



Empowering Library Materials Management



*The following is the transcript of an interview with **Lisa Rosenblum, the director of the Public Library in Sunnyvale, California**, in which she discusses her reasons for investing in RFID technology.*

I'm Lisa Rosenblum, director for the city of Sunnyvale. Sunnyvale has a population of 140,000 people. We have one very well-loved, very well-used library: 2.5 million items circulate a year. We have an average of 2,000 people a day who walk through our doors and we simply could not keep up with demand.

We found ourselves in a situation that many libraries across the country are finding themselves in: With the downturn in the economy, more and more people are coming to their public libraries. Over the past five years our circulation has gone up 37% but our staffing has gone down 13%. So, in order to deliver the same service with fewer staff, we have to make sure that our existing services are as efficient and effective as possible.

Most of industry uses technology to help them move materials, so we decided we needed to do the same thing since we're largely in the materials movement business. And that's why we thought of an RFID and materials handling solution. We needed an automated solution to our inventory issue because we simply could not check in our books in a timely manner.

RFID benefits patrons and staff

In the past, it took us 3-5 days to get books checked in and on the shelves. We received a lot of calls from people upset with us, asking, "Why is this item still on our record?" They had done their due diligence, they had shown up and returned their items, but we were unable to get them checked in on time.

When we implemented RFID technology, the first benefit we noticed was that our materials were checked in instantly. Our customers were happier. We, in turn,

because of the Bibliotheca 21-bin sorting system, are able to presort items more quickly, get them on the shelves and into the hands of our customers within 48 hours. This means we have more inventory available than in the past. As a result, our highly used DVD collection, which we use to limit to 3 items per check-out before our investment in RFID, we've now raised the limit to 10 items per check-out because there are simply more DVDs available on the floor. It's quite simple: The quicker items are checked in, the faster we can get them on the floor to our customers.

Our staff is our greatest asset. Before our investment in RFID, they were spending more and more time doing back-room activities such as checking in items and checking out items for our customers. The materials handling system frees us from having to do these routine tasks and allows our staff to go out on the floor and help our customers where they need help. Let the machine help with routine tasks, but let our staff take care of the more complex tasks our customers need assistance with.

Seamless integration with current ILS

Another great advantage of the RFID system is our ability to integrate the RFID system with our existing ILS, Millennium ExpressLane. As a result, we have created a more seamless process for staff and customers who have not had to learn a new integrated library system.

Empowering patrons with fast self-service

We particularly like our new RFID self-check machines. Customers not only can check out items quickly by stacking 3 or 4 items at a time but also access their records with touchscreen technology. Customers can also simply scan their credit cards and pay fines online, and then receive an email with a receipt. This is a much more powerful capability than in the past. Also, our customers just love having the receipts printed out for them from the check-out and returns machines. Finally, the self-check machines are so convenient to use, our self-check usage has risen from 77% to 92%. I should add that having staff on the floor to teach customers how to use the self-check machines is the other key to increasing self-check usage.

