

COVID-19 Impact Report – September-November: A Three-Month Retrospective

Date:	January 25, 2021
To:	Toronto Public Library Board
From:	City Librarian

SUMMARY

This report is a three-month retrospective of the COVID-19 Impact Reports, for the months of September, October and November of 2020, analysing the pandemic's impact from the perspectives of the following key stakeholders:

- Torontonians
- TPL's Customers
- TPL as an Organization
- TPL Staff

As the Toronto Public Library continues to navigate the uncertainty and changing environment of the ongoing pandemic, the long-term social and economic impacts remain unknown. The analysis presented in this report demonstrates that between September and November, Torontonians continued to depend on TPL's services for their success, resilience and well-being. As expected, service usage and demand from customers remained lower in some areas than pre-pandemic levels, but saw strong increases when compared to the previous three-month period. The organization and staff continue to be agile and highly effective in adapting services and operations to meet the changing environment.

This report is consistent with the Library's commitment to accountability, evaluation and transparency in supporting evidence-based decision-making and delivery of outcomes for all Torontonians.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The impacts of COVID-19 on the 2020 operating and capital budgets are being monitored and reported in budget monitoring reports.

The Director, Finance & Treasurer has reviewed this financial impact statement and agrees with it.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC PLAN

This report supports TPL's evidence-based decision making practice, ensures that TPL delivers on targeted outcomes, and that TPL continues to be transparent and accountable to Torontonians. This report is a product of TPL's strategic plan "evaluation and accountability" enabler.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

TPL continues to focus on understanding and breaking down barriers to access and ensuring inclusion so that everyone who wants to use the Library feels welcome and is able to access TPL services. In particular, digital access continues to be a top TPL priority, in order to address ongoing social inequality that may be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

DECISION HISTORY

At the April 27, 2020 Toronto Public Library Board meeting, TPL provided an update on its operations, services and responses to the COVID-19 public health emergency in the [COVID-19 Emergency Response](#) report. Highlights from March's COVID-19 impact report were attached to the update.

At its meeting on June 22, 2020, the Library Board received the [COVID-19 Impact Report – March-May: A Three-Month Retrospective](#) assessing the impact of COVID-19 on customer experiences and services, operations, staff experiences and key initiatives

At its meeting on October 19, 2020, the Library Board received the [COVID-19 Impact Report – June-August: A Three-Month Retrospective](#) assessing the impact of COVID-19 on customer experiences and services, operations, staff experiences and key initiatives.

ISSUE BACKGROUND

At the onset of COVID-19, TPL's leadership team identified an urgent need to understand the pandemic's impact on customers, staff, library services, operations and key initiatives. After the closure of all TPL branches in March, a monthly COVID-19 impact reporting process began, tracking and analysing available key data points.

As the Province and City continue to monitor the pandemic and adjust restriction levels, the data and resulting analysis from the COVID-19 Impact Reports has proved instrumental in helping TPL adapt, informing the phased reinstatement of services and planning decisions.

COMMENTS

As the course of the pandemic changed over the fall months and restrictions were gradually eased, TPL prioritized a reinstatement of services, reopened 11 branches, and reinstated most of its services with distancing measures in place. Between September and November, home library service, the bookmobile, digital innovation hubs, library settlement services and all 22 youth hubs with limited services were reopened to the public. Some restrictions remained in place, with the number of computer workstations available greatly reduced, and Sunday service along with in-person programming canceled.

Data collected throughout the phased reinstatement of TPL's services showed - as expected - that service usage and demand from customers in libraries remained lower than pre-pandemic levels, as these continued to be impacted by physical distancing measures.

For September to November, the number of visits to branches was only a third in comparison to the same period last year, equally true for the number of Wi-Fi sessions. The volume of physical materials borrowed was slightly larger than half of what it was in 2019, and in-branch computer use was down to a sixth, mainly due to the reduced capacity.

While service usage related to Library spaces was down from pre-pandemic levels, the data shows a very positive trend across the board when compared to the previous three-month period of June to August 2020 – showing a direct correlation between the lifting of restrictions and Torontonians returning in large numbers to use library services.

Another positive indicator comes from the consumption trends for digital services. Use of online remote learning resources and e-collections has been consistently on the

rise, with volumes for November to September being both larger than in previous years, and larger than the previous three-month period.

There was considerable effort by the organization during the early stages of the pandemic to create capacity and support for increased demand on online services and customer support channels, enabling TPL to adapt operations and continue the delivery of services. The push to keep up with customers was maintained into the September to November period. Staff shifted to new video platforms to accommodate larger class sizes, raised registration caps to meet increased demand and offered more evening classes to accommodate customers returning to work. As Torontonians continued to engage with the library on various platforms for information and updates, TPL's efforts for September to November were recognized through higher metrics in both customer satisfaction with AnswerLine and the helpfulness rating of the AnswerLine service.

TPL's workforce has been instrumental in supporting the increased and changing demands of Library customers, and in enabling the organization to reinstate services and reopen branches. Staffing has been returning to pre-pandemic levels, with September to November seeing an average of 86% of all staff working.

Workforce readiness numbers are at an all-time high, with November's number for staff on standby (available but not working) at 0.5% - the smallest since the pandemic began - further demonstrating the enormous capacity and agility of TPL staff to continuously adapt to the changing environment of the pandemic, and enable the transformation of Library services to meet the needs of Torontonians.

The key findings provided below in this report deliver a retrospective analysis covering the period of September to November 2020, of the impact of COVID-19 across the following four perspectives:

- Torontonians
- TPL's Customers
- TPL as an Organization
- TPL Staff

Torontonians

The Library continued to support all Torontonians in building success, resilience and well-being: reopening additional branches, reinstating more library services that were modified to align with public health directives, working to eliminate the digital divide through its digital inclusion and literacy work efforts, and ongoing engagement with the public.

(1) Reinstatement of services

- Between September and November, TPL opened an additional 11 branches, with regular Monday to Saturday hours. As restrictions were gradually lifted, most TPL services were reinstated with distancing measures in place. Services included the home library service, bookmobile, digital innovation hubs, library settlement services as well as the reopening of all 22 youth hubs with limited services.
- The reopening of branches drove an increase in visits, bringing the levels up to a third of where they were between September and November of last year, or a 69% decline. This was a positive indicator, however, and a 156% increase from June to August of this year, showing that as restrictions are lifted, Torontonians are returning back to branches in growing numbers.
- By the end of November, the province announced increased efforts to combat the second wave of the pandemic, and Toronto entered a grey-lockdown period, with the Library closing all branches for two days to adjust services, reopening on November 25th with contactless pickup, restrictions on browsing and the use of study spaces.

