

# World First for Lewisham Library

## Library brings Internet access to the high street to make local information accessible to the whole community

Lewisham is the first library in the world to integrate touch screen technology into its street-facing window, enabling everyone in the community – even those without a computer - to get access to important public information at any time of day or night.

Antonio Rizzo of Lewisham Library comments that using this award winning technology, developed by British company Visual Planet, signals to everyone that the library is still the best place to go for information.

“Much government information is available on the Internet, but many people don’t have computers at home. By introducing this ‘self-service’ technology, literally on the street, we are showing how public services have changed to become more accessible.”

With a 60-inch rear-projection touch-screen positioned in the window of the library, passers-by have fingertip access to information on helpline numbers and the council website 24 hours a day – even when the library is shut. This is particularly important over public holidays.

By becoming the first library in the country to use this type of technology, Lewisham is leading the way in the Government’s drive to make information available for all.

“It’s a way for the council to extend beyond the building. Sometimes the buildings themselves can act as a barrier and we are doing all we can to remove all obstacles and help people to access information about their local council and the services available in an easy to use format.”

When not being used by a member of the public, the screen cycles through content showing local services available and makes use of speakers to attract attention.

“A lot of people walking past might not recognise the interactive potential of the screen,” explains Antonio. “But people passing by turn their heads when they hear a jingle or a voice and will often stop to play with the screen.”

The library is planning a more detailed survey of the usage and benefits of the screen in the New Year, but the staff have already seen the extra interest interactivity can bring.

“From inside the library we can see the people out on the street, but can’t see what is on the screen. It can be quite funny to see people standing there, touching all over the window, without being able to see what it is exactly they are looking at – people certainly seem to enjoy using it!”

As well as attracting great interest from the staff, library users and passers-by, this innovative installation has also been admired by the London Libraries Development Agency, the body responsible for implementing a co-ordinated strategic version for library and information services across London.

“The agency was carrying out a survey of public libraries in London to find out who was using screens and for what purposes. When they came to us, they were very interested because they had never heard of anything like this before. In fact, Lewisham is the first public library in the country to use this technology – something we’re very proud of.”

Following the initial success of the screen and the results of the more detailed review to be carried out in the New Year, Antonio hopes Lewisham can continue to lead the way, with plans for further installations at other locations in the library.

“We have a glass screen separating the library and café which would be perfect for another large touch screen,” concludes Antonio. “I think it’s very important that we continue to try new ways to push information out to the local community and using Visual Planet’s touch-screen technologies is a great way to achieve this.”

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