National Association of Realtors® Streamlines Access to Real Estate Knowledge with Soutron Archive

INTRODUCTION

For over a century, the National Association of REALTORS® (NAR) Library & Archives has been a treasure trove of resources to NAR members, staff and the public, providing a variety of professional research services to help them find information on all thing's real estate.

With 1.5 million members worldwide, NAR's library and archive collections aren't just for REALTORS® but also staff at the national association level, 54 state and territory association levels (including Guam, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), plus 1,000+ local associations as well as the public, providing access to the largest real estate collection in the world.

Services provided by the library & archive staff to members and staff at no charge include quick research services in addition to custom, in-depth research reports. The NAR library and archive holds 12,000+ print materials including books, magazines and newspapers, with over 150 journal runs in print. They also have a very large digital collection, as well as a robust eBook and audiobook collection of over 10,000 items.

CHALLENGE

NAR wanted to make its massive catalog accessible not only to members and staff, but also to academics and researchers, especially those working on real estate history or teaching classes on it.

That meant the association needed two custom library and archive portals. One that the public could browse for information on projects such as land use development and a second portal for NAR members and staff where it was easy to find the information being looked for. With the previous system, open-source Koha, that wasn't possible.

Providing reference services is a primary function and fast access to information is required. NAR's library and archive staff take pride in providing quick answers to short reference requests for statistical data, links to online resources, or other material.

For more in-depth research needs, a custom research service can be undertaken by a librarian or archivist, who will provide a research summary along with a list of relevant articles, reports, links and other sources where they found the information requested.

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"Our reference services are pretty robust," states Abby Shah, Manager, NAR Library. "A member or staff member can contact the library and archives and ask any question, big or small. Sometimes they just need statistics or a chart from an internal report that we can get out to them and matter of minutes. Sometimes they ask bigger questions like the history of their association or how a community or a property feature might impact property value." They needed a system that could better support both their public and internal audiences that was easily searchable.

SOLUTION

To find a solution that would enable NAR to better serve their members and the public, the library & archive staff relied on the technical services ILS report that comes out from Marshall Breeding, an independent authority of library automation systems, which is where they discovered Soutron Archive.
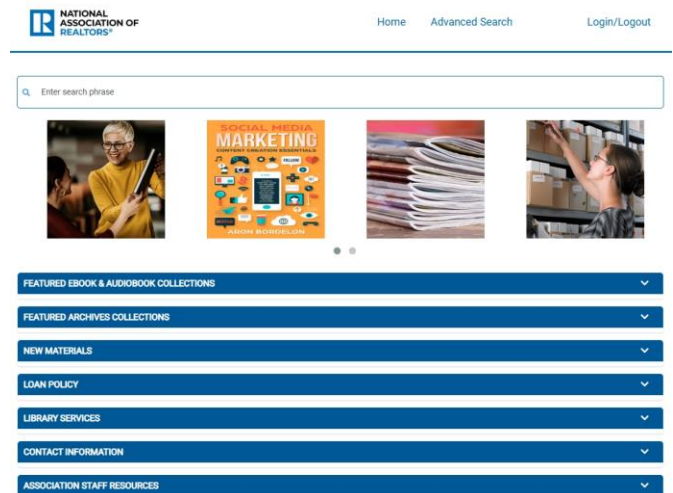
Enhanced Organization

"We have a pretty robust Archive collection and our archivist was really impressed with the hierarchical tree structure in Soutron" states Abby. "The way that we were able to categorize everything from the archives in Soutron and display the search results was the major selling point."

Enhanced Accessibility

With Soutron, NAR has two search portals to accommodate their audience: one for members and staff (login required) and one for the public to search and browse to see what the collection has to offer (See image top right).

On top of that, they've set up "Saved Searches," allowing curated parts of their collection to be featured whether it's the latest eBooks, audiobooks, or hot topics members are buzzing about.

Transparency is key and now members can see exactly what's new in the collection at any time.
Increased Efficiency

Abby is also appreciative of Soutron's modern user interface on the back end. "I find it so much easier to use than any other ILS that I've used. It makes sense, it's more dynamic and its ease of use is great."

NAR found that Soutron was the more streamlined system that really helped them get the organization that they were looking for and the search results that they were expecting.

Improved Search

"Soutron helps us because we can see what is available in the parent child hierarchy that Soutron displays. We can look at the larger categories and then drill down to child categories and find PDF information or know where to go to find that in the physical collection."

NAR is also appreciative of the controlled vocabulary Soutron supports with its poly-hierarchical thesaurus. With regards to the latest release of Soutron, Abby states, the recent changes have been very helpful. It is important to us to maintain the thesaurus because we know that keeping terms compliant with our formatting can help with discovery."

Soutron has enabled NAR to organize their vast collection in the catalog the way they want it to be displayed, not only making it easier for their archivists and librarians to find related documents, but also for staff and members to be able to search within the Archive through Soutron, which wasn't possible with their previous KOHA system.

RESULTS

"Our members say that our library services are the best kept secret at NAR and I say it's not a secret. I get excited about what we do. It's meaningful, it's impactful on people's personal lives and their businesses. And I think it's incredible that this is one of the benefits that the National Association offers its members."

The value of Soutron Archive at the NAR library and archive is apparent as Abby states: "It's really fascinating for us to do the back-end work and our users are able to take that effort that we put forward for them and take it to their client, to their community, to their company and make actual change".

Awareness of the Library and the research services available to members of NAR is a priority for the association, as they are vested in the professional success of the real estate industry. To promote their library services, the library has a presence at association conferences, is on social media and even zooms into new member meetings at local associations when they're doing their new member orientation and to give a 15-minute presentation on what the library offers.

Through Soutron, NAR has not only preserved its rich history but has also made it accessible to a broader community. This has strengthened the association's position as a leading authority on real estate and its related fields. "People love talking to us and we love talking to them and honestly, every time I meet a new member who is unfamiliar with the library and archives, I tell them everything we have and everything we can do for them", Abby states.

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To find out more about the National Association of REALTORS®, visit their website for details:
www.nar.realtor

To find out how you can migrate to a fast, secure, cloud-based archive or library management system to support your organization's needs, start a conversation with Soutron Global today:
www.soutron.com