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Special Libraries and YouCanBook. Me: Easy Consultation Scheduling through an Online Booking System

Ilana Stonebraker

Purdue University, stonebraker@purdue.edu

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Special Libraries and YouCanBook.Me: Easy Consultation Scheduling Through an Online Booking System

Seeking help should be the easiest part of the research process, but often patrons face many setbacks. Librarians, especially special librarians, are a limited resource. At the time of information need, a librarian may be in a meeting, off the desk, or finished for the day. A patron may find the correct person to talk to, but email is not an ideal scheduling system. Patrons may find themselves in a game of calendar battleship (“Do you have Wednesday 4pm?”) or filling out Doodle polls for days or even weeks.

Libraries are increasingly using online booking systems (Hess, 2014). As librarians continue to move away from references desks, online booking systems can help manage patron interactions in an increasingly consulting-focused reference environment. Online booking systems sync to Outlook calendars and offer real-time availability, saving hours for both the patron and the librarian.

I have been using an online booking system, YouCanBook.Me, for two and a half years (see Figure 1). I first heard about the system from a student who was interviewing me for the school newspaper. She used the system to schedule interviews. I loved the system because it was very simple to use and had an easy URL to remember. As of this writing, I have had 206 bookings made with the system.

Benefits of Online Booking Systems

My patron-focused approach is anytime I do not have something else on my calendar, I’m available for patrons. YouCanBook.Me has several benefits for this approach. I can sync it to my Outlook calendar using a client (Gsyncit). Whenever I put something on my calendar, it gets blocked off on my YouCanBook.Me calendar in real time. This allows anyone to see my availability but not my whole calendar. It’s always up on the internet, no matter how late at night, so patrons do not need to exchange emails in order to find out my availability. I have found this has greatly increased my consultations, especially with groups, which were often the hardest to schedule before I began using the system.

Online booking systems also provide statistics for assessment. The online system tracks the number of bookings and with whom, separate from my other emails and Outlook events. When it comes to reporting consulting statistics, this is very helpful for charting growth.

Setting up a YouCanBook.Me Account

Setting up a YouCanBook.Me account is relatively simple. It currently syncs with Google or iCloud Calendars. I used my Google account to sign up. You then set up the time ranges you are available. For me it is 8:00 am -5:30 pm (see Figure 1), but you can choose small periods of time as well if you have specific hours. There are options for how far ahead to make bookings. I have it set for 2 hours in advance. You can also decide whether or not to allow cancellations. I don’t allow cancellations because I prefer students to email me if they need to cancel.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

My workplace uses Outlook. To make YouCanBook.Me, I use a third party client, Gsyncit, to sync my Google and Outlook Calendars. It takes about ten minutes to set up and sits inside of Outlook (see Figure 2). You can either sync the two calendars together, or you can do a one-way sync, Outlook to Google (see Figure 3). I do one-way, because I like to manually put the appointment on my calendar to make sure I can actually attend them, but know others who do the two way calendar sync without issue. One of my colleagues at Purdue has been experimenting with Libcal, Springshare’s subscription

calendar platform, and it seems like it can sync with Outlook, so in the future I may move towards that system. Both systems have buttons that can be added to Libguide pages, and URLs to add to email signatures or websites.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Cautions when using YouCanBook.Me

YouCanBook.Me has been a very successful calendar management system for me, but there are several things that librarians should be aware of before they start using a calendar system. First, you should consider how much time you really have available for patrons. Many librarians have other duties not always on their calendar that may take up their time. Before you start using a real-time availability online booking system, you should make sure to block time for non-meeting things. For example, perhaps you have a weekly meeting on the other side of a large campus. You should put that walking time on your calendar each week. Perhaps you usually come in at 7:30 in the morning, but once a week you have to drop off your niece at school, so you don't make it in until 9am on that morning. You should put that on your calendar as well. Maybe you aren't comfortable being perpetually available to patrons, and only want to be available a couple of times each week, during office hours, or when you are at the desk.

You should also be realistic about what times you want to meet with patrons. My patrons are mostly students. The times they usually have available are early in the morning or late in the afternoon due to their class schedules. Those times are also times I am unlikely to have other commitments. Using an online booking system has greatly increased my 8am and 4:30pm meetings. If you get into the office in the morning at 8am, but you don't really want to talk to students before 9am, then you should start your YouCanBook.Me availability at 9am, instead of 8am.

I usually put bookings on my calendar for longer than they are scheduled because often patrons get lost finding my office. I have a question on the booking form about how people from their group will be meeting with me, because it's not feasible to have more than three people at my desk, and I may need to book a conference room or meet them in the library space.

Conclusion

At my library, staff and other librarians greatly appreciate the YouCanBook.Me system when making referrals. It can often feel haphazard to give a patron the librarian's business card and ask them to follow up in email. Being able to point to times when the librarian is available to meet with you in the next week can give patrons a vital next step in getting the help they need.


YouCanBook.Me has not only saved me hundreds of emails, but I think that it increases my library value. I always see myself as being available to my patrons, but given my location and my availability, this is not always the case. Patrons may wander into my office as I am leaving for a meeting, when I am working towards a deadline, or when I am meeting with someone else. Using an online booking system gives me a chance to reorient the conversation so that patrons have something tangible: a time that works, just for them.

Works Cited

Hess, A. N. (2014). Scheduling research consultations with YouCanBook.Me: Low effort, high yield. *College & Research Libraries News*, 75(9), 510–513.

Ilana Stonebraker- Parrish Library, Purdue University

Click on any time to make a booking. All meetings held in Krannert 331.