(2) Digital Inclusion and Literacy

- TPL is a strong advocate for digital inclusion for all Torontonians, and continued to provide Wi-Fi access at all of its locations throughout the early stages of the pandemic and the resulting branch closures. This allowed many Torontonians to stay connected and access the Internet from outside buildings. Since then, most branches have reopened and the number of Wi-Fi sessions has been continuously rising. September to November saw over 407,000 sessions, a third of the volume seen for the same period in 2019, or a 68% drop. However, when compared to the previous three-month period of June to August, the volume of Wi-Fi sessions increased by 98%, a solid indicator that Torontonians are returning to use Library spaces, and to stay connected.
- TPL continued to focus on offering a wide selection of remote digital literacy programing during the September to November period, with a total 156 programs, up 3% from June to August, and 2,303 participants, an increase of 112% from the previous three-month period. Staff responded to the increased demand by switching to an improved programing platform, increasing class sizes and offering more evening classes for greater flexibility for those customers that have returned to work. Compared to the previous three-month period, the September to November data shows that:
 - Digital Innovation Hub and Pop-Up Learning lab programing increased by 16%, and the number of participants grew by 67% to 643.
 - Google IT Support Certificate series hosted 29 programs with a total attendance of 153 participants.

- There were 62 Let's Learn Tech programs offered (a 17% drop), but larger class sizes and more flexible time slots allowed the total attendance to increase by 85%, to 643 participants.

(3) Public Communications

- TPL continued to broadly communicate important service changes and updates through existing channels, including tpl.ca, social media, email notification and branch signage.
- Torontonians continued to connect and engage with the Library's social media channels for relevant information about library services and updates, and to receive customer service support. As more Torontonians returned to work and restrictions were gradually lifted, there was a 68% drop in customer questions posted on the Library's social media between September and November, compared to the June to August period; with TPL staff responding to 330 customer questions through TPL's social media channels.

TPL's Customers

The September to November period saw TPL continuing to adapt its operations, with resources directed towards reopening of additional branches and reinstatement of in-branch services. Focus was also placed on addressing the increased demand for online collections and services, and on areas where the strongest customer impact could be had, such as initiatives that targeted the Library's most isolated and vulnerable customers.

(1) Seniors Wellness Check-In

- In support of the City's broader work to provide services for Toronto's vulnerable residents impacted by service closures and physical distancing measures, TPL's Home Library Services (HLS), together with a team of 20+ staff, made over 5,719 phone calls between September and November to senior customers aged 80 and older, an increase of 62% from the calls made between July to August.
- Having completed close to 10,000 calls after reaching out to most of TPL's senior customers aged 80 and older, staff are continuing this valuable initiative by reaching out to seniors between the ages of 70 to 79.

(2) E-Collections & E-Services

- There has been an extraordinary demand for digital content since the pandemic began. That has continued, despite the various stages of reopening that took place during the summer. New OverDrive users increased by 10% between September and November, the number of OverDrive checkouts went up by 30% and OverDrive holds increased by 49% compared to the same period last year.

- TPL's customers have been accessing an increasing volume of e-video content compared to pre-pandemic levels. Between September and November, video plays on the Kanopy service increased by 47% and Hoopla circulation increased by 88% compared to the same period last year.
- Customer demand for e-newspapers (i.e. NY Times, Toronto Star, Globe & Mail, Press Reader) has also increased significantly, up by 44% between September and November, compared to the same period last year.
- The reinstatement of services and larger demand for digital content has led to an increase in visits to tpl.ca. The number of visits to the website went up by 6% between September and November, from the previous three-month period of June and August.
- In compliance with physical distancing measures, a reduced number of computers have been made available. In spite of this reduction, in-branch public computing sessions have been increasing steadily month-over-month since the service resumed on June 30th. Specifically, the total sessions between September and November have increased by 229%, to over 171,000 from the previous three-month period of June to August. However, year-over-year sessions are down by 83% for the September to November period compared to the same period in 2019.

(3) Programming

- Starting September 28th to December 4th, TPL welcomed its first four Career Coaches in Residence, which offered remote job search help for younger adults, along with consultations, workshops and seminars. TPL customers looking for career advice took advantage of the program by participating in 197 free one-hour coaching sessions by the end of November.
- Between September and November, TPL launched 387 online programs to the public, an increase of 8% from the previous three months. This amounted to a total of 28,507 views (for recorded programs plus attendees for live online programs), a growth of 10% from the June to August period.

(4) First-Time Checkouts

- The phased-in reopening of additional branches led to more customers resuming the borrowing of materials in-branch, with physical first-time checkouts for the period of September to November reaching 2.23 million, a 79% increase from the previous three-month period of June to August. While this number is down 43% from the pre-pandemic levels of the same period last year, it does indicate that customers remain loyal to the library's physical collections.

(5) Online & Remote Learning

- The reopening of additional branches and reinstatement of most in-branch services did not seem to curb customers' increasing appetite for online and

remote learning, which has been on the rise since the pandemic began. Between September and November, e-learning sessions increased by 29%, Mango Languages by 19%, BrainFuse by 83% and Gale Courses by 80%, with Lynda.com experiencing a slight decline of 13%, compared to the same period last year.

TPL as an Organization

Considerable effort by the organization went into supporting the increased demand on the IT infrastructure and maintaining strong internal communication to ensure that TPL was able to adapt its operations and continue the delivery of services in these challenging times.

(1) Continuity of Services/AnswerLine

- Customer feedback for AnswerLine services has been very positive. Metrics to measure customer satisfaction of the services were introduced in June of this year, and the satisfaction levels have been consistently on the rise. The September to November period saw average customer satisfaction increase by 9% from the June to August period to 89%. Similarly, helpfulness measures for the service went up 8%, from the previous three-month period of June to August, to an average of 90%.
- AnswerLine chat services were originally suspended in late March because branches closed and the service pivoted to email and social media. In late September, chat service resumed and the engagement numbers are returning to levels similar to those before the pandemic. November saw the service receive 766 chat inquiries, a 9% increase from November 2019.
- The resumption of chat services coincided with a slight decrease in the number of calls received from September to November, which dropped by 10% to 20,585, compared to the June to August period.
- With the organization shifting towards offering more of its services online, the volume of phone communications and queries has decreased. The move to online programming, the use of online title suggestion forms and the pausing of library fines for overdue materials has had an impact on the number of phone calls from customers. When compared to the same period last year, the volume of calls to AnswerLine went down by 28% between September and November.
- AnswerLine email inquiries were up by 10% to 7,917, compared to the same September to November period of last year, but down 63% from the previous three-month period of June to August. The high volume of emails received this year between June and August can be attributed to the large number of public enquiries related to the introduction of TPL's curbside pick-up service.
- This was mirrored to some extent by social media inquiries to AnswerLine, where September to November saw 330 inquiries, a 117% increase from last year's numbers, but a drop of 68% from the June to August high of 1,027.

