ABSTRACT

A Devil of a Challenge – Introduction of RFID Technology

Some would say living in North Queensland with 90% humidity, raging cyclones, swimming with deadly jellyfish and crocodiles is challenging, yet this is nothing compared to leading staff through major cultural, operational and organisational change.

CityLibraries Townsville made the decision in 2012 to join the 170+ libraries across Australia and New Zealand to liberate ourselves from out dated technology and implement RFID. Evolving with the times staff were destined for a 100% self-service model accompanied by a transitional period of uncertainty and culture shock. What did this mean for us? A bumpy road where the leadership team worked tirelessly to support library staff in the movement from a role defined by transactions to a role centred on interactions with customers.

How did we manage and cope with this? Forget the managers' perspective, this paper will tell you what it's really like leading front line staff through the challenging and opportunistic transformation whilst keeping morale high and the library functioning beyond its current capability. For the customers it would be a game changer, with a proven record for enhancing the service to maximise productivity gains resulting in staff having time to assist with the rapid growth in demand for digital technology and the delivery of more services and programs to the community. Leading by example required each and every one of us to commit to new behaviours and new habits for the transition to 100% self-service. As Team Leaders, we were the first port of call for concerns from the front line staff proving that we as Library and Information Technicians more than ever must be the "devil" to tame the beasts and lead staff through an ever changing and demanding world in libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Some would say it was just another ordinary staff meeting, but unknown to all present, a devil of a surprise was about to be unleashed. Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) would be implemented in the coming year.   There was a hush in the room. We knew what everyone was thinking, darn another change to cause upheaval and anxiety. As expected with any change, some staff would embrace it and some would wish it away. As Team Leaders, we revelled at the thought of a new and challenging experience.

RFID would be the latest major project in a short period of time for CityLibraries Townsville. We have been on a journey of transformation since 2008, evolving from a service which focussed almost exclusively on lending books and other physical materials to a place of learning, discovery and connection.

In our roles as Team Leaders we soon realised that we were going to have to be devilishly bold in our approach and behaviour, to be strong, dynamic and inclusive to proceed on this voyage with our staff.

The most challenging element of the RFID transformation would be staff accepting the change of culture. To cultivate a shared vision and approach it was necessary for staff to take ownership by developing new ways of thinking and new ways of working to embed change.

We were excited about the opportunity to boost productivity and improve our customer service experience, as we would have more time to provide new programs and cater to changing community needs. For many customers the greatest benefit would come from more interaction with library staff, as we would spend less time on routine physical tasks and pay more attention to meeting the needs of our customers.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT US

Townsville is located halfway between the tip of Cape York and Brisbane and through the years has developed into the de facto capital of North Queensland. Our local government area covers 3,736 square kilometres with a population of 192,000.

CityLibraries Townsville provides service through three busy static branches, a mobile library service, a home library service and 24/7 online resources. Almost 1 million items are loaned each year and annual visitation figures are just under 700,000 across five locations with 121,000 members.

In 2012, the process began to investigate the implementation of RFID which would replace the barcode method. Townsville City Council decided that it made long term sense and a better use of council rates to introduce an RFID system, the use of a tag fixed to library items for the purpose of identification and security using radio waves. Self-loan kiosks provide library customers with fast and simple checkout service where multiple items can be borrowed in one process. This simplifies transactions which releases staff to fulfil the demand for digital technology, reader's engagement and programs desired by the community.

As Team Leaders, we supervised 28 Customer Service Officers, including casual staff rostered primarily to engage with customers. We see our role as one that "puts fires out", dealing with day to day branch operations, leading staff through the myriad of cultural and organisational changes we have experienced in recent years. We are also the first port of call for concerns from the Customer Service Officers, including human resource issues, building maintenance, rostering and customer feedback. Between us devils, the beasts above included Branch Operations Librarian then Coordinator Customer Service and Operations who in turn

reports to the Executive Manager. These management staff were key figures in the Project Management Team (PMT) responsible for RFID project.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

Let us tell you how challenging this project was, some of the barriers we encountered from staff were; fear of losing their jobs, lack of confidence and knowledge about the change process. Concerns were voiced by staff about the removal of the large customer service counters and the associated Workplace Health and Safety barrier between them and the customers.

As Team Leaders clear open communication with the PMT was vital for consistency of information delivered. A high level of engagement at all levels, the willingness to take risks and the ability to learn from our mistakes was one of the more challenging elements of the transformation. The PMT delivered the solution and as Team Leaders we were the devils who worked with staff and council departments to implement the change.

We appreciated that it took compassion to understand staff apprehension. It was essential to pay attention to individual staff members who had doubts about RFID. We assured them that the opportunities would be beneficial to customers as well as staff and the effort would pay off with increased productivity and improved customer service. Pivotal to this transformation was the commitment from staff to change their work culture and develop new mind sets and habits.

As a result of these concerns, a working group was formed to develop Library Values and Customer Contact Standards. The Values were originally designed as guiding principles for customer interactions but were quickly adopted by staff, assisting them to learn the new system and forge new habits.

