, it's easier to engage someone who has gone just a few months without using the library, as opposed to someone who has lapsed for a year or more.

³Includes all libraries on Savannah platform

⁴153 libraries were included in the analysis that were part of the Savannah Community in both 2021 and 2022.

Better Messaging, More Engagement



Targeted Messaging is Core to Improved User Engagement

In 2022, Savannah libraries sent four percent more unique messages than the year before, totaling 276 million total messages.⁵ If we look back 10 years ago when we were developing Savannah, there was a lot of apprehension in the library community about sending emails to cardholders. It is heart-warming to see this shift where libraries understand that targeted messaging is welcomed by their cardholders, and it is an effective tool to keep engagement high.

Key Takeaways

New Users are Discovering the Library

Libraries are tapping into new markets. First time signups continue to grow among Savannah libraries. Measurable, data-driven marketing efforts are helping libraries improve cardholder acquisition.

Inactive Customers are Resuming Library Activity

Libraries are continuing to bring lapsed cardholders back. This is an ongoing effort that can be supported with automated messaging campaigns. But, it also requires a continued effort to deliver programs, services and collections that are relevant to today's library users.

Targeted Messaging is an Important Channel in Customer Engagement

In this case, more is more, meaning, use email messaging as an important channel to reach cardholders with information they want.

About OrangeBoy, Inc.

OrangeBoy has been helping clients Think in Color for more than 20 years, using customer insights to drive results. Inspired by a little orange cat named Opie, OrangeBoy set out to tackle challenging business problems by studying consumer behavior and community characteristics. Opie's colorful personality, work ethic and ability see things differently served as the basis for the company name and represents our values still today.

OrangeBoy has leveraged its 17-year industry expertise to build and host Savannah[®], a software as a service (SaaS) customer intelligence platform designed to help libraries improve community outcomes by harnessing the power of data. OrangeBoy also offers its Orange Dot Studio to provide consulting resources and Enterprise Solutions to customize existing solutions and build new ones.