Weston College: Janet page one streaming library renewals service

Summary

Weston College have introduced Janet Page One Text to Renew service for their library. Students can now renew their library resources easily with the touch of a button through their mobile device. This system is already saving staff time as well as the library significant costs.

About Weston College

With over 3500 FE and HE students, Weston College has transformed itself in the last eleven years and has maintained its position as one of the top performing colleges in the West of England for the last four years. It has achieved significant success with examination achievement rates at 99.8% for A Level and 100% for vocational courses. The latest Ofsted report is exceptional with recognition of high quality teaching and learning and praise for a rich and varied curriculum describing the support given to students as “outstanding”.

Weston College offers more than 100 vocational courses, 27 A Levels and an ever increasing range of very popular Apprenticeships and Degree courses offered in partnership with Bath Spa University and UWE. In 2007 the College opened the ‘state-of-the-art’ University Campus which houses Arts, Media, Design, Music and a Sixth Form Centre. Weston College’s Knightstone Campus also includes the latest technologies and state-of-the-art facilities with an industry standard fitness suite and gym, world-class training kitchens, a top restaurant and a Higher Education Centre. Both sites benefit from the innovative LibraryPlus facilities and service. A third campus - the South West Skills Campus houses the Construction and Engineering Centre of Excellence and the bespoke Business Enterprise Centre.

The challenge

With the rising cost of administration and staff time to deal with overdue library resources, Sheena Palmer, Learning Technologies and Resources Manager at Weston College wanted to deploy a more streamlined and efficient system for handling the renewal of library resources, while also changing the library policy to break down many of the barriers that had existed with the previous system. Critically, it was recognised that many students now use their mobile phones as their main communication tool, so it seemed a logical customer-focused step to engage learners using their preferred technology.
The main challenge for the introduction of the new system was to ensure all students at the college were aware of the service and make sure that everyone had access.

To help facilitate such a big deployment and change of policy Sheena had to manage all the promotion and liaise with the marketing department to produce new branding and a dedicated campaign.

Whilst the setup of Janet Page One was relatively straightforward at the college, Sheena had to ensure that their staff had adequate training to help administer the new service effectively.

**The activity**

The main focus of the project was to make sure that every student was made aware of the new service. To do this the college organised a special launch day to enhance the visibility of the service. This involved various stalls setup around the different campuses, the stalls were manned by staff and each student could take away a free branded bookmark. The bookmarks contained all the instructions and information needed for the students to operate the new text to renew service.

Janet Page One is quite easy to setup and it is web-based, so it is just a case of having a new mobile number setup. The Text to Renew service simply works by the student texting their student ID number to a special mobile phone number. The library staff then pick up the message and send the students a personalised response informing them that their library resources have been renewed. This costs the same as a standard text message. It is also possible to setup sub-accounts, so for example another department in the college could use the text service for something else like student enrichment.

Branded posters about the new service were also displayed throughout the college to enhance exposure.

The college promoted the new service to staff internally through manager’s meetings and via Moodle.

Every new student inducted in September received a bookmark in their welcome pack and staff encouraged them to store the mobile number for TXT 2 Renew on their mobile devices.

“The main ethos was to provide a customer friendly service for students, whilst keeping a simple and effective to use system - efficient in terms of time-saving, but also versatile.” – Sheena Palmer, Learning Technologies and Resources Manager

The library has additionally had a big overhaul of their overdue process, which means that they no longer fine students for the late return of library resources. They have also linked up their Heritage library management system to Janet Page One, so that students receive a text message three days before their library resource is due to be renewed. This way the system automatically manages the library resource process and encourages students to renew.
Before the library introduced the new system and a policy change students would be sent reminder letters for overdue resources. This was not only very time consuming for staff, but the library would be sending out 100 letters per day to students, which at a cost of up to £150, was proving to be inefficient. Students would often ignore the letters and fail to respond via email, telephone or in person.

**The outcomes**

The new text to renew service has undoubtedly helped to streamline the library services, providing:

- Enhanced communication
- Time savings
- Better access to resources
- Paper savings
- Cost savings on postage

Students no longer need to travel to the college just to renew library resources, which means that they don’t have to attend the college unnecessarily.

In terms of the change of policy, the college saw that there were barriers to the library use through the previous system, so some students that had failed to return items would feel uncomfortable about attending the library.

“Sometimes what happens is that a student will genuinely forget to renew the books then it gets later and later and they have ignored all the letters and then they would just feel like that they could not attend the library. So it’s a barrier to usage.” – Sheena Palmer, Learning Technologies and Resources Manager

“By removing the barriers and removing fines and being proactive in using a digital/online service that the students are familiar with we feel that we are much more likely to get best results in terms of non-returned resources” – Sheena Palmer, Learning Technologies and Resources Manager

If the library does have any issues with students that still fail to return books or renew them and are extremely late, they can put a message on their account in the library Heritage system and can stop the student from using the computers at college.

In terms of costs, Janet Page One is not a free service, but it is significantly cheaper than posting 100 letters per day.
The impact

The feedback that the college has had from students has been really positive. Students immediately like the new system because it is so easy to use and is convenient. They are much more likely to respond to a text message, than having to physically carry all their library resources back to the library to renew them.

Sheena commented; “Since the induction of thousands of new students into the college in September students have commented on how useful the text to renew service is as they don’t always want to come into the college or have to make a special trip to renew a book.”

The lessons learned

Janet Page One text to renew system is a proven system that works and something that Sheena has had previous experience of.

The main important factor is to ensure that the system is properly managed and enabled. Additionally it has been the excellent promotional campaigns and events to launch the new service that has been very effective in putting text to renew into the minds of every student at the college.

Sheena said; “I would highly recommend getting Janet Page One – the web interface is pretty simple to use, I would highly recommend it as an easy way to enhance the services that are offered to your students.”

Useful links

- JANET pageone – products for education
- JISC South West website
- Weston College website

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