Sun 8/14/16	Mon 8/15/16	Tue 8/16/16	Wed 8/17/16	Thu 8/18/16	Fri 8/19/16	Sat 8/20/16	
8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:00 AM	8:00 AM	
8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:30 AM	8:30 AM	
9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:00 AM	9:00 AM	
9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:30 AM	9:30 AM	
10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	10:00 AM	
10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:30 AM	10:30 AM	
11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	11:00 AM	
11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM	11:30 AM	
12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	12:00 PM	
12:30 PM	12:30 PM	12:30 PM	12:30 PM	12:30 PM	12:30 PM	12:30 PM	
1:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00 PM	1:00 PM	
1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	1:30 PM	
2:00 PM	2:00 PM	2:00 PM	2:00 PM	2:00 PM	2:00 PM	2:00 PM	
2:30 PM	2:30 PM	2:30 PM	2:30 PM	2:30 PM	2:30 PM	2:30 PM	
3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	3:00 PM	
3:30 PM	3:30 PM	3:30 PM	3:30 PM	3:30 PM	3:30 PM	3:30 PM	
4:00 PM	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	4:00 PM	
4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	4:30 PM	
5:00 PM	5:00 PM	5:00 PM	5:00 PM	5:00 PM	5:00 PM	5:00 PM	

Time Zone: Americas / New York

Figure 1 How my calendar looks to patrons

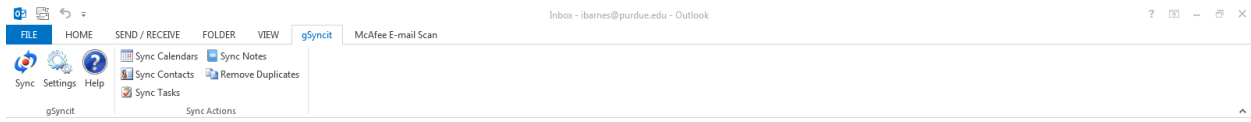


Figure 2 How Gsyncit looks in my Outlook

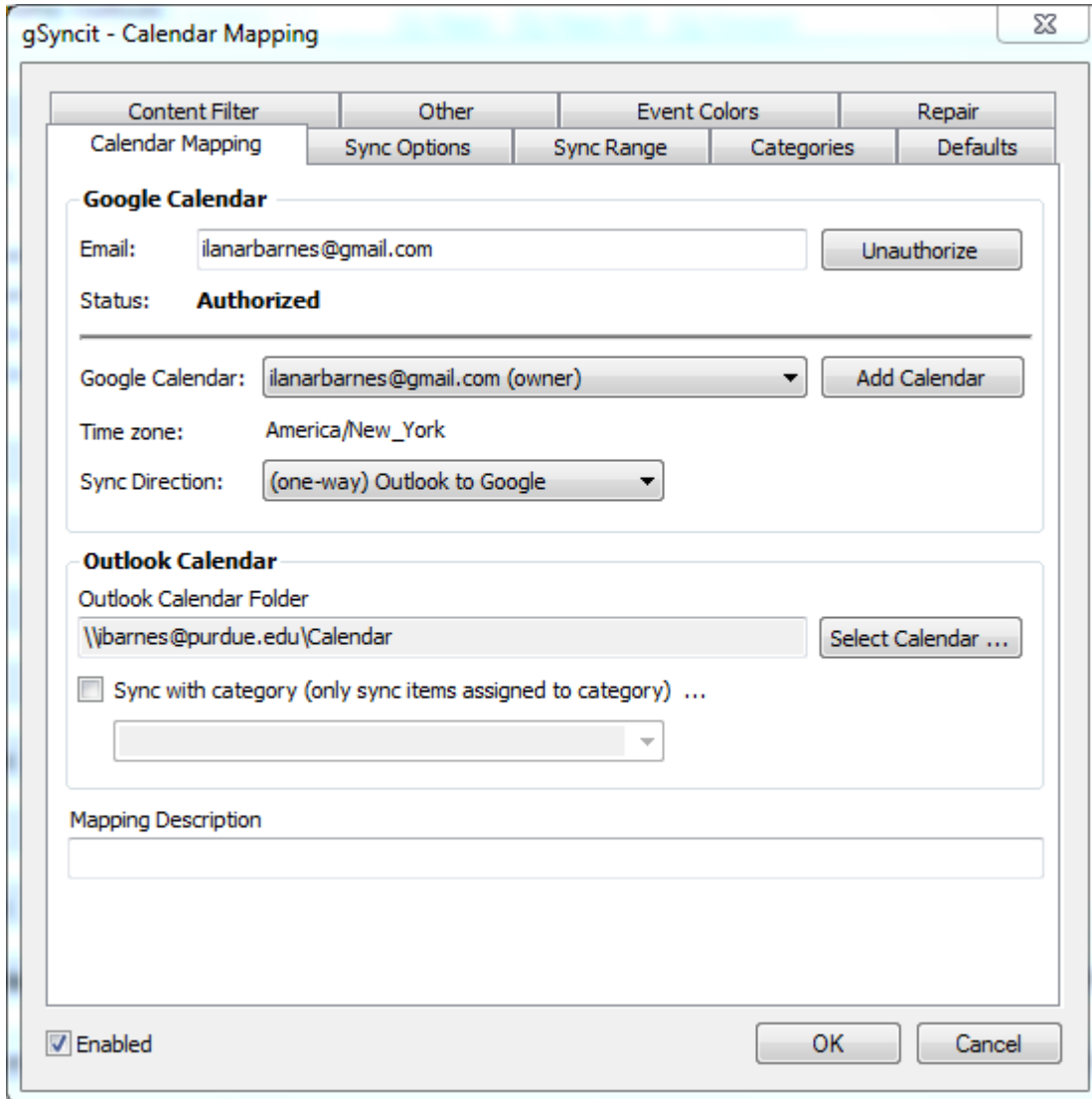


Figure 3 My one-way sync in Outlook.