Our values are:

- Respect – Appreciate that everyone may be at a different point of the learning journey
- Empathy – Accept that change is not embraced by everyone
- Cooperation – Working together to achieve a common goal
- Responsibility – Support each other to achieve 100% self service
- Patience – Demonstrate tolerance and understanding

It was especially important to communicate with customers about the advantages of RFID by letting them know that it had a proven record for enhancing their library experiences. Staff buy-in and support was necessary to address customer concerns through the disruption and assist them to learn new routines and answer questions. Customer experience now involves

staff and customers interacting side by side, rather than across a communication barrier (desk).

The following list of working groups was established below the Project Management Team:

- Blocks and traps
- Change and post implementation
- Collection item tagging
- Communication – Staff and Customers
- Design and Layout
- Equipment procurement
- Staff training
- Workflow – Circulation
- Workflow – Collection Development and Procurement

This was a collaborative effort giving staff opportunities to share the ownership with a united vision and approach.

The communication group was established with a brief to develop plans for both internal (staff) and external (customers) to consider responses to feedback and develop key messages. An online shared workspace was developed on council's intranet, storyboards were established in branches, staff had the opportunity to post questions and concerns anonymously and a fortnightly newsletter was produced. To assist us, Champions were nominated to be positive contributors to the cultural changes with the introduction of RFID. From a Team Leader perspective we wanted everyone to feel part of this project, giving staff the opportunity to contribute through working groups to identify blocks and traps that would prevent 100% self-service and creating new procedures in line with the new technology.

On numerous occasions it was necessary to take drastic measures with an emphatic protest against PMT decisions in the refurbishments. As Team Leaders we were involved in the planning process of layouts in the branches, ideas were discussed and sometimes it was necessary to out-devil management by opposing their proposals. An example of this was placement of a self-service kiosk in an area that didn't make any practical sense in line with the proposed library layout. To convince the PMT, the floor was marked out with tape, using kiosk measurements to demonstrate the alternative to their recommendations. As a result the devils celebrated wildly because it was a win for the customers and staff. We accentuated the positive; eliminated the negative; latched on to the affirmative and the PMT didn't mess with Mister In-Between.

Leading by example required each and every one of us to commit to new behaviours and attitudes. As Team Leaders we had to demonstrate doing things differently by visibly forming new practices based on the theory that it takes three weeks for a change in habit to become a new habit. We embarked on "22 days" in which staff were inspired to individually reflect on the changes they had made in their customer service behaviours. Our goal was to provide a more customer-centric approach to deliver a higher level of personalised and interactive service to customers at their point of need. We didn't pretend to have all the answers. However, we managed our priorities, remained resilient and provided a supportive and calming influence for staff.

As part of the design and layout working group, we identified requirements and gathered quotes for data, power, furniture and fittings. We embarked on the process of farewelling the customer service counters and embracing minimal but still relevant service points. Equipment and fittings were removed in readiness for painting and installation of the new streamlined customer service points. Whilst this was underway we improvised with pop-up customer service counters maintaining efficiency, ensuring the process was swift and as painless as possible for staff and customers.

We made a highly motivating and informative road trip to Mackay to see how their library had progressed one year after they went live with RFID. We were armed with a list of questions gathered from staff to gain tips for implementation and post implementation. It was an opportunity to see how the Mackay Library Service continues to evolve. We observed they were visibly harnessing RFIDs ability to free up staff time enabling them to improve their skills sets and provide more programs and activities.

Over 230,000 library items across five branches needed RFID tagging. In line with our inclusive work strategy, staff at all levels were part of the tagging process. This team effort cemented staff ownership of the RFID implementation. It proved to be one of the most enjoyable aspects of the project with everyone appreciating the opportunity to work across teams. There were inter branch competitions with tagging ripping along at a cracking pace with 5,000 to 6,000 tags being placed on items each day. As we said, "Keep calm and tag on!"

Prior to go live day, we were well prepared through three days of training. Staff celebrated the RFID conversion with a bus tour of all branches and a party which allowed everyone to reconnect as a whole having fun before the much anticipated big day.

Our journey of transformation did not end after our RFID launch. A working group on change and post-implementation planned for sustained change. Through periodic messages from the Library's Leadership team and follow up activities, staff were inspired to remain switched on to make the changes stick. To accommodate RFID teething problems each branch

used a dedicated folder for "Surprises and Solutions". This allowed staff to advise of any issues and provide recommendations for improvements. As Team Leaders we looked at these daily to determine if the solution was viable after consultation with the relevant staff.

CONCLUSION

CityLibraries Townsville's implementation of RFID was a period characterised by a whole team approach to a transformation that would enhance and improve our service delivery to the community.

The RFID project was a huge undertaking with five branches to 'Go Live' on the same day. It was the culmination of a planning process several years in the making which assisted staff to support the community in their RFID journey. What started as an equipment project rapidly became a people project and a big win for the Townsville community of library users.

To bring our staff on board, we encouraged them to replace any negative reactions with positive constructive thoughts to make the difference. Our message was to turn off your auto pilot, adjust your attitude and keep your eye on the prize as RFID is coming and it is a game changer. It was a conscious effort on our part to go from being controllers to enablers.

Our agile approach to continuous improvement is evidenced by our strength and stamina which now helps us prepare for the next step forward, the integration of City Council's Customer Service Centre into the library service.

Change is good – Let's do it together.