(2) IT Response

- Globally, the current pandemic has been a subject ripe for exploitation by cybercriminals using phishing campaigns, malware and spam to target employees returning to work. With over 71% of its workforce back on-site, TPL has been experiencing increased levels of phishing attempts and spam.
- The September to November period saw a 21% increase in phishing attempts at 48,956 from the June to August period. Malware jumped by 491% compared to the last three-month period due to an abnormally large number of attacks in September.
- Spam volume experienced a slight increase of 2.6% for the same period, with a monthly average of 39,700 spam messages intercepted. Overall, TPL continues to monitor this trend.

(3) Staff Communications

- Building on the success of its first all-staff virtual town hall held in August, TPL hosted two additional virtual town halls, one in September and one in November. These events helped address staff questions and concerns, and shared information about the reopening of branches and the reinstatement of services. The combined attendance for the two live events was 706, and the recordings of the town halls received a total of 192 views.

TPL Staff

Library staff have been instrumental in supporting TPL's capacity to transform its operations during the changing service environments of the phased reopening process.

(1) Workforce Readiness

- When branches first closed in March, staff capacity pivoted towards remote work and online services. Since then, TPL's workforce has been steadily returning to normal pre-pandemic levels. September to November saw an average of 86% of all staff working, up from the average of 75% for the June to August period. A total of 71% of TPL's workforce were back to working on-site during September to November, compared to 56% of staff for June to August.
- TPL's reopening efforts and pivoting of work have been instrumental in improving workforce readiness. The average number of staff on standby (available but not working) for the September to November period dropped to an average of 0.7%, from the 7.4% average for June to August. Another positive indicator of a return to normalcy was November's number for staff on standby, 0.5% - the smallest since the pandemic began.

(2) Staff Training

- TPL's new learning management system, learn:tpl, launched on June 22nd, offering staff a more personalized experience, expansive online training options, on-demand training modules and improved searching capabilities.
- Since its launch, learn:tpl has seen a huge uptake in staff participation, with the number of learning objects accessed by staff on the learn:tpl platform increasing by 149% from the June to August period; and a monthly average of 1,385 staff members accessing training for the September to November period.
- TPL staff participated in 2,701 training sessions between September and November, a 487% increase from the 460 sessions that took place from June to August. Staff completed a total of 9,353 online classes, a 95% increase from the 4,792 online classes completed between June and August. A big reason for the dramatic increase has been the assignment of mandatory annual health and safety training, and it is unlikely that this level of growth will be sustained,

CONCLUSION

As the longer term social and economic impacts of the pandemic will remain unknown, the monthly COVID-19 Impact Reports will continue to be provided to TPL's leadership team, as well as the COVID-19 Three-Month Retrospective Report to the Board, to measure and assess the impact of the pandemic on community, customers, TPL and staff.

The COVID-19 Impact Analysis will also inform the update to the balanced scorecard metrics, targets and initiatives and the development of divisional scorecards. The metrics will be assessed against metrics identified in this report, to assess system-wide and divisional performance, and to inform where future efforts and investments should be made as part of the business planning process.

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SIGNATURE

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City Librarian

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: COVID-19 Impact Report: Three-Month Retrospective (September – November) Presentation

COVID-19 Impact Report: Three-Month Retrospective (September - November)

Toronto Public Library Board

January 25, 2021



- Throughout September to November, the library opened an additional 11 branches with regular Monday to Saturday hours.
- Many long-standing programs and services were gradually reinstated with new safety protocols as part of Stage 3:
 - Bookmobile
 - Home Library Service
 - Library Settlement Service
 - Musical Instrument Lending
 - Digital Innovation Hubs: 3D Printing and equipment lending
 - Youth Hub services
 - browsing and borrowing collections
 - self-checkouts
- As we headed into a second wave of the pandemic in the late fall, the province announced a new tiered system. Public health units were ranked into five colour-coded categories. TPL branches reopened with limited in-branch services under Grey-Lockdown restrictions Nov 25.

September	October	November
8 – Youth Hubs re-open at all branches with resumed services	5 – Complimentary PRESTO cards available at select TPL locations in collaboration with TTC, while quantities lasted	14 – TPL introduces Digital Access Cards while stopping new registrations for Overdrive Instant Digital Cards
14 – TPL revised safety measures and COVID-19 exposure protocols for day porters and staff	15 – Resumption of in-person 1-on-1 Library Settlement Partnerships service by appointment starting with Eatonville	14 – Toronto moves to Red zone with no impact on TPL's services
14 – Re-opening of Bookmobiles and Home Library Services, Special Collections Service Points at TRL & Lillian H. Smith, Music Instrument Lending at Downsview and Parkdale	19 – 4 new Youth Hubs re-opened at Agincourt, Jane/Dundas, North York Central and Richview branches	23 – Toronto moves into Grey-Lockdown and TPL closes all of its branches both Nov 23 rd and 24 th to prepare for adjustment of services
21 – Digital Innovation Hub resumes 3D Printing and bookings for Arduino kits	21 – New COVID-19 resources site on ShareTPL for TPL Staff	25 – TPL branches reopen under new Grey-Lockdown restrictions
28 – Additional 6 branches reopen to the public with access to Stage 3 services. Flemingdon Park and York Woods pop-up reinstated Youth Hub service	26 – Planned re-opening of 5 branches: Albert Campbell Pop-Up, Armour Heights, Bridlewood, Eglinton Square, and Gerrard/Ashdale	26 – Virtual Staff Town Hall takes place via Crowdcast
30 – Virtual Staff Town Hall takes place via Crowdcast		

Torontonians:

- continued to depend on TPL for their digital well-being and as a lifeline for normalcy during the fall months

TPL's customers:

- continued to build their collective resilience by taking advantage of the wealth of digital and social resources offered by the Library

TPL as an organization:

- was nimble in modifying its operations while maintaining positive customer satisfaction

TPL staff:

- were quick to take advantage of the training resources available on learn:tpl and accessed critical information through the COVID-19 resource site and staff town halls

