

Cham, Schweiz – 3. Oktober 2007

## **Winterthur Municipal Library: High-tech library in medieval walls**

**As an absolute pioneer in the field, Winterthur Municipal Library decided to act as a pilot library as long ago as 1997. In issue 9, dated September 2, 2004, of the German journal *BuB* of the *Berufsverband Information Bibliothek* (professional librarians' association), Dr. Rolf Weiss, Library Director up to June 2004, gave a detailed report on the extensive reconstruction of the historical building and technical modernization based on the BiblioChip system.**

(...) The Municipal Library at Kirchplatz in Winterthur has been in operation for a year now – and it's already a favorite with the public. It opened its gates on July 5, 2003, just before the summer holidays – bringing together the latest stocks of the Municipal Library, the Altstadt Library and the former commercial library on a total of eight floors. With some 200,000 books and special media on a surface area of some 3000 m<sup>2</sup> it is one of the larger thematically structured open access libraries in Switzerland. Set amid the historical center of Winterthur, a contemporary information and meeting



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center has been created in the two new refurbished buildings “Blumengarten” and “Tösserhaus”. The center has captivated young and old with its varied range of offerings and the distinct charm of modern architecture integrated into medieval masonry. Use of the municipal library has increased by about 35 per cent since the new center opened. Every month, some 30,000 patrons borrow 63,000 media – equivalent to an annual lending rate of some 760,000 units. (...)

### **Increased performance with less staff thanks to RFID technology**

Virtually insoluble problems were pre-programmed when it came to getting the new municipal library up and running: the new eight-storey building had to be operated by a staff which had been reduced by two members, despite offering additional facilities and contact points. Since this was not possible with a traditional lending system, extensive automation facilities were required. An interesting solution was offered by the technology of radio frequency identification (RFID), as supplied by *Bibliotheca RFID Library Systems AG*. (...)

Serving the approximately 1,200 patrons who visit the library each day and the 2,700 check-out

**BIBLIOTHECA RFID Library Systems AG**  
Public Relations . Birgit Lindl . Dräxslstrasse 7 . D – 81541 München  
Tel. +49 (89) 6511 5388 . Fax +49 (89) 6511 5492  
[birgit.lindl@bibliotheca-rfid.com](mailto:birgit.lindl@bibliotheca-rfid.com)  
[www.bibliotheca-rfid.com](http://www.bibliotheca-rfid.com)



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processes, there are now four automatic check-out points available on the ground floor. (...)

Media return is even simpler with the four RFID-controlled Bibliomats. (...) With such a high lending frequency, a sorting system is recommended in order to relieve personnel.

The Bibliomats are situated in the entrance way of the municipal library, which can be opened using the electronic library card the same way as a bank customer can access a teller machine outside opening hours. In this way, media can be returned on public holidays, too.

### **Introduction and acceptance of RFID machines**

The RFID system with automatic check-out points and return facilities still ranks as a European pilot system to this day. When the decision was taken to purchase the system in 1999, there was only a lab installation of administration workplaces and an automatic check-out point. The Bibliomat was not developed until later for the Winterthur Municipal Library. Even though there was much that needed to be optimized in the first year of operation, and optimizations are still necessary, it can certainly be said that Winterthur Municipal Library could not

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function without RFID facilities. The consistent and constant use of the machines is imperative. Consequently, as a matter of principle, there are no more counter check-out points at the Winterthur Municipal Library; patrons cannot choose between machine and counter check-out. The user service only checks out reserved media or non-accessible stored items. This means that in contrast with other RFID libraries, not just 40 or 50 per cent of the lending and return volume is taken care of by machines, but over 95 per cent.

In order to achieve this, intensive patron training was required during the first few months of operation. Three library staff members stood next to the machines during opening hours to help patrons. Today everyone is accustomed to the future-oriented infrastructure - and patrons are also used to not having to stand in line at the Winterthur library. And if things occasionally don't run as they should, user service staff have time to deal with individual problems, help patrons look for specific media or support new and inexperienced users in operating the check-out facilities. But this happens directly as a demonstration at a machine and no longer at the check-out desks – since the latter do not exist any more as such.



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with kind permission of the editor. See also [www.b-u-b.de](http://www.b-u-b.de). Photos © Winterthur Municipal Library)

For more information on the library see  
[www.bibliotheken.winterthur.ch](http://www.bibliotheken.winterthur.ch).

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Public Relations . Birgit Lindl . Drächlstrasse 7 . D – 81541 München  
Tel. +49 (89) 6511 5388 . Fax +49 (89) 6511 5492  
[birgit.lindl@bibliotheca-rfid.com](mailto:birgit.lindl@bibliotheca-rfid.com)  
[www.bibliotheca-rfid.com](http://www.bibliotheca-rfid.com)