

WHAT ARE THOSE PEOPLE REALLY DOING IN OUR LIBRARY?

This is a story which will be familiar to those wrestling with the growing demand for statistics and the limitations of technology, staff resources and budgets. The City of Joondalup wanted to know more about how their four libraries were being used. Loans usage statistics only provided part of the story, so they turned to wireless people counters.

The City of Joondalup, in the fast-growing northern corridor of Perth, is one of the largest local governments in Western Australia by population with approximately 167,000 residents.

There are four public libraries, Joondalup, Duncraig, Whitford and Woodvale, to adequately service such a large and connected local community. Joondalup Library is the largest public library in WA, holding more than 109,000 items, while the three smaller branch libraries hold about 60,000 items each. More than 1.3 million loans were recorded at the City of Joondalup's four libraries during the 2013–14 financial year.

Previously, we collected visitor numbers using manual counters at each branch, with the results tallied by a staff member each day. We then progressed to RFID (Radio Frequency Identification) and door counters, which worked for a while, but recently we have installed a new system of wireless people counters with cloud-based reporting.

We now know that almost 500,000 people visit our libraries each year. We also know which sections they visit and the hourly pattern of their visits.

The system, designed by Cohera-Tech, uses fully wireless battery-powered sensors sending data direct to a cloud-based server. Staff members now receive email data reports and can access the website to run reports at any time. These are detailed enough to provide a breakdown of hourly traffic and visitors by section within the bigger branches; something our staff could previously only ever dream of.

Joondalup Library counts people who enter the building as a whole and can get a picture of customer movements throughout the building. The Reference Library, located on the basement level of Joondalup Library, counts customers who visit the reference and local history section. We have learned that approximately 25% of all people who visit the Joondalup Library building go to the reference section.

These report results are of more than just passing interest. By analysing door count readings together with the usage statistics, we have also discovered an average 60% of

people who enter Joondalup Library will go on to borrow items. Loosely, this means 40% come to the library to do other things, and that figure rises to 50% as the end of the school year approaches and more students visit the library to study. At the smaller branches the statistics change from 60:40 (borrowing: not borrowing) to 80:20.

Our statistical analysis is just beginning, but already this data is an essential part of our management information system. The sky's the limit on what we can learn about how people move into and around our libraries and, in turn, how we can use that information to deliver facilities and services to meet proven needs.

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