01 TORONTONIANS

Torontonians continued to depend on TPL for their digital well-being and as a lifeline for normalcy during the fall months

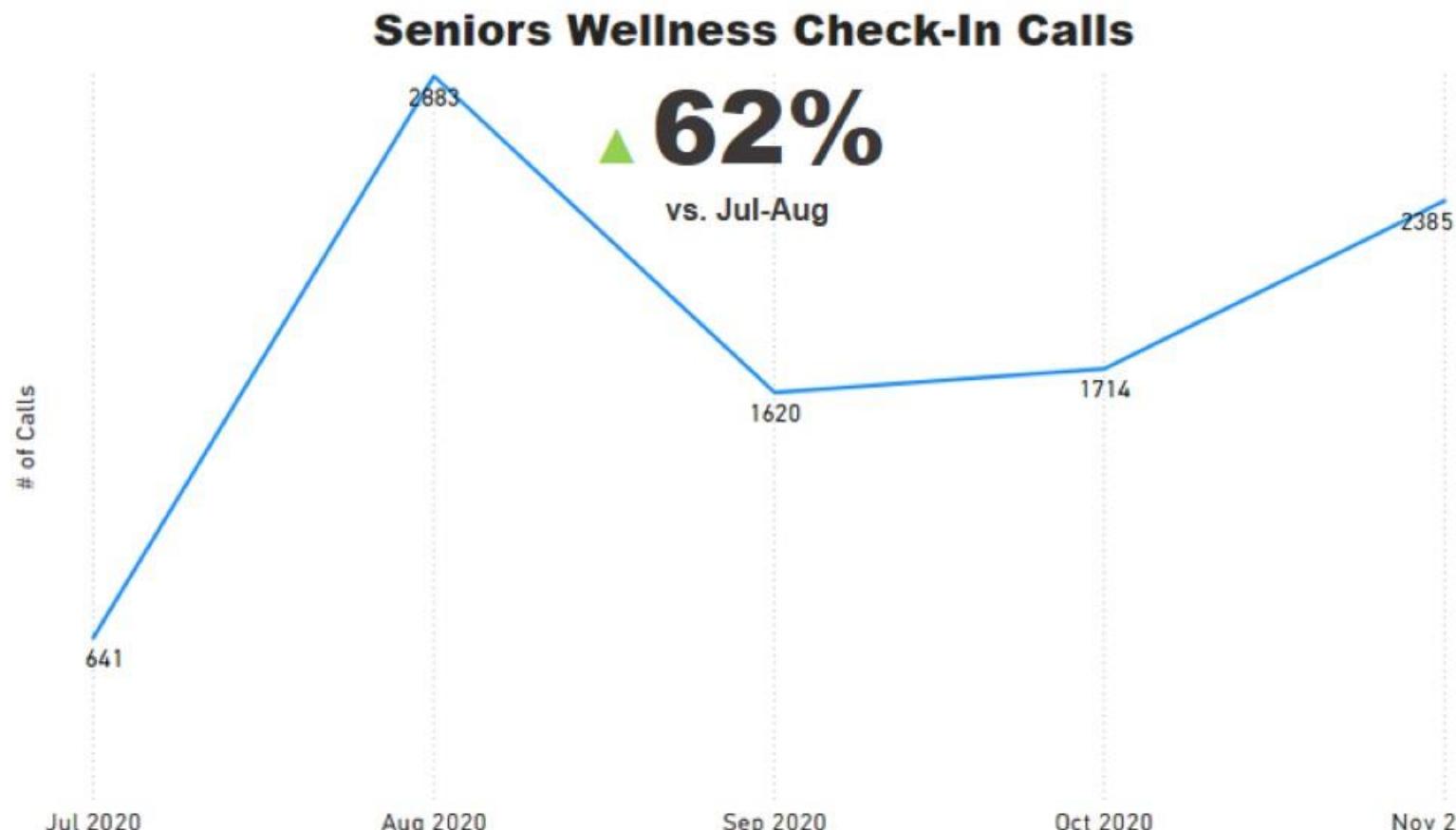
Torontonians continued to depend on TPL for their digital well-being and as a lifeline for normalcy during the fall months



02 TPL'S CUSTOMERS

Customers continued to build their collective resilience by taking advantage of the wealth of digital and social resources offered by the Library

TPL continued its outreach to older seniors, increasing awareness of the library's digital offerings and mitigating negative strains resulting from a prolonged pandemic



There was an explosion in remote learning as students headed into virtual classrooms and many adopted “social distancing” as a new way of life



