Technology? The Benefits for Libraries

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How can technology benefit libraries? D-Tech explains.

As with all libraries it seems budgets are being reduced and money saving solutions are having to be implemented. This has forced libraries to re-think their working patterns and by doing so many authorities have been able to continue service as normal whilst reducing costs with the help of the latest technologies available today.

The most common technology used is at the front end of the library service. Self-Service kiosks have led the way in enabling libraries to stay open longer, which has resulted in a significant reduction in costs. Self-Service solution are available in either a barcode only, electromagnetic or RFID format offering full flexibility regardless of the end –users current setup however the majority of libraries investigating a solution in today's market are opting for the latest technology that is RFID due to the added benefits it can offer. RFID offers a much faster approach to inventory helping libraries to reduce staffed hours; this in return enables libraries to remain opening for longer hours and in some cases in an un-staffed environment. With the implementation of self-checkouts, RFID Self-service kiosks also offers a much faster service for the users and frees up library staff to enable them to communicate with their users. RFID is a fast and affective technology giving the libraries options to create new operating models.

In an ever changing market libraries have also swayed towards other technologies enabling new ideas and methods of working. One of these methods is offering the facility to allow users access to a library in an 'out of hours / un-staffed environment. Yes you did read that correctly! – No staff presence. This technology is not new; it is known in the industry as B.M.S (building management solutions) the model is to offer a library service but without having to pay for staff to facilitate it. The products to enable this

are also not new, it's a combination of components grouped together and controlled by a central application. Common products controlled include; Access control, CCTV, public announcement systems, lighting and power. There are many other products that can also be controlled such as heating and security systems.

How does it work? The first thing we should be clear of is that this model will not work in all libraries that depend very much on size, layout and location. The solution also restricts who can visit their library during un-staffed hours. Users would have to register and be vetted with the library to use the service and agree to obey any policies that the authority might put in place. Any authorised users will be added along with the their library card details onto a separate LMS access control database, which will allow the user access into the library out of normal hours.

Once users have access into the library they are monitored by CCTV which will include images being captured that would have been agreed by the user at registration. Lights and power are controlled by a central control system along with a digital advanced PA system to let users know when the library is closing and can provide additional audio and visual alerts if required. The users then have full access to the library including internet access. Designated staff areas will be locked and no access will be allowed.

The access model also accommodates other services using the building, e.g. local groups or a community hub for the Police. This will allow an added service not only during normal library hours but extended library hours. The implementation of this powerful and effective solution needs to be managed by the authority, health and safety policies, insurance policies; security and staff equipment have to be considered in detail before this facility can operate.

The use of NFC (Near Field Communication) smart phones/devices and apps designed around the library is becoming a common feature, it is possible for users to checkout library materials via an app using the items RFID label. Any compatible smart phones will be required to have the facility to be able to write back to the RFID label (currently Apple iPhones cannot do this) although if RFID is not in place then any smartphone can work by scanning the barcode number for the items ID. This solution could eradicate the need to purchase any self-service kiosks however due to the limitations of the iPhone currently and a very large percentage of mobile phone owners preferring the Apple product, it is unlikely at this stage that libraries could function without kiosks as a cost saving measure.

As technology continues to improve we have seen smaller tablet sized self-service kiosks, these units can reduce the capital cost dramatically, and although not really suited for any physical payments they can be used with contactless card payments. Contactless payments are now available for any transactions totalling a maximum of £30.00 in the UK, this feature can eliminate the requirement for a coin and notes payment facility via the kiosks, reducing staff time and risk when removing cash.

Laptop self-service kiosks have been used to open library spaces and allow for a more comfortable area to relax and surf the internet. The idea is to remove the fixed PC's, which then allows for the fixed desks to be removed, opening up the library. This concept also allows a large cost saving as power points and data points are no longer needed. Fixed desks and chairs can be removed and replaced with conformable sofas and clean open areas. The Laptop kiosks can be used for Laptops, IPad's, MAC's and even as BYOD (bring your own device). Secure lockers keep the IT safe and fully charged.

Users can scan their library card and be allocated a fully charged laptop or device of their choice to use within the library. The item will be checked-out on their library ticket. Once the devices are returned by the user they are stored correctly and will be charged for the next user.

D-Tech International is one of the world's leading library solutions providers, our overall goal is to deliver products to suit our customers' needs and not what is necessarily '*off the shelf*' . Together we can develop solutions that meet and enhance the library experience both for users and library staff.

Libraries are using technology to enhance their services they supply. Technology is designed to encourage more users to experience and understand the services that a library can provide It also allows the library to become more flexible which is extremely desirable for all library users. The outstanding benefits of libraries using this technology are:-

- Extended library opening hours for patrons. The library is able to provide library services 365 days of the year without implementing extra costs!
- This service encourages users to utilise the library whether they are existing or non-existing users.
- Increases footfall.
- Gives the patron a positive experience of the library.
- Patrons using the out of hours service, frees up staff time to provide a better service during manned hours.
- Mobile Apps could in time reduce cost by reducing kiosks.

If you would like more information on the latest technologies available to libraries, contact with us today! Call us on 01394 420077 or email us at info@d-techinternational.com.