



# Create a more human library

## How to Handle Explosive Growth and High Service Expectations

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Dan Lee  
Assistant Library Manager  
Chandler (Ariz.) Public Library

### The Need

The Chandler Public Library (CPL) is a four-branch library system serving the fast-growing community of Chandler, Arizona in the heart of the “Silicon Desert.” The influx of high-tech businesses and sun-loving retirees has led to an explosion in Chandler’s population, which has jumped from about 90,000 in 1994 to nearly 250,000 in 2007.

The effect on Chandler’s libraries has been predictable but nevertheless daunting. As the demand for materials and services skyrocketed through the 1990s—and with circulation growth pegged at 45 percent between 2000 and 2001—the library’s infrastructure, personnel and budget were stretched to the breaking point.

To handle the growth, library staff focused on three goals: improving staff efficiency (by reducing the time spent on repetitive tasks and increasing accuracy); increasing self-checkout use; and streamlining collection management. For help, they called on 3M Library Systems.

\*The 3M™ Digital Library Assistant performs a variety of collection management functions, making identification and tracking easy.

### The Solution

CPL already had a good working relationship with 3M. In 2001, the three branches then in operation were equipped with 3M™ Detection Systems for security and 3M™ SelfCheck™ System technology for checking out items with barcodes. The staff was pleased with 3M’s quality and service, so they naturally turned to the company when they began to consider solutions for further increasing productivity.

The CPL librarians quickly identified the RFID (radio frequency identification) system from 3M as a potential solution. In early 2002, the board was briefed on the 3M system and soon approved the investment that staff had outlined. Starting with the Downtown branch, CPL tagged 10,000 items and installed a full RFID system with 3M™ Staff Workstations, 3M™ SelfCheck Systems and a 3M™ Digital Library Assistant (DLA). The conversion and integration were completed in one month.

The other branches were added gradually. “We made sure that our newest branch opened [in 2003] with RFID in place, then we went back to existing branches, doing them when we could get to them,” explained Dan Lee, Chandler’s Assistant Library Manager.

Today, the Chandler Public Library’s collection of 480,000 items is fully converted to RFID technology from 3M. “There are genuine benefits,” Lee said. “For customers, the lines for checkout and check-in are shorter. But the biggest benefit for staff is the DLA. We all love it. We use it to scan carts before shelving, to make sure that all the books are checked in. Invariably, we find something.” The rate of error is only about .5 percent, but Lee pointed out that that translates to about 15 books a day that a customer returned that would not have been recorded in the integrated library system before re-shelving.

The Chandler librarians also find that weeding is much easier with the DLA. “We’ll load the DLA with books that haven’t circulated in two years and do a very fast weed,” Lee said. “We’ll also scan for exceptions—books that are supposed to be missing or lost in transit or on hold—and we’ll often find a dozen or more books in just a couple of hours.”

## The Future

Looking ahead, Lee said there are greater efficiencies that could be accomplished with the RFID system.

“We have over 90 percent self-checkout in one of our branches,” he said, “but several others are well below that. For now, we’ve decided not to push it. We’re letting people decide for themselves if they want self-checkout or not.”

Other capabilities and efficiencies could also be achieved from the 3M system. “We’ve looked at the self-pay feature, for example, but we haven’t made the decision to pursue it,” Lee added. “There are other capabilities of the system we already have that we haven’t fully exploited. But what we’ve done so far has certainly—and significantly—improved our efficiency.”

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