Pcounter
one solution

Loughborough University

Case Study
Loughborough University

> "Working with AIT to find a future proof system that provides transaction information in real time was so easy."

Becki Turlington-Smith
Finance officer,
Loughborough University

About

Loughborough University is proud of its long history as an institution of further and higher education.

Throughout its history Loughborough University has built upon its distinctive characteristics. Today it is one of the country's leading universities, with a reputation for excellence in teaching and research, strong links with business and industry and unrivalled sporting achievement.

The School of the Arts provides specialist programmes allowing both total engagement in a specific area of study and an opportunity for a more flexible approach with interaction between disciplines.

The School is equipped with some of the best facilities available for visual artists: extensive workshop facilities, studios, equipment and the latest IT resources including high speed internet access. The School of the Arts has a vibrant and ever-expanding research community of leading practitioners, scholars and postgraduate students working on world-leading research in identified areas of excellence. Their research culture reflects the School's reputation and outstanding achievements in the Art and Design sector.

The Problem

The School of the Arts has to account and charge for, materials that it provides to students. As a result a system was originally implemented in 2008 that allowed students to "top up" a smart card that could then be used to pay for the products/services they required. The system comprised of smart "Chip" cards that students added credit to via a cash loader and card reading terminals were deployed in each art department work area to debit the value from the card and a database was updated to record transactions that took place.
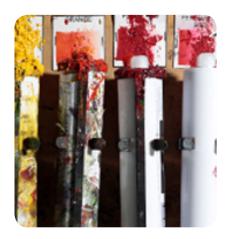
This involved a fair amount of administration time for the finance officer and the transaction information wasn't in "real time". It had to be poled from the terminals as required, which had caused some issues with having up-to-date information on card balance data and more time on the finance resources. There was also the administration and issuing of smart cards to the students which were a separate card to the students university ID card.

It was clear that whilst at the time of the original installation the technology used was up-to-date and met the needs of the university, the equipment was becoming less reliable and the database administration was also more time consuming than first realised. As a result the department embarked on looking at alternative solutions to meet their rather bespoke requirements.

![Pcounter logo] **Pcounter** *one solution*   ![Loughborough University logo]

The solution

Through consultation with the AIT technical specialists a proposal was put together to solve the problems by providing an up-to-date solution that reduced the administration time, was able to work with the university student ID card – thereby reducing the issuing of smart cards and provided a future proof solution that could grow with the department as it started to handle more complicated services and products it supplied to students.

The solution chosen was XPR Enterprise POS for Pcounter. Whilst other supplied solutions where considered this was felt to be the best solution to meet the needs and with a better total cost of ownership.

The solution consisted of Pcounter Pro server based software and the XPR Enterprise POS application installed on each client PC that was located in the work areas.

The central Pcounter Pro database linked to the University Active Directory which meant there was no administration required to populate the users. Also the system allowed for the student ID cards to be imported for allocation of funds. A value loader was also provided for students to add credit to their account.

Implementation

Prior to installation implementation meetings was arranged to ensure the network infrastructure was in place to take the new system. As a result the installation itself was completed from scratch in less than 2 days.

Once the database of products/services had been set up the system was ready to use. Each work area was able to authenticate a user using the students ID card which made the look up of the user account extremely quick. Users then select the service/products from the available list. This would create a "Shopping Basket" and once complete the transaction would be updated in real time against the Pcounter Pro database. This meant information was available in "real time" for reporting purposes.

The use of solution was very quickly picked up by both students and administrators and feedback on the ease of use compared to the previous solution was very positive.

The results and benefits

Whilst there was an initial capital outlay to introduce the new system it was apparent that there had been a lot of "waste" when it came to auditing products with the previous solution.

The new XPR Enterprise POS for Pcounter was able to immediately identify where improvements could be provided to ensure these loop holes were reduced. This meant the ROI was going to be quicker than originally thought. The amount of reduced administration of the system also meant the finance resources could be better spent in other areas. Also there was no further need for the Arts Department to procure smart cards as the POS system utilised the student ID cards that were already in circulation.

It was also clear after just a few weeks of operation that the solution could be expanded and customised to meet other requirements the department had in terms of better administration and accountability for loan equipment, at no additional costs or "optional extras" as it was all included in the functionality of the solution.

"**The system is so easy for students to use compared to our previous solution**"

Becki Turlington-Smith
Finance officer,
Loughborough University