



At Addison Public Library, the 3M™ Integrated Disc Media Unlocker Leads to a “Dramatic” Increase in Self-Service

With a bigger, busier new building and no increase in staff, the Addison Public Library needed a way to boost productivity. The library board and staff decided to complement their existing barcode circulation system with 3M's RFID-enabled Integrated Disc Media Unlocker. Now patrons are able to check out almost all items in the collection using self-service, and any future migration to RFID will be that much easier.

The Challenge

When its first standalone library was built in 1968, the village of Addison, Illinois had a population of about 18,000 and was “almost rural,” according to Library Director Mary Medjo Me Zengue. Over the subsequent forty years, the community has become “basically a suburb of Chicago” and its population has more than doubled.

Not surprisingly, the original library building was too small to keep up with the constantly expanding collection and the growing demand from patrons, so the village allocated \$13 million for a new, 54,600-square-foot building.

As they planned their future library, the board and staff were aware of the paradox of new facility construction: buildings designed to satisfy unmet community needs tend to encourage even more visits and even greater circulation. “We expected to see a significant increase in demand,” Medjo Me Zengue said, “but we weren't in a position to increase our budget or hire staff. And that meant we were going to be spread thin.”

The Solution

The new Addison Public Library, which opened in July 2008, is twice the size of its predecessor. It contains more than 50 patron-accessible computers, a coffee shop, snack bar, and shelves that can finally accommodate the library's 140,000-item collection. And to bridge the gap between the growing demand and a steady budget, the library upgraded its existing 3M™ SelfCheck™ System V-Series with three 3M™ Integrated Disc Media Unlockers.

“Even when we were still at the old building, we knew we needed to rely more on self-service if we were going to keep satisfying our patrons,” Medjo Me Zengue said. “It's been part of our service model for some time, but we needed more people to use it.” When lines formed at the older building's circulation desk, librarians encouraged patrons to use the self-service workstations. “We'd point out the line and suggest they try self-service, but they invariably had a reason why they needed a librarian's assistance. Often it was because they were checking out a DVD that had to be manually unlocked.”

Library management began looking at self-service devices that could simultaneously unlock and check out disc media. They discovered that 3M was about to launch such a device, and that it would be compatible with the Checkpoint DiscMate cases they were currently using.

With the 3M Integrated Disc Media Unlocker, the patron places the item on the workstation, where the SelfCheck System checks it out using either radio frequency (RFID) or barcode identification. The SelfCheck System display screen then directs the patron to insert the case in the unlocker. Using an RFID tag on the case, the unlocker confirms that the inserted item matches the checked-out item. The case is then automatically unlocked and the workstation generates a receipt. (Other disc media security systems usually don't match the item checked out to the item in the unlocker. This allows thieves to check out one item but unlock and remove another; the still-locked first item is then returned to the library.)



Create a More Human Library

The Integrated Disc Media Unlocker wasn't scheduled to launch until early 2009, roughly six months after the expected opening of the new Addison library. Despite the delay, library management decided to plan their system around the forthcoming 3M device. "We were willing to wait until it became available," Medjo Me Zengue said. "We like the SelfCheck System we've been using, and we've had excellent service and technical support. We also really like Matt Bellamy, our 3M sales rep. So we were thrilled that we could get what we want with 3M."

The Result

The Addison Public Library installed its 3M Integrated Disc Media Unlockers shortly after they were introduced in early 2009. Indications are that the staff's patience has paid off: a significant increase in demand has been observed—as expected—but patron self-service has increased at an even faster rate.

From May 2008 (three months before the new building opened) through April 2009, circulation and visits both increased by more than 25 percent. Medjo Me Zengue noted that staff expected some of the increased traffic to taper off as the initial interest waned, but that hasn't happened. "We think it's because of the economy," she said. Citizens often use the library more during difficult times, and especially now when job searches and applications are commonly done online. "Whatever the reason, we're happy they are coming and we can assist them."

Increasing circulation and visits by such a large amount would have been daunting without the increase in self-service provided by the Integrated Disc Media Unlockers. Primarily because of the unlockers, the use of the library's self-service system grew at an even faster rate than the circulation. In the month before the

unlockers were installed, self-service constituted 22 percent of total circulation; in the month after, self-service had climbed to 38 percent of the total.

Medjo Me Zengue called this increase in self-service "dramatic" and "a huge benefit" for the staff. She also predicted that it would continue to grow. "Over the coming months, as we show the unlockers to more people and as they try them out, that percentage of people using self-service is definitely going to increase," she said.

She added that library patrons seem to enjoy using the devices. "We've heard nothing but positives," she said. "Everyone is happy with them." And while children have caught on faster than adults, the adults have had few problems learning the procedures. "Some of them asked for a handout they could read and we told them it wasn't necessary," she recalled. "It's very intuitive. Very simple. You just have to read the screen and follow the directions."

Previously, the library had used barcode labels on all its items. Because the Integrated Disc Media Unlocker uses RFID to confirm each item's identity, the staff needed to place tags on the collection's disc media—a process that went smoothly over several weeks before the collection was moved to the new building.

While there is no need to undertake any additional RFID-related activities, Medjo Me Zengue said she expected that the tagging of the disc media collection was a first step toward a full conversion. "Eventually, we'll go totally RFID. A lot of our neighbor libraries are doing it. It's going well for them and it's clearly the future for libraries." By tagging the disc media now, she added, the library is one step closer to that upgrade.

July 2009



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