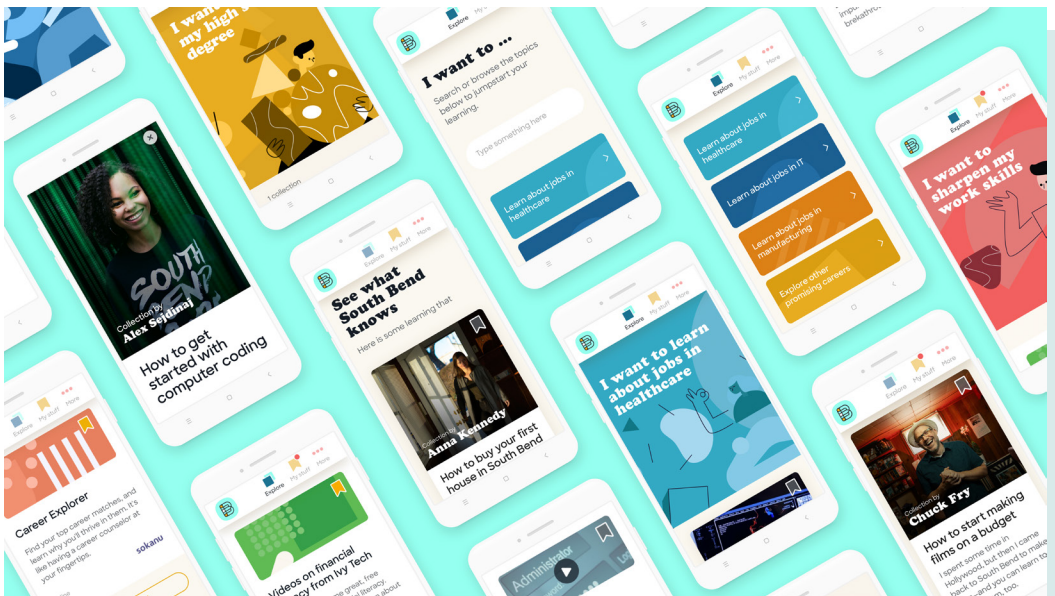


The St. Joe County Public Library Uses Bendable to Meet Its Mission of Connecting Patrons to Learning

"Bendable has been an important tool for our library to meet a need in our community for accessible and affordable continued learning outside of traditional education."

-Norah Alwalan, Bendable specialist
at the St. Joe County Public Library



The St. Joe County Public Library includes the Main Library in South Bend, Indiana, and nine branches. It serves a population of more than 167,000.

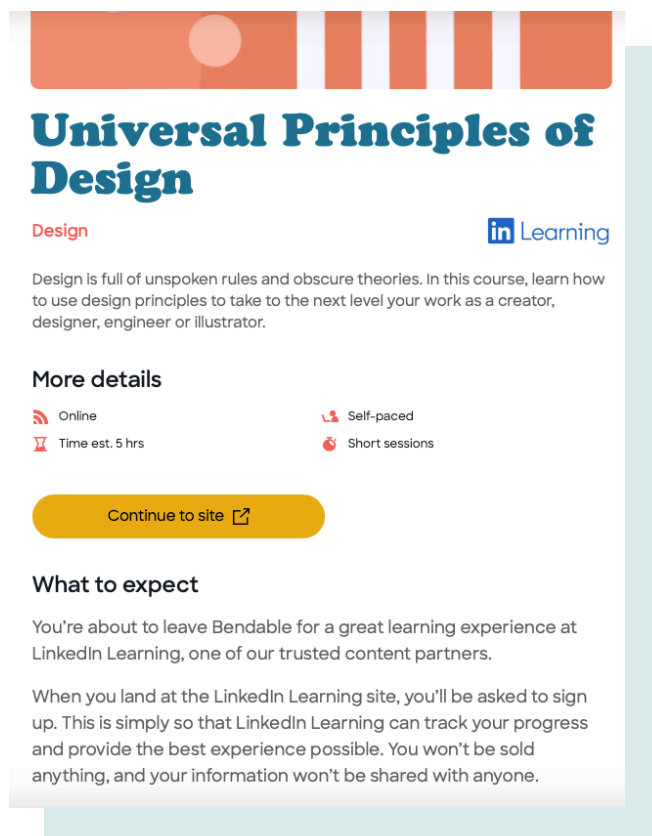
On the simplest level, Bendable is a learning marketplace, helping library patrons of all ages and backgrounds to easily discover and access the learning they need.