Lynda.com



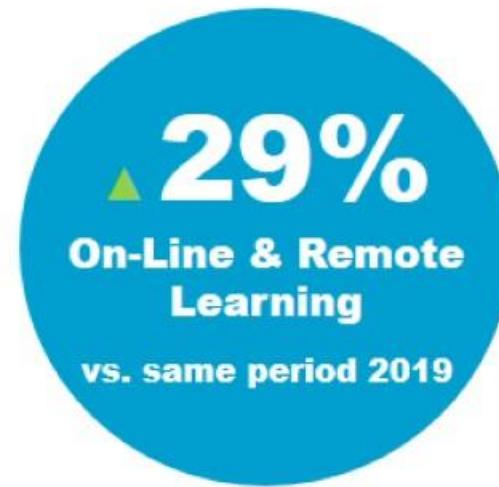
BrainFuse

▼ 13%

vs. same period 2019

▲ 83%

vs. same period 2019



Mango Languages

▲ 19%

vs. same period 2019

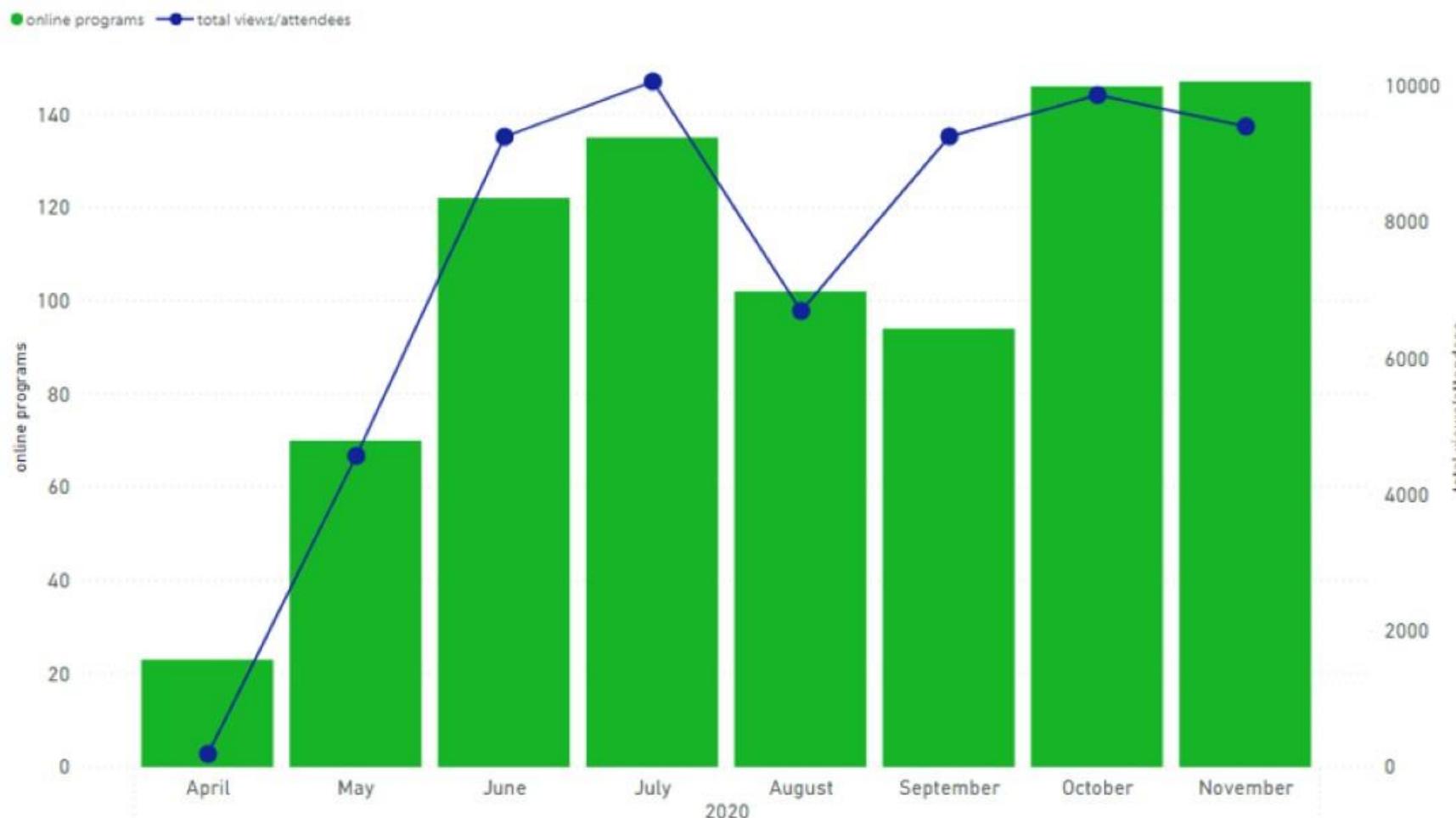


Gale Courses

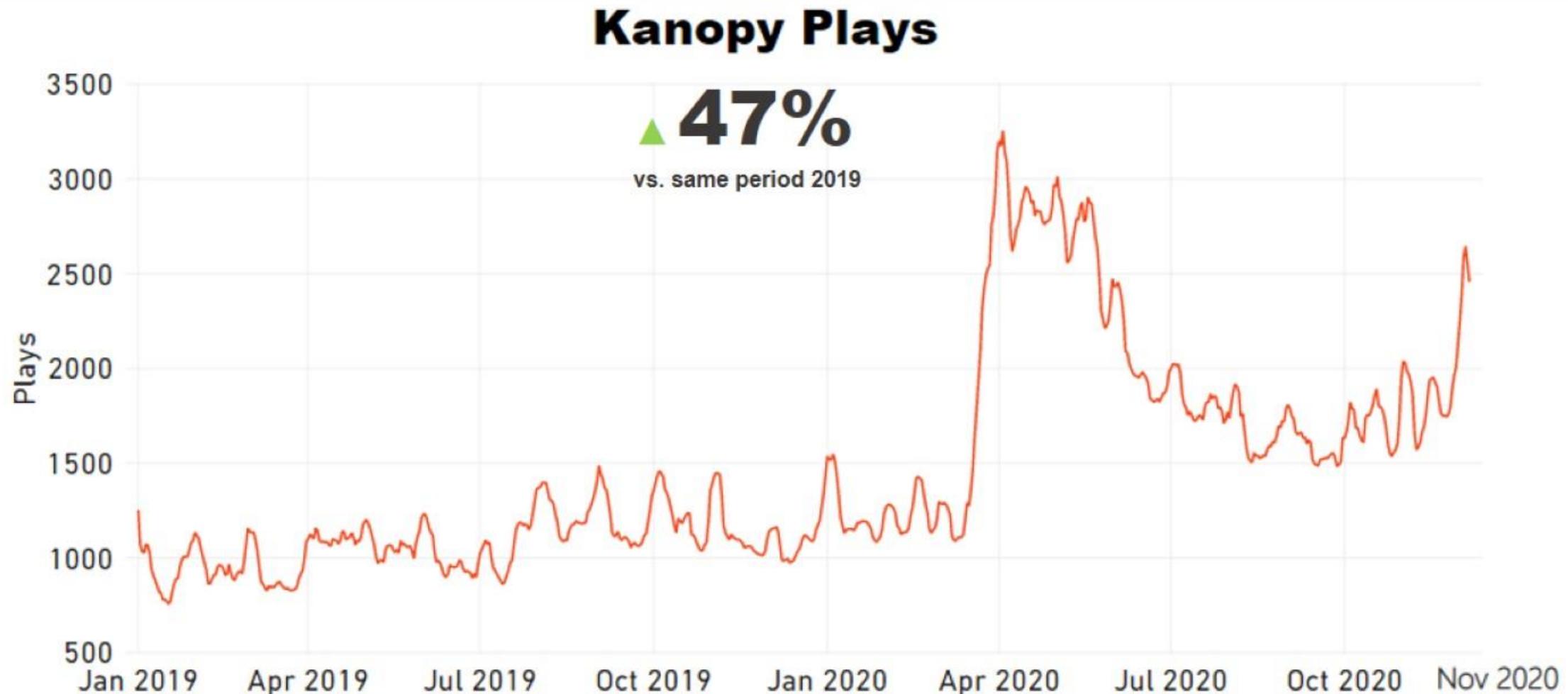
▲ 80%

vs. same period 2019

Attendance for online programs remained strong throughout the fall



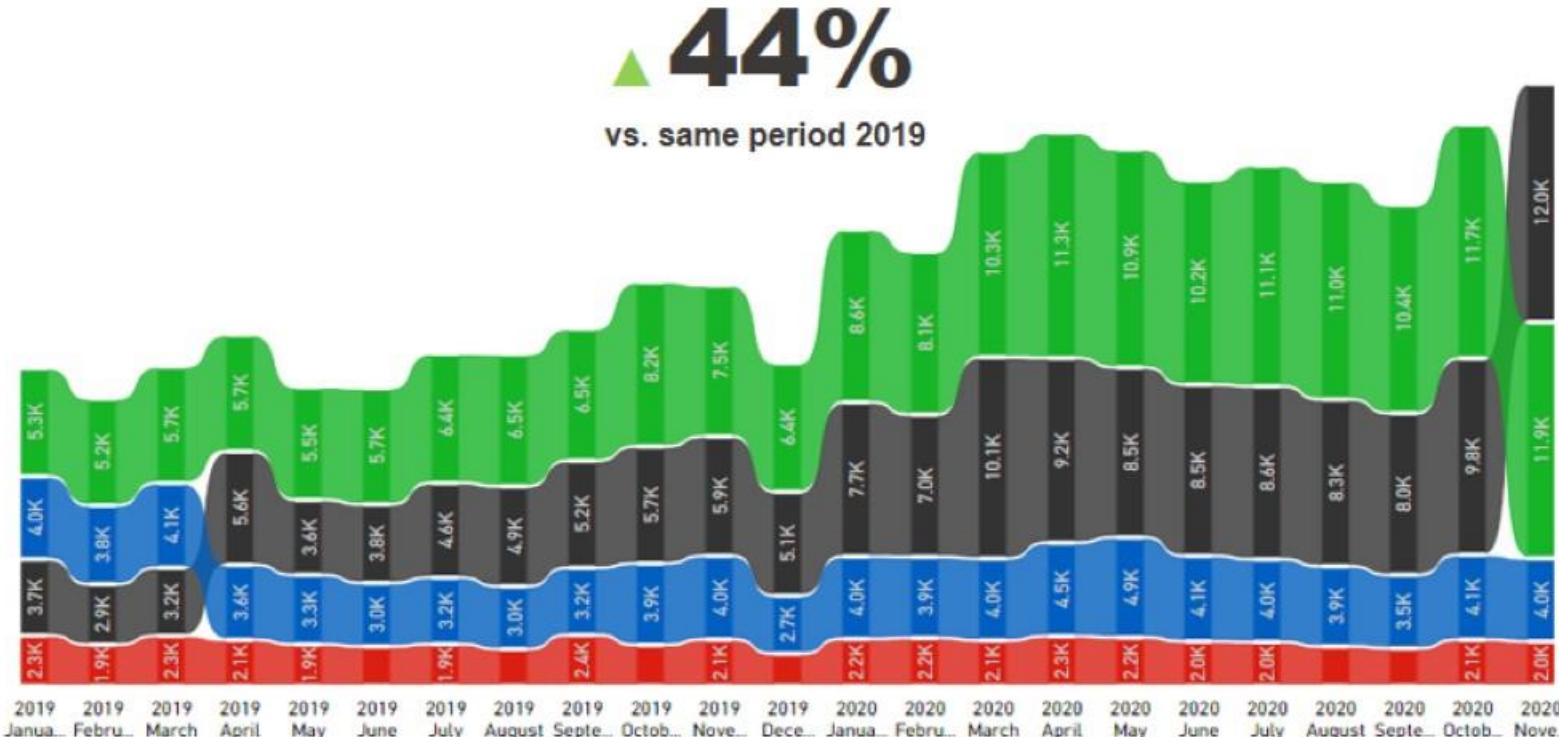
The pandemic is shifting media consumption, driving customers to stream video content at higher levels compared to a year ago



