

OTAGO MUSEUM SETS THE STANDARD WITH SMARTTRACK RFID TECHNOLOGY

Following the signing of a major purchase and installation agreement with Smarttrack RFID, New Zealand's Otago Museum is set to become the first museum in Australasia to have all its collection items audited and tracked using sophisticated RFID technology.

Located in the city of Dunedin and with a focus on culture, nature and science, the Museum is in the early stages of installing the Smarttrack RFID asset tracking system to monitor its estimated two million artefacts. The implementation involves attaching a Smarttrack RFID tag to each collection item. Fixed Smarttrack RFID readers located at various entry and exit points in the Museum's collection storage areas and at the front of the building will track collection item movement through the Museum. When a reader detects the signal from a tag, details regarding the item and its location are automatically updated in the Museum's Vernon Collection Management System.



Otago Museum's implementation of the Smarttrack RFID tracking system forms part of an enormous collection audit project. The project, which commenced with installation in October 2011 and collection auditing in February 2012, will be rolled out over several years and will eventually see each collection item checked, photographed, RFID-tagged and, where necessary, re-housed.

Whenever an item leaves the Museum building its Smarttrack RFID tag will be read by a fixed reader and its status will be automatically changed in Vernon CMS. In the event of an unauthorised item movement Vernon CMS will automatically alert the Museum executive responsible for collection coordination.

Under the previous system, which is being phased out as the new system enters further stages of implementation; staff had to manually input information into Vernon CMS whenever artefacts were moved within the museum complex. The shortcomings of this system included inaccurate capture of data, excessive demands on staff resources, incomplete documentation regarding collection items, and limitations when it came to monitoring the movement of artefacts within and from the Museum.

“The Smartrack RFID tracking system forms an integral part of our collection audit and is proving itself as the ideal solution for a large-scale project of this type”, said Clare Wilson, Director of Collections and Research at Otago Museum. “As the first museum in Australasia to implement RFID for collection management, Otago Museum will become a valued reference site for similar institutions throughout the world.”

One of the major benefits of the new system, which allows hundreds of tags to be read per second, is that it will enable staff to conduct storeroom audits of collection items more quickly, more comprehensively and with a higher level of accuracy. Importantly, the new system will also enable the Museum to have a complete overview of the collection, with its strengths and weaknesses identified, allowing research and acquisition activities in particular to be carried out and prioritised based on high-quality, easily accessible information.

The risk of artefacts being damaged during an audit is also reduced as the RFID solution enables tags to be read through many types of packing material, thereby eliminating the need to manually handle collection items.

“The auditing of collection items is one of the more time-consuming and labour-intensive tasks carried out by the Museum”, said Clare. “The integration of the Smartrack RFID system with Vernon CMS will enable enormous savings in staff resources and, as a result, will allow us to allocated resources to the care, interpretation and development of our collection.”

Otago Museum visitors will also benefit from the new system. With the enhanced availability of comprehensive and up-to-date information on each collection item, the Museum will be in an improved position when it comes to planning exhibitions and scheduling the rotation of items on display.

With significant labour cost savings anticipated in all areas of Museum collection item movement and auditing, the Museum expects to receive a speedy return on its investment in Smartrack RFID technology.

“Investing in RFID technology has been a smart decision for Otago Museum, one which we believe will quickly lead to short term gains and in the longer term even greater advantages”, said Clare.