The Challenge

The St. Joe County Public Library has long offered its patrons online learning resources such as LinkedIn Learning and Brainfuse. But like many libraries, SJCPL found that much of this content was being underutilized and that simply providing it wasn't enough to meet the library's stated mission to "connect members of our diverse community to learning, resources, culture, and each other."

The Solution

By rolling out Bendable, SJCPL has made big strides in each of these areas. On the simplest level, you can think of Bendable as a learning marketplace. The platform allows people of all ages and backgrounds to easily discover and access the learning they need. But Bendable can also do much more, helping a library connect with its local community, and community members to connect with each other, through learning.



Bendable allows users to quickly compare different learning experiences so they can find what's just right for them. Every course included in the Bendable catalog shows how much time it will take to complete and other key information.

Increasing Use of the Library's Learning Resources

Before SJCPL introduced Bendable, finding and accessing online learning resources wasn't the easiest thing for a library patron. As at many libraries, you had to click around the SJCPL website and then dig through a list of databases to see what content was even available. Bendable has allowed SJCPL to put learning front and center, helping drive usage. Take Brainfuse, a site that offers homework help and much more. In the first six months of 2022, Brainfuse was used by SJCPL patrons an average of 55 times per month. Beginning in July, SJCPL created a special section of the Bendable homepage to highlight Brainfuse—a simple task, thanks to Bendable's librarian-friendly admin suite. The result: Over the rest of the year, average monthly Brainfuse sessions soared to 107.

Ensuring Patrons Find the Learning That's Just Right for Them

When library patrons want to figure out which online provider suits them best—"Should I learn to use Excel through Coursera or LinkedIn Learning?"—they often need to log into one database, check out what's available, back out, and then go into the next database to compare. The process is time-consuming and filled with so much friction, it's easy to lose the learner before they even start. Bendable changes the game, allowing users to quickly size up different learning experiences so they can find what's just right for them. Every course included in the Bendable catalog shows how much time it will take to complete, whether the class is geared toward younger learners or adults, whether the learning is scheduled or self-paced and other key information.

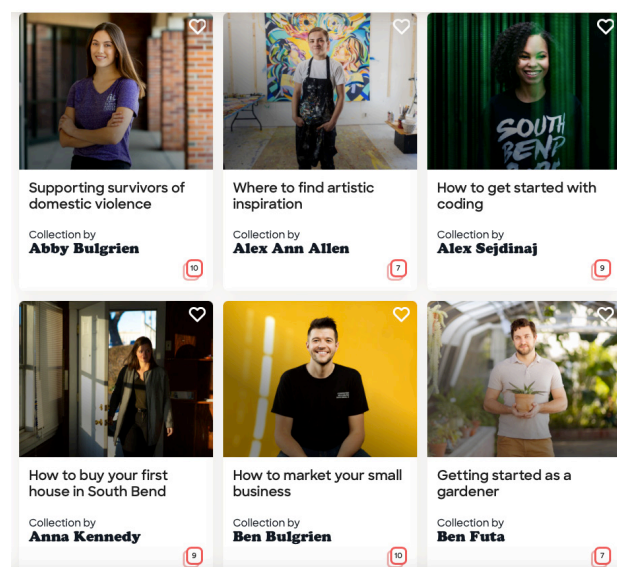


Photo credit: Myriam Nicodemus

SJCPL has used QR codes to steer people to Bendable so that they can explore different subjects of interest.