Consumption of e-newspapers continued to be significantly higher than a year ago. Stories about the pandemic and the US election largely contributed to the spike

E-Newspaper Clickthroughs

• [Globe and Mail - Historical Newspaper Archive](#) • [NYTimes.com](#) • [PressReader](#) • [Toronto Star - Historical Newspaper Archive](#)

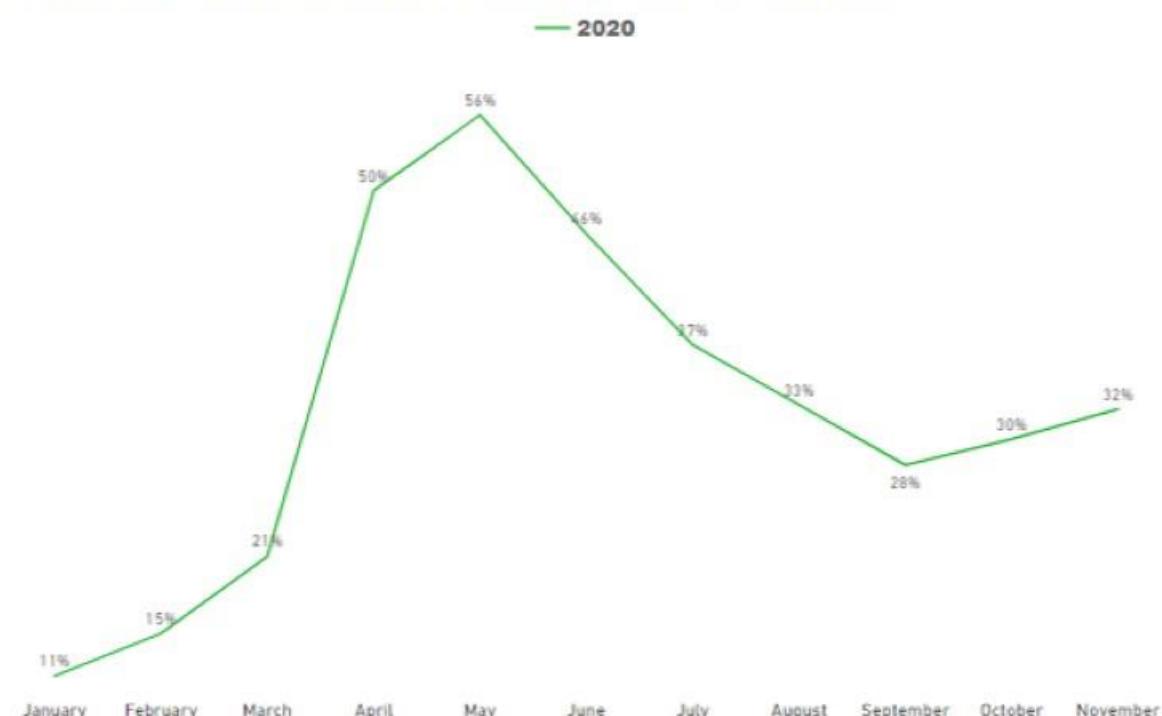


Customers continued to borrow and place holds on e-books, e-audiobooks, and e-magazines using OverDrive

