Self-Checkout at McMillan

Where We Are
Currently, over 75% of all circulation at McMillan is run through our three self-check stations. Over 5% is self-renewal accomplished online by patrons. About 10% is handled at the circulation service desk with the rest staff mediated elsewhere.

Some items can not be circulated through self-checkout and must be staff mediated (rentals, art loans, interlibrary loans). In some situations, provision of quality service calls for staff mediation. We allow checkout with photo ID, pickup by spouses and other options that can not be handled by the self-check. Our experience is that about 10% of circulation will continue to be staff mediated at the service desk, though we have had daily rates as low as 4%.

How We Got Here
In implementing self-checkout, McMillan was guided by best practices at other libraries. We made site visits to Waukesha (Wis.) Public Library, Maricopa Co. (AZ) Public Library and several libraries in the Twin Cities. Their examples were invaluable, though none exactly replicated our situation.

We started with one self-check station and entirely voluntary use. We progressed to three stations, which we used as often as possible, before remodeling the library to maximize self-service.

Three Guiding Principles
1. Self-checkout must be viewed in the context of the entire library, not merely as a circulation matter.
2. Self-checkout must be embraced fully, with no half measures or thought of retreat.
3. Implementing self-checkout (or any self-service) must improve service and increase meaningful interactions with patrons.

Staff implementation
Staff underwent several major changes. The structure was slightly flattened. This involved a decrease in pay grade for several employees. McMillan employs:
- Shelvers. Shelvers check in material, sort it and reshelve it. They are also expected to help patrons with patron level tasks (using the self checkouts, doing simple searches on the catalog, signing onto public computers and any basic skill which patrons can be expected to acquire).
- Library Assistants. Assistants are responsible for all library clerical tasks not handled by the Business Office. They are also responsible for all patron level skills. The formerly departmentalized Assistants were combined in one unit and cross-trained. The renovation and move to self-checkout placed them in closer contact with patrons.

- Paraprofessionals. McMillan's only remaining paraprofessionals deal with acquisitions and interlibrary loans.
- Librarians and managerial staff. McMillan implemented an "out front" philosophy, so that less staff time was spent in offices and more time on the floor. A wireless laptop assists in this effort.

Physical Implementation

- The Library implemented self-checkout as part of a renovation project. All Adult AV and periodicals were moved to the new Lower Level, a coffee house added and wireless installed among other changes.
- Three self-checkout stations were installed, two on the Lower Level and one in the Upper Lobby.
- The Circulation Desk in the Upper Lobby was eliminated. Adult and Children's service desks now occupy that space, along with a self-check station.
- The lower level reception desk was eliminated and a new Circulation Services Desk constructed in the renovated area. All fines, registrations and other unusual situations are resolved there. This desk is staffed during all open hours. One staff workstation is at the desk, with another nearby for check-in and other clerical tasks. These are near the Lower Level self-checks so that staff can assist patrons.
- A staff workstation was installed next to the self-checkout in the Upper Lobby. This is used by Library Assistants. Either it or the nearby Children's desk are staffed almost all the time.
- All service desks are equipped with cordless phones to improve staff mobility.
- Holds (almost 20% of our circulation) are housed near the self-checkouts. They are arranged under the first three letters of the patron's last name and the first letter of their first name (Andy Barnett = BAR, A). This is private, secure and unique enough to avoid confusion.
- Self-renewal is maximized by including a link to the *Your Account* part of our ILS on every overdue notice emailed to patrons. Self-renewal now accounts for 7-10% of our circulation.
- Power shelving was implemented to improve self-service.
- A photo tour of the Library showing many of these areas is available at http://www.mcmillanlibrary.org/library/tour.html.

How it Works

- All self-checkout units are close to a service desk. In effect, the units are "staffed" and employees assist patrons whenever they seem to need help.
- Staff is instructed to self-check items for patrons, rather than check out items at the service desk.
- The service desk is not a checkout desk. It exists to help patrons with registrations, fines and other situations that require staff intervention. Staff checks out items there only when it provides better service.
- All staff is responsible for training patrons on self-checkout. This training is still continuing after four years.

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