



## British Library Keeps Excellent Record

Imagine being charged with the task of keeping track of 150 million items, books, journals, maps, stamps, music, patents, newspaper and sound recordings in eleven reading rooms and study areas and, more importantly, storing, retrieving and delivering one of those 150 million to an individual visitor or someone at a remote location anywhere in the world. Impossible - you might think, but staff at the British Library meet with this challenge on a daily basis.

The British Library is the world's leading resource for scholarship, research and innovation. The new building at St. Pancras has been designed to protect the Library's famous collections which have been developed over 250 years, and to serve the needs of users, including researchers, academics, business and industry.

Demand in the reading rooms exceeds more than half a million visits each year. The Library offers the widest range of services of any national library with over four million documents supplied to remote users and three million separate items being added to the collection each year.

Enormous attention has been given to the aesthetic as well as the functional in order to create a pleasant environment for efficient research. The British Library is committed to using new technology wherever possible to ensure wider and better access to its collection. Projects such as digitisation of the Library's treasures, i.e. Turning the Pages; Patent Express Jukebox and Electronic Photo Viewing System have been widely praised. Major IT developments have included a system that will create an integrated catalogue of the Library's collection. The Library has also developed a service providing free access to some of its catalogues over the Internet.

Book delivery to any part of the Library is partly manual and partly mechanised through a system of horizontal motorised roller conveyors and vertical paternoster lifts. These form a continuous loop linking all the storage areas and reading rooms.

Readers request items from closed access through the Online Public Access Catalogue and the Automated Book Request System identifies the relevant storage area. A member of staff collects the item and places it in a bar coded plastic container. The Mechanical Book Handling system routes the container to the correct collection point.

Eric Mason, Implementation Manager St Pancras Systems, said: "Speed, accuracy and delivery of materials were the driving factors behind the introduction of bar code technology. To ensure a high level of success we paid a lot of attention to how the bar code would be used and applied to the delivery of individual items."

The British Library appointed Paradigm, specialists in bar code solutions, to deliver a sophisticated system that would be pivotal in recording the material issuing details. Paradigm recommended Zebra Xill™ printers, industry-leading machines which produce quality bar codes that read on the first scan every time. The printers feature thermal transfer printing technology which prints durable, high-quality labels on a variety of materials.



### Solution Technology

Xi™ Printers



With thermal transfer printing the bar codes are much sharper than dot matrix or laser printed bar codes, even when very small labels are printed.

The printed tags are placed in the pages of the various books with the bar codes protruding from the top. Richard Freeth, Paradigm, said, "One of the major concerns was that the tags or ribbons would mark the books. Therefore we arranged for the project team to visit Zebra to ensure the correct media was chosen." Roger Butcher, Head of St Pancras Information Systems, commented. "The bar codes scan reliably and do not smear so there is no danger of the books being marked. The labels are also very durable which is crucial when they are being handled continually by staff and visitors."

The efficient tracking and delivery of materials ensures visitors receive their requests quickly which makes more effective use of their time as they don't need to spend time searching. The system also saves thousands of pounds in terms of clerical labour costs.

"We've always maintained that to achieve the highest level of success, you have to make use of the most advanced technologies. Automation has certainly helped the British Library enhance the quality and speed of its services to its users. We would not be able to control operations as we do without this bar code solution. This technology is instrumental to the success of the Library."

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