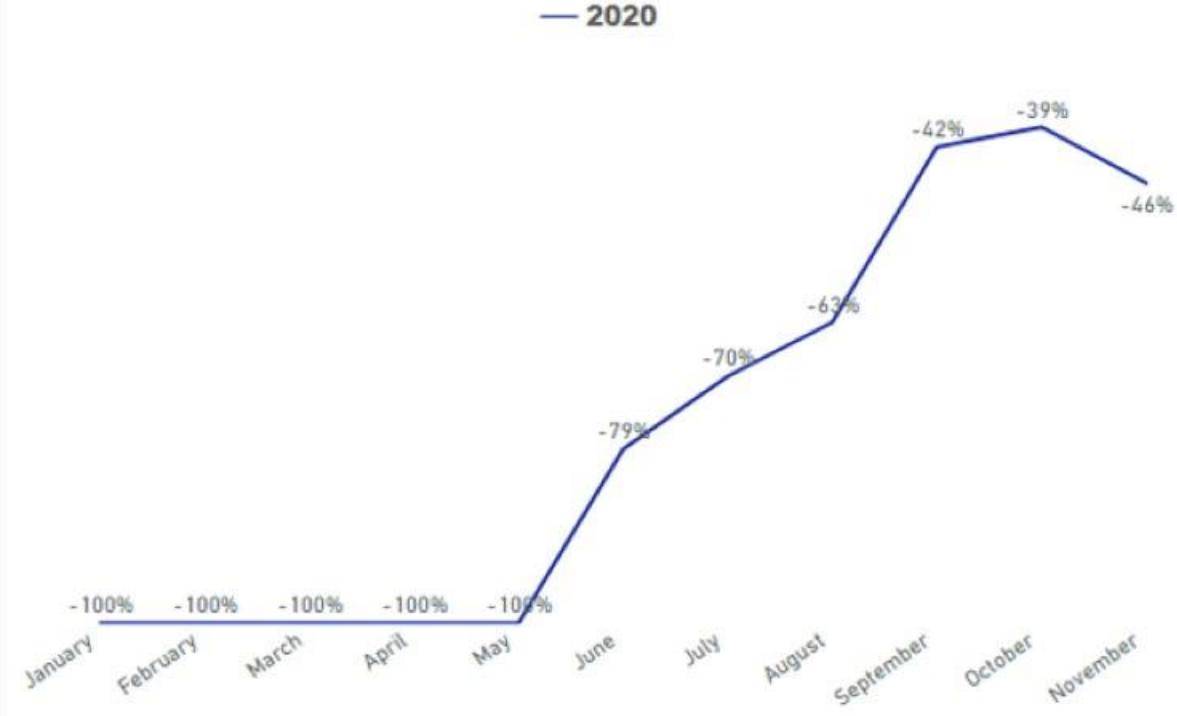


Throughout the fall, demand for TPL's e-collections remained strong. Customers also exercised the option to borrow the Library's physical collection as more branches re-opened

Year-over-Year Change E-collections Checkouts



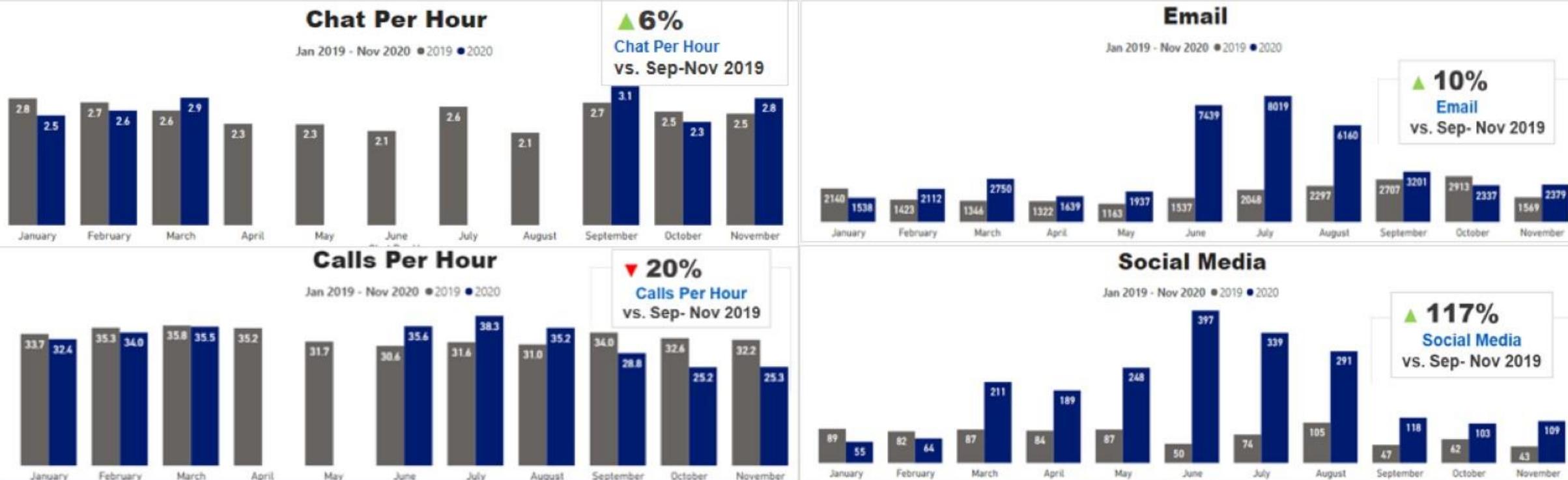
Year over Year Change Physical First Time Checkouts



03 TPL AS AN ORGANIZATION

TPL as an organization was nimble in modifying its operations while maintaining positive customer satisfaction

AnswerLine reintroduced online chat in the fall while calls declined as some services shifted online



Services that shifted online:

- program queries and registration requests
- title suggestions requests

Customers were not only satisfied with response times but they appreciated the personal communications they were receiving from TPL's AnswerLine staff



