



# Create a more human library

## RFID Helps Manage the Flow of Library Materials

*"I have a pond on my property. To have a healthy pond, I need to have water coming in and out. Our library collection is similar to that. We need new materials flowing in and old materials flowing out. RFID has allowed us to do a better job of managing that flow."*

Karen McPheeters, Director, Farmington Public Library

### The Need

Located near the Four Corners Monument—where New Mexico meets Arizona, Colorado and Utah—the library in Farmington, N.M., pulls its customers from a service area the size of Connecticut. After years of stopgap measures to cope with growing demand and surging circulation, the community began construction of a new facility in 2002. A year later, the \$13.2 million, 52,000-square-foot Farmington Public Library opened with a collection of more than 180,000 items and seating for almost 600.

Although library staff assumed that they would eventually employ radio frequency identification (RFID) technology for collection management, they didn't develop an implementation plan until Library Director Karen McPheeters took a hard look at the expected customer and circulation figures for the new facility. She determined that the library simply could not increase staff to match the anticipated growth in customer traffic. Use typically doubles when a library reopens in a new building, and McPheeters calculated that her facility's broad outreach services and programs could lead to a tripling of use—an estimate that has held true. (In 2006, annual circulation was around 520,000 items.)

Recalled McPheeters, "I began saying to myself, 'Hmmm, twice the space, twice the volume, but not twice the staff. How are we going to manage?' We decided that we'd have to rearrange the budget to have an RFID system installed and ready by opening day."

### The Solution

While attending a Public Library Association conference in Phoenix, McPheeters spoke with 3M sales representatives about the company's RFID solutions. She was especially impressed with the productivity gains that would be possible with the five-bin sortation system 3M was offering. "It really struck home, since reshelving was taking our staff 15 steps, and there's no way that could continue with the high circulation we were facing at the new library," said McPheeters. "It was clear 3M offered the complete package of products we needed to improve efficiency and meet demand, with no worries of incompatibility with our existing 3M security products."

Farmington Public Library ordered a fully configured 3M RFID system, with new 3M™ SelfCheck™ Systems Model 7210 and upgrades to several previously installed machines, as well as 3M™ Staff Workstations, 3M™ RFID Tags, 3M™ Digital Library Assistants (DLAs), and a 3M™ SelfCheck™ System S-Series with five bins for sorting materials. (The library has since further upgraded to the latest 3M™ SelfCheck™ System V-Series units.)

The conversion to RFID went very smoothly, according to McPheeters. "We had three stations operating in the stacks during normal library hours. The machines were very handy. In two weeks, we converted 140,000 items with no disruption for our patrons. In fact, it was a good opportunity to start teaching people about what we were doing and why. It became part of the educational process, which is part of maintaining a good relationship with the community."

## The Result

The library's customers have embraced the RFID system, so much so that virtually all checkouts are now self-service. "We went up steadily in the first months, to 94 percent, then to 97 percent. Then we got to just short of 100 percent and my staff checked the records. They found out that the only person not using the self-check machine was me. After a few months of 100 percent self-service, I told them to give it up. There wasn't any reason to keep tracking it."

The use of self-service checkout has freed up library staff to provide other services to customers. "People tell us we have the best customer service in the city," McPheeters said. "Because of RFID, we aren't tied behind the desk, doing mundane things. We can help the patrons and they get what they need."

Productivity has also been boosted by the staff's use of the DLAs. The hand-held scanners have made it "much easier to manage our collection and, as a consequence, it's in the best shape it's ever been in," according to McPheeters. "We weed the collection on schedule, and it's very manageable. As a result, we're caught up on weeding. And after we've weeded a section, we purchase new books in that area." She emphasized that a steady current of new books and other items are the key to maintaining a vital collection. "It's like this," she said. "I have a pond on my property. To have a healthy pond, I need to have water coming in and out. Our library collection is similar to that. We need new materials flowing in and old materials flowing out—and RFID has allowed us to do a better job of managing that flow."

She added that the introduction of RFID prompted the library staff to reconsider—and eventually streamline—a number of other processes. "Overall, we're doing a better job, with better quality control, and that produces happier employees."

When the new Farmington Public Library was still under construction, McPheeters said the purpose of building was to give a "balance between the tradition of books and the future of technology. 3M is helping us do that." Today, she feels that the 3M RFID system continues in that role and that there is more to be accomplished. "The staff has been very creative with this technology and we feel there are more ways we can use it. We've only scratched the surface of what it can do."

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