

NEW AND EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

How a room booking system has improved computer access at Swinburne

In 2007 Swinburne University Library was looking for a computer booking system to both improve access to its computers and equity of usage. At that time, if a student was lucky enough to find a free computer in the library, then there was no limit as to how long they could use it for. Everyone else was forced to stand in queues and wait an indeterminate amount of time until a computer was free. In a library that was getting busier each year, and where the queues for computers were getting longer and longer, it was evident that something needed to be done. After evaluating a few products, it was decided to trial a British computer booking program called MyPC, tested first on a few student computers at the Hawthorn campus, then rolled out across the Hawthorn and Prahran libraries in 2008. By the end of the first year however, it was evident that the program had achieved only partial success.

The program had been successful in limiting the amount of time that students could stay on a computer, but it had not worked as a means of enabling students to plan and book computers in advance. Even though the demand for computers had increased yet again, by the end of the year there had only been 3000 advanced bookings – well under expectation.

In early 2009 an opportunity was identified to use the MyPC program to also manage the student room bookings. The unforeseen benefit of this was the dramatic way this expansion helped to better manage the ever-increasing demand on the library's computers. In the last year the number of computer bookings has increased by more than 700%. By encouraging students to use the program for booking the meeting rooms, they have become more familiar with the program and consequently are now more comfortable in using it to also book and plan their use of the computer resources.

In stark contrast with the experience of using the program solely for computer bookings, this expansion proved to be an immediate success with over 1100 room bookings in the first month and, by May this figure had jumped to 2500 room bookings. Prior to the expansion, the Service Desk areas had been managing the room bookings by using large A3 booking sheets which were being continually passed back and forth from one staff member to another as rooms were both booked and then checked to determine which rooms the students had booked when they came to collect the keys; a system which inevitably lead to numerous errors and the lengthening of queues.

In the first year the rooms have been booked through the system over 15 000 times which has resulted in a significant reduction in staff workload. The booking half is handled by the student themselves with no staff intervention. The collection of keys still requires staff intervention, but importantly can now be managed by multiple staff at the same time. If there are four staff working on the Service Desk, all four can now be checking bookings and handing out keys whereas previously this was restricted to whoever had the booking sheet. The other major impact has been the reduction in booking errors and consequently there are now virtually no disputes over incorrect bookings.

The major success however was not in the improvement of room bookings, but in the way that it has dramatically improved access to the library's computers. This past year the computers at the Hawthorn library alone have been used almost 100 000 times more than they were the previous year. In the period of May to Dec 2008, there were 233 919 uses of the Hawthorn library computers; in the same period in 2009 there were 333 503.

Even if the students don't actually book the computers in advance, the flow on effect is that they are now using the booking program to determine when would be a good time for them to come to the library. If a student at lunchtime can see that all of the computers are booked until 3:00pm, then they won't need to come in and out of the library all afternoon to check if there is a computer free, or be forced to stand in a queue for half an hour. They instead simply delay their visit until 3:00pm.

The result: 40 000 bookings of rooms and computers, 100 000 extra uses of the computers (or a 43% increase on 2008), no significant increase in door count (roughly 10%) and a reduction in queues everywhere.

Ben Conyers
Manager, Logistics & Customer Service
Swinburne University
bconyers@groupwise.swin.edu.au

Jean Arnot MEMORIAL FELLOWSHIP 2010

\$1000 FOR WINNING ESSAY

The annual Jean Arnot Memorial Fellowship honours Jean Fleming Arnot (1903–1995) MBE, FLAA, who had a distinguished career of 47 years in librarianship and was a pioneer of equal pay and women's rights.

The fellowship is funded by a generous donation from the National Council of Women in New South Wales Incorporated, and the Australian Federation of Business and Professional Women's Associations Incorporated.

The fellowship is awarded to a female librarian or student of librarianship for an outstanding paper of no more than 5000 words on any aspect of librarianship. An award of \$1000 will be presented to the winner at the annual Jean Arnot Memorial Luncheon to be held at Parliament House, Sydney, on Friday 21 May 2010.

Entries for the fellowship close on 19 April 2010 and should be submitted to:

Richard Neville, Mitchell Librarian, State Library of NSW, Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000

Further information:

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For conditions of entry and application forms:

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