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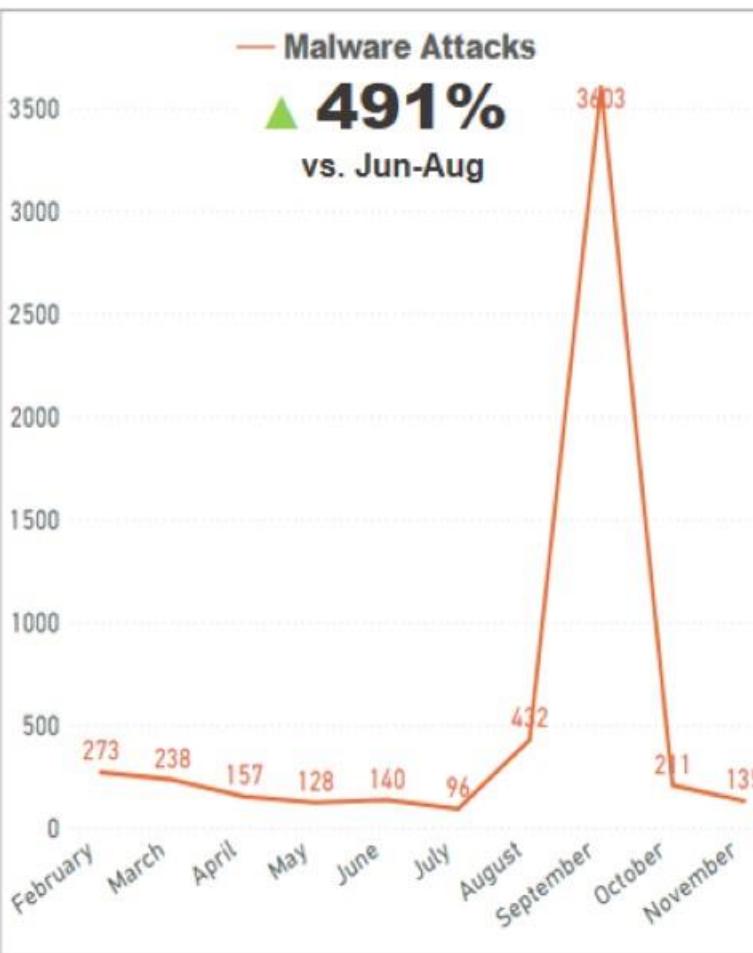
I appreciate the fact that someone took the time to give me an extensive answer which explained your current cleaning practices in our covid world.

The response was thorough, swift, and helpful [...] Thank you for the kind and detailed assistance.

Has always been helpful in answering my questions and directing me correctly to the next part of my search. Thanks for continuing this needed service.

”

IT continued to cope with and monitor increased levels of phishing and malware attacks in the fall



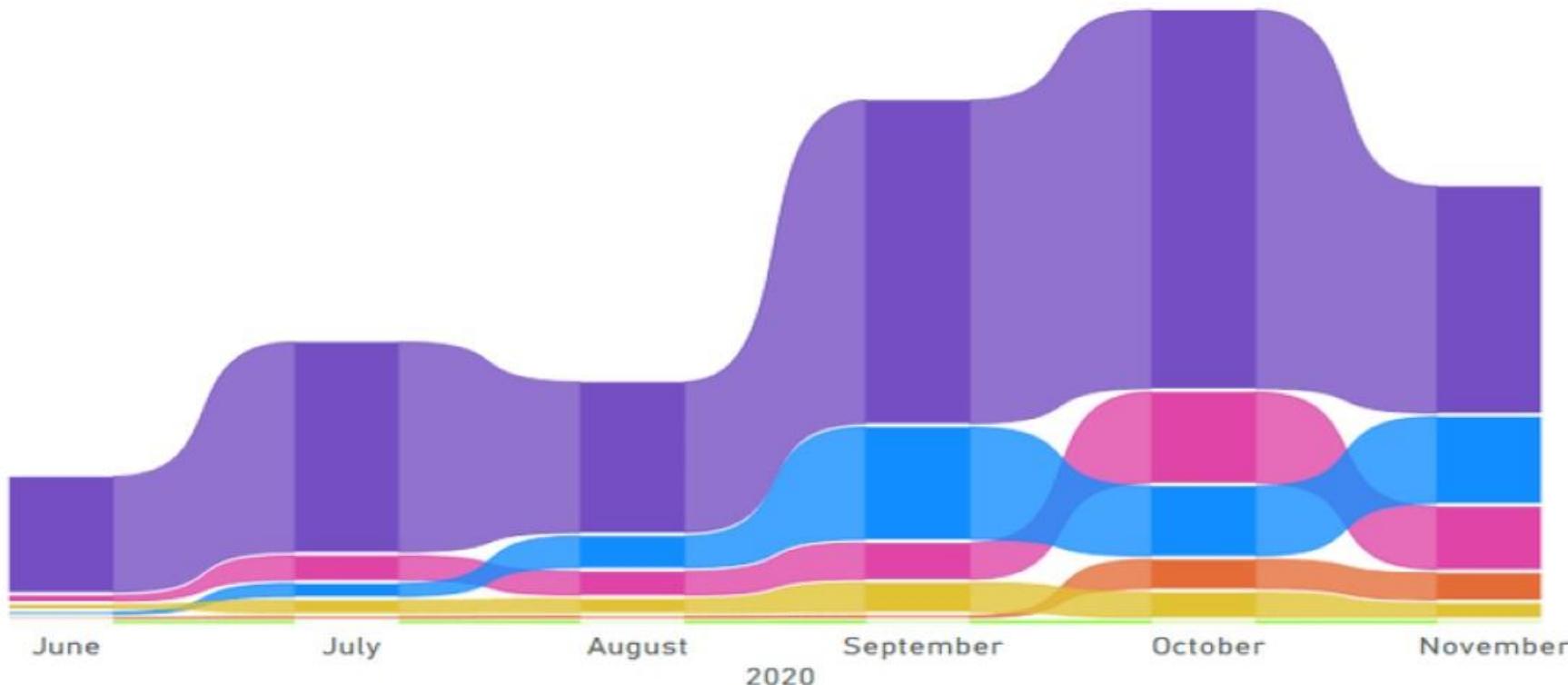
04 TPL STAFF

TPL staff were quick to take advantage of the training resources available on learn:tpl and accessed critical information through the COVID-19 resource site and staff town halls

Since its launch, learn:tpl has seen a huge uptake in staff participation

Total Learning Object Completions

Learning Object Type • Curriculum • Material • Online Class • Session • Test • Video



▲149%
LOs Completed
vs. Jun-Aug

1,385
Average Staff
Completing
One LO
Sep-Nov

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