



How to make a smooth transition to RFID



Bibliotheca recently interviewed Sarah H. Sledge, branch manager of the Madison Public Library in Madison, Alabama, regarding her library's experience in implementing Bibliotheca RFID solutions. Bibliotheca posed the following questions to Ms. Sledge and received the following answers:

Huntsville-Madison County (Ala.) Public Library outfitted its main library and Madison branch with Bibliotheca's RFID system, including book labels, Biblio StaffStations, BiblioGate VI security gates and Orion self-check stations. The library's decision to implement RFID at its two busiest locations, with potential expansions at other locations, is based in large part on a strategic objective to keep pace with the high-tech expectations of one of the fastest growing and most technologically oriented communities in the U.S.

What issues prompted your library to explore using RFID solutions?

When we first began researching for a materials management solution in 2006, I knew RFID was the direction to take the library. I was knowledgeable enough about RFID technology from information I learned in classes, reading professional journals, and visiting library conferences to recognize that other options would be a "band-aid" in today's world. The main issues we were dealing with – loss of materials through theft and limited staff because we lacked the space in which to place additional staff – indicated we needed an RFID solution. Plus, we are a busy library that circulates more than 520,000 items a year in a 15,000-square-foot library.

What RFID capabilities were most appealing to you? Why?

Enjoying the benefits of enhanced security was our primary goal, followed by the need to identify items when/if stolen, protect customer privacy, and provide self-check options for patrons.

Being able to protect our valuable collections, especially DVDs, with RFID security features that identify when items are not checked out was our primary goal. We were also, of course, interested in finding a solution that would help us manage circulation demands. The longer I researched and evaluated RFID technology, the more I realized that self-check stations have the power to carry us to new heights of public service.

What strategic or operational goals did you (or do you plan) for your RFID investment to help your library achieve?

Customer service is our top priority. Freeing up staff from the circulation desk allows library staff to assist patrons searching for materials. With RFID self-check stations, patrons can check out their items, print a receipt, and even pay fines. Staff, in turn, can step away from the desk without fearing that lines will back up. The result is improved customer service, which actually reduces staff frustration because they finally can provide the high level of service they take personal pride in. Everyone is happy and everyone benefits!

What traits were you looking for in an RFID solutions provider?

Obviously, I wanted an RFID provider with a reputation for producing great products *and* I was looking for a provider who was knowledgeable, responsive, helpful, and considerate of our needs and problems. It was imperative we find someone who could communicate necessary information to us in a clear manner and, at the same time, recognize when we needed different guidance or support to meet the requirements of our new systems. It was also imperative we had a provider familiar with our ILS. Bibliotheca was a great choice for us. The support team was very responsive to our concerns and provided solutions, professionalism, and humor. In a nutshell, our experience has been stellar.



CASE STUDY



Our experience was smoother than I could ever imagine it being. The nights of worrying about conversion and implementation were wasted. This was my first major technology project to manage. I learned a lot and find myself unconcerned about taking on this type of project in the future. The support staff at Bibliotheca has been extremely helpful and easy to work with regularly.

What benefits have you already experienced (or do you expect to experience) with your new RFID solutions?

First and foremost, our DVD collection isn't evaporating prior to circulation. This is the exact result we wanted. We are starting to see, and I expect more improvement in, the maximization of the use of the space we have by moving customers through more efficiently. Our building is intended for 32,000 people, and we serve well over 45,000. City officials are working closely with us to find short-term solutions to our physical space limitations, while considering an expansion project. RFID puts us in a position to serve more people at a high satisfaction level, and I expect this to continue.

Moving to RFID has significantly reduced the percentage of customers that is sent to the staff desk. Our goal is to reach 90+% self-check usage. We are at 64% after the first full month.

What tips do you have to offer libraries for making the transition to RFID as smooth as possible?

- Do not worry about tagging the collection! The process was not the monumental feat it sounds like when you consider touching every item in a collection of 75,000. Granted, many collections are much larger. We hired temporary staff to tag during regular hours without closing. I would do it exactly the same if I had it to do over.
- Plan, plan, plan. Think through the process in your location and brainstorm everything that could happen because it most likely will.
- Evaluate all angles of your physical workflow in the building to anticipate your equipment needs.
- Get a full understanding of how your ILS and RFID software will operate with each other. Understand what your ILS actually does.
- Recognize quickly when something is not working and listen to staff suggestions immediately. They are doing the work and know what they are talking about.
- Keep staff informed and educated throughout the project. Make sure they understand their jobs are going to change slightly and what the goals of those changes are.
- Talk to other similar libraries already converted to RFID.
- Plan some more!

