

Repurposing library space

By Vince Vesser and Terry Bushnell.

Shifting collections, providing more community space, or further supporting collaboration and creation are just a few reasons why a library may look at repurposing its physical space. From small changes such as adding a few select pieces of furniture to major changes such as a complete redesign, there are many options available.

Gaining space, maintaining collection

Compacting book stacks is the easiest way to gain space without eliminating collections. There are systems available that allow you, in many cases, to use your existing book stacks. They can be put on a system that allows the book stacks to move together, thereby utilizing a single aisle to access an entire set of book stacks.

There are a growing number of these systems finding their way into all types of libraries because they address the need to open up space and preserve necessary physical collections. As a general rule, you can shrink a collection to fit into half of its original space, thereby gaining desired open space or double the total number of books in the same physical foot print. This is especially useful in book archives and offsite storage areas.



Breakout area, Coquitlam City Centre Library. Photo by Terry Bushnell.



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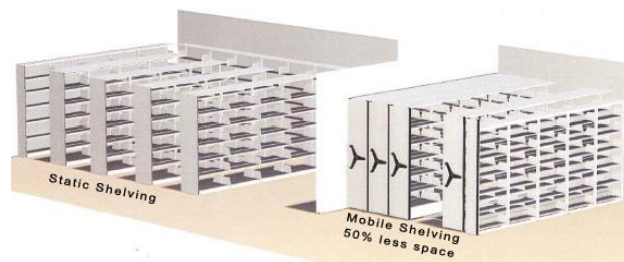


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Flexible solutions

Libraries can also use shorter shelving or switch from traditional, static shelving to mobile shelving that increases storage capacity or decreases storage footprint.

There are mobile storage systems that mount book stacks and storage cabinets on wheeled carriages that travel on rails. This eliminates the need for multiple fixed aisles, freeing floor space. For a cost effective option, libraries could choose a manual mobile system instead of mechanical assist or powered system.



Static versus mobile shelving

Gained space

One of the more common repurposing of space is the creation of community areas with comfortable seating where people can relax while accessing the electronic library resources and the Internet. Creating more study space for library users, and more computer workstations are other popular uses of gained space.

Gained space can also be converted for group meetings or events with the addition of nesting tables and chairs that are attractive, stylish and easy to move and set up. This, along with the possible addition of modular walls, allows events and quiet spaces to co-exist. New clear glass reconfigurable architectural walls add to the open aesthetic.

Assessment & review

Many libraries are surprised to see just how much space they can gain after reviewing their options with a specialist who has access to all of these new and innovative shelving and furniture options.

Assessment and review is the first step to determining budgetary and space requirements and limitations. Most companies who work with libraries are willing to visit the library to evaluate space and budget, and to provide options that meet specific needs.

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