

CAPITA

Leeds Library and Information Service

Bridge Pro



Bridge Pro implementation dramatically improves public engagement

Background

Leeds Library and Information Service has a catalogue of over 730,000 items and serve a community of 761,100 residents through 53 static library service points. With over 100,000 active borrowers and more than 3 million annual issues - last year there were over 4 million visits - modernising the library service represented a major strategic and organisational challenge. Having observed the growing use of self-service in other aspects of modern life (such as supermarket check-outs), Leeds Library and Information Service decided that self-service should be used to relieve front line staff from manual, basic transactional tasks, giving them more time for engagement with the public.

The benefits of RFID

Although there is a choice of technologies that provide self-service to libraries, Leeds chose RFID as they identified two major benefits. Firstly, there is the simplicity of RFID self-issue. Library users are able to place a stack of items on the self-service kiosk and so are able to issue or discharge a number of books simultaneously rather than being required to expose each barcode individually. This is convenient for users and saves time in issuing or returning items. Secondly, security was previously only enabled on book stock in the central library and the busiest branch library. By adding RFID tags in all stock and security gates at all branches gave the opportunity to enable security at each of these sites, thus potentially reducing the amount of stock loss.

Choosing the self-service vendor

To find out more about RFID, Leeds attended CILIP's 'RFID in Libraries' conference, where they met the various vendors to gather more information, and visited other libraries who had already installed the technology. Based on the information gathered a competitive tender was published. Intellident, a Capita Additions Partner, were awarded the contract, because as Sandra Sharp, ICT Business Development Manager, Library and Information Service, Leeds City Council explains "Intellident's tender illustrated that they knew exactly what libraries needed and their solution had a number of additional features."

Working together: Capita and Intellident

The Additions Partner Programme was established to build strong relationships with third party companies to provide customers a wide choice of complementary technology services, including self-service vendors. As a member of the programme, Intellident work closely with Capita to ensure that all the technical requirements combine in order to result in successful implementations. Sharp recounts her experience: "we were very impressed with the close working relationship between Capita and Intellident. It was reassuring that everyone was on board and in the loop with the project." Commenting on the installation, Andy Chadbourne, Marketing Manager of Intellident added: "we have been a partner for over 6 years now and have deployed many RFID installations together. Having a strong relationship between the self-service provider, LMS and the customer is critical in ensuring a smooth installation and long-term operation."

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Andy Chadbourne, Marketing Manager, Intellident

Supporting the business case

Budget was secured for the initial pilot of RFID on the strength of the improved stock security and the reduction of transactional tasks for front line staff. The target for self-service usage for the pilot was 60% of all transactions. In order to secure funding for the general roll out, a further report was produced at the end of the pilot, outlining the most successful sites which achieved up to 91% self-service uptake.

Demanding timescales

As Leeds Library and Information Service have a 'return anywhere' policy there was a need to implement RFID as quickly as possible. This avoids problems occurring when library users return non RFID tagged items to RFID enabled libraries. Therefore, Leeds developed an ambitious plan to implement RFID across 32 libraries as quickly as possible. The project was broken into three phases: pilot, implementation in refurbished libraries, and general roll out.

Already RFID has been implemented in 11 sites in 2008/2009, plus the two pilot sites and two refurbished libraries the previous year, and are part way through a rollout to a further 15 sites planned during 2009/2010, including a newly built library in Garforth, and the final two installations in new libraries by 2010/2011.

Learning from the implementation

Although there have been a few challenges, 20 sites have gone live and "the project has been very smooth" explains Sharp. Several of the library sites at Leeds are listed buildings, adding a degree of complexity to the project. Sharp explains "Intellident were great at coming up with creative solutions to work within the limitations of the regulations of these buildings - where fixtures can't just be drilled into walls."

The pilot also showed that the use of agency staff to tag stock with RFID tags in the pilot sites to minimise disruption to library staff, didn't work as well as anticipated. This was partially because the agency staff needed a lot of supervision and staff felt there simply wasn't time to be able to supervise the agency staff on top of their regular roles, but also because staff liked to be involved and needed to feel a part of the project from the start.

To avoid these issues, Leeds now deploy staff workstations several months before the installation of RFID kiosks. Therefore, library staff are able to begin to tag items to fit around their existing roles, without dramatically increasing their workload or impacting on their existing responsibilities. Staff visits to other libraries with RFID are also arranged as part of the preparation for the implementation. This demonstrates the system working and enables staff that have already been through the process to share their experiences.

More issues, better services

The target self-service usage across the entire service is 60-80%. For the most part, sites are hitting these targets, but for those that aren't, Leeds are exploring how to increase use. This includes working with library staff to identify issues, for example repositioning the self-service machines to more prominent areas so staff can see if borrowers are having difficulty using the kiosks.

In one of the early implementations at a refurbished library, issues have increased over 42% from the year before. With the library regularly achieving 90% self-issue, staff are no longer stuck behind counters, and instead are free to engage with the public in a more interactive way which includes community events (such as coffee mornings and reading groups).

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