



Create a more human library

RFID as a Tool for Collection Management for the Past Six Years...and Counting

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*Patricia Iannuzzi, Dean of University Libraries
University of Nevada, Las Vegas*

The Need

The University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) opened the Lied Library in 2001. Built with \$55.3 million in combined funds from the Nevada State Legislature and the Lied Foundation Trust, the 300,000-square-foot research facility was billed as a showcase of architecture, services, programs, and some of the most advanced library technologies available. In particular, the planners wanted to incorporate technologies that would give students and faculty reliable guidance on the availability and location of the library’s books and other research materials.

The Solution

For the Lied Library staff, the 3M™ RFID (radio frequency identification) System was a logical choice. The technology was proven and simple to install, and the supplier had a longstanding relationship with the library. (The UNLV library system was already equipped with 3M™ Tattle-Tape™ security technology.) Staff tested the 3M RFID system several months before the Lied Library opened. They liked its performance and its compatibility with the security equipment. According to the library’s chief administrator at that time, the 3M system “was appealing to us in that it integrates our automated systems with our Tattle-Tape security. It’s the only system available today that can do that.”

To begin the conversion to RFID, Lied Library leased three 3M™ Conversion Stations and converted 580,000 bar codes to RFID tags in less than seven months. (“Tagging was easy,” said one employee. “It became a game to see who could put on the most tags in an hour.”) In all, Lied purchased three 3M™ SelfCheck™ Systems to promote patron self-checkout, seven new 3M™ Staff Workstations, four 3M™ Digital Library Assistants (DLAs), and two 3M™ Detection Systems. Later, an additional workstation and two more DLAs were added.

The Results

Many libraries turn to RFID as a means of increasing staff productivity (through increased customer self-check and through more efficient shelf management). While the Lied Library staff appreciates the productivity gains, their favorite benefit from the system is its ability to track items. Notwithstanding its significant size (more than one million items) and annual circulation (more than 220,000 items), the Lied does an extraordinary job of synchronizing its catalog to the actual state of its shelves.

When it first opened, the then-dean of University Libraries at UNLV declared it to be “the most accurate library in the world.” The current dean, Patricia Iannuzzi, says this claim still holds true. Her analysis indicates that the catalog-to-shelf correlation is over 98 percent, primarily because of the library’s aggressive use of the DLA. (The national average from availability studies is about 60 percent.)

“We continuously use the DLA to read our shelves,” Iannuzzi said. “Also, each day our staff updates the DLA list with everything that’s been checked out. When books are returned, they are entered into the system and put on carts. Then all the carts are checked by DLAs to make sure we’ve caught everything.” Using the DLA, the “in-house circulation” can also be entered into the integrated library system; this allows collection managers to analyze and respond to usage patterns.

Iannuzzi concedes that customers usually aren't aware of what the system gives them. "The biggest benefit from RFID is that it ensures that every item is in its place. People look it up in the catalog and see it listed as being on the shelf. They go up and find it. They love that. They love RFID, but they don't know it."

Lied Library customers also like the self-service capabilities of RFID. "We haven't marketed the use of the 3M SelfCheck Systems in a sustained way," explained Wendy Starkweather, Director of User Service. Nevertheless, "the self-service percentage has been as high as 41 percent."

The university is planning a campaign to promote the idea of self-service, but Starkweather said that the system has already proved its value. "There is no doubt that the benefits of RFID have been worth the investment. The system meets all of our expectations for ensuring item availability, easy and ongoing inventory, collection assessment, and ease of use."

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