Giving Local Residents a Way to Share Knowledge

Bendable "Community Collections"—learning playlists curated by local residents who have expertise on a particular topic—have taken off at SJCPL. In fact, Community Collection resources were clicked on more than 880 times in 2022. That's more than any other type of resource on the platform. SJCPL has worked with residents to create collections on a wide range of topics, including gardening, community safety, local history, playing chess, celebrating Kwanzaa and much more. For library lovers like Ben Bulgrien, who put together a Community Collection on "How to market your small business," sharing what he knows has brought his own learning journey full circle. "The resources that the library gave me is what got me into the position that I'm in now," said Ben, a consultant to small firms. "So it's cool to be a part of someone else's movement in their own direction."



SJCPL has worked with its patrons to create dozens of Community Collections—a great way for local residents to share with each other what they know. The Bendable team can help you create your own set of Community Collections without a huge burden to library staff.

Drawing People Into the Library

Bendable is more than just a digital platform. It is an avenue to draw more people into the library, connect them with each other—and make a real difference in their lives. “Bendable has helped us foster a sense of community,” said Norah Alwalan, the library’s Bendable specialist. One way that SJCPL has done this is by holding learning circles. They’re like a book club, only instead of reading a novel or a work of nonfiction and discussing it, participants take a course together on Bendable and discuss that. Learning circles have been held on, among other topics, building digital skills, starting a business and finding happiness. One community member, Nina Stoeckel, walked away from the “creating a website” circle with

a working site for her new clinical psychology practice. “Technology was definitely not my strong suit,” she said. “I was so appreciative of this opportunity.”



Photo credit: Myriam Nicodemus

By leaning into Bendable, SJCPL has been able to convene learning circles on a variety of topics, put on talks by Community Collection authors and host other in-person programs. For one activity, librarians asked people what their learning dreams were—and then helped direct them to valuable resources on Bendable.



Photo credit: Myriam Nicodemus

SJCPL was able to deepen its partnership with the local United Way by using Bendable to give childcare providers in the community a path for professional development. Viri Zamarripa (shown here) was among those who took advantage of the program. “Bendable is awesome,” she said.

Deepening Library Partnerships

In 2021, when United Way of St. Joseph County wanted to raise the quality of childcare in the community, it knew right where to turn: to Bendable. United Way worked with SJCPL to build out a course pathway, available on the platform to anyone with a library card, who wanted to obtain a Child Development Associate certificate, as well as take supplemental courses on conflict resolution, teamwork and stress management. “There’s not a clear pathway for professionals to navigate finding the right information,” said Emily Rupchock, who started the program as United Way’s director of community engagement. “There’s a force behind Bendable that makes that possible.”

Taking it Step by Step

The success that SJCPL has had in leveraging Bendable didn't happen overnight or alone. So don't let any of this overwhelm you. Keep in mind:

1

Take it slow. Bendable can start as a simple and useful learning discovery tool for your patrons. You can do more with it—creating Community Collections, holding in-person learning events, using the platform to deepen relationships with library partners—over time. It took SJCPL a couple of years before its staff began to use Bendable in all the ways highlighted in this case study, and it's still finding new applications for it all the time.

2

We've got your back. As part of the Bendable network, you'll regularly receive marketing material, best-practice examples from your peers and other tips on how to really lean into the platform. At its fullest, Bendable is a dynamic lifelong learning and workforce development program, and we're here to help you get the most out of it.

3

We can help you spin up Community Collections. These patron-authored learning playlists are very popular on Bendable, and Community Collection authors are perfectly positioned to host lectures at the library or lead in-person learning circles. Community Collections are also marketing and social media gold; people love seeing what their neighbors know. But we're also aware that many libraries don't have the capacity to work with local residents and make collections. Not to worry. We can help you partner with high school journalists in your area to lead the effort—taking the burden off the library while creating a great educational opportunity for young people.

Bendable: Key Benefits:

Since the St. Joe County Public Library launched Bendable in June 2020, it has seen:

1. Increased usage of the library's learning resources
2. Patrons easily finding the learning that's just right for them
3. Local residents sharing their knowledge with each other
4. New opportunities for in-person learning events at the library
5. Deeper partnerships between the library and community stakeholders

