

## CASE STUDY



### Using RFID to drive efficiency and customer satisfaction



**Cindy Gibbon, senior library manager, Access and IT Services, explains why Multnomah County Library (MCL) in Portland, Oregon, decided to implement Bibliotheca RFID solutions.**

*Cindy, along with project manager Lucien Kress, share their experience in transitioning to RFID.*

*Multnomah County Library (MCL) is the oldest public library west of the Mississippi and, according to the Public Library Data Service, last year set a circulation record among all libraries serving fewer than one million residents. With 22.7 million items in circulation and serving a population of about 700,000, MCL averages 30 items checked out or renewed by every man, woman and child in the county. Founded in 1864, MCL includes 18 neighborhood libraries in addition to Central Library and has the highest in-library materials use per capital among libraries nationwide serving a population of more than 500,000.*

#### What problems led you to consider investing in RFID?

About five years ago, MCL found that our staff could not keep up with circulation demands, causing delays in re-shelving items and filling holds. A move to control loss of inventory – relocating DVDs and media holds behind service counters – exacerbated these problems and led to increases in repetitive stress injuries among staff and a decrease in patron privacy. It was obvious to us that changes were in order.

#### What appealed to you most about RFID?

After careful research, we selected RFID to improve materials handling efficiency and theft detection. With an electromagnetic theft detection system, the patron or staff would manually scan the barcode and demagnetize or magnetize the strip for every check-out/in. With RFID, *both* the workload and security issues are addressed with a single solution.

#### Why did you choose Bibliotheca?

Bibliotheca's reputation as the RFID leader in Europe, their ability to quickly deliver large tag orders, and their 24-hour, U.S.-based software support center were huge factors. In addition, we needed an RFID provider willing to help us

integrate their software with our existing self-check stations using Innovative Interfaces' Express Lane software.

To evaluate RFP responses, we developed a score sheet with extensive criteria. Bibliotheca offered some product features other companies could not deliver. For example, their shielded RFID pad prevents the signal from bleeding, which in tight spaces helps prevent inadvertent checkouts. Weighing all considerations, Bibliotheca easily won out.

#### How do the benefits of RFID factor in with the challenges of implementation?

We had to justify both the costs and benefits of RFID, so we collected data before we started and continue to measure our results. Locations with RFID are already experiencing the following important benefits:

- 90% or better usage rate at self-check stations, resulting in more satisfied patrons
- 50 to 60% fewer missing items
- 25 to 40% improvement in materials handling
- Significant reduction in repetitive stress injury
- More staff time to interact with patrons

Once all of our items are tagged and all of our staff has achieved a high comfort level with the new technology, we anticipate these statistics will grow even further.



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### What tips do you have for other libraries considering the transition to RFID?

- **Keep staff and community informed and involved, as well as organize volunteer opportunities.** We hosted Sunday “tagging frenzies” at our Central Library to extend the feeling of ownership and acceptance of RFID throughout the library system.
- **Establish staff teams (tagging, security, IT, etc.) to implement, problem solve and train others during the conversion process.** Our core tagging team honed their processes and skills converting the Central Library collection. Then they travelled from branch to branch, bringing knowledge about the best way to tag each item.
- **Build conversion carts, including a netbook with Bibliotheca RFID software, shielded pad, and scanner.** Taggers took the carts into the stacks to convert the collection to RFID. They placed a tag in the item, placed the item on the pad and scanned the item barcode. The pad then wrote the barcode to the tag. Very efficient!
- **Mark call number labels to identify items already tagged as well as items preprocessed with RFID tags.** We used a yellow marker on the call number label to flag items already tagged so that these items could be easily identified by the taggers in the stacks. The same yellow mark is being printed on the call number labels of new items that are preprocessed with RFID tags by our vendors. Today, about 80 percent of our new materials are coming preprocessed with RFID tags.
- **Limit tagging work hours to avoid staff injury.** We followed county ergonomics experts’ guidelines and no one was permitted to tag for longer than one two-hour shift at a time, with no more than two shifts a day, not back-to-back. Our part-time staff picked up

some extra shifts and we offered some extra hours to on-call staff, which everyone appreciated. Everyone – including those of us on the steering committee – tagged. We feel we had a safe conversion that did not burn anyone out.

- **Train staff members thoroughly on how to assist patrons at new RFID check-out stations.** We introduced the “Think Yes!” customer service program designed to free staff from behind service desks so they are on the floor meeting patrons at their point of need. This service strategy has meshed well with our Bibliotheca RFID implementation.

### Results

Our goal was not to reduce staff, but to alleviate a significant amount of the manual labor of check-out, giving staff more time to interact with patrons. Based on the statistics and the happy faces on our patrons and staff, I believe Bibliotheca has helped us reach this goal.

By the end of 2010, the library successfully converted 16 of 19 locations. The last three branches will be completed in the first quarter of 2011, as we have a fair amount of additional renovation work to do in these locations. Although the implementation of RFID in our library system has been a long process, the results are very rewarding.

