



LAPTOPSANYTIME™
Automated Checkout Kiosks



Austin Public Library LaptopsAnytime™ Case Study

November 2017

*Interview conducted with Joe Faulk,
Director of Information Technology*

Welcome to Central Library. Your Device of Choice Is Waiting... Austin Public Library and LaptopsAnytime Invest in Community Change, One Device at a Time.

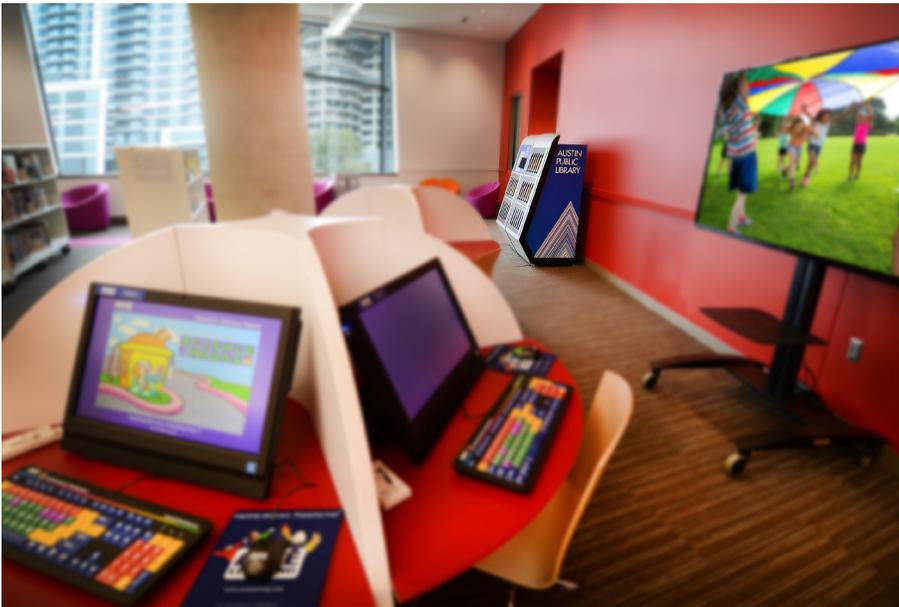
It's hard to talk to Joe Faulk about the Austin Public Library's new Central Library without wanting to get on a plane immediately to visit. Faulk, APL's Director of Information Technology, is so enthusiastic about the way the city and library management came together to create an extraordinary community space that it's impossible not to share that enthusiasm. "We know what a library is today, but we were building a library for the future," he says. That vision drove the location of the library and all the decisions about infrastructure, furnishings, equipment, and services.

To understand the vision for the library, Faulk says you first need to understand Austin. Historically, much of the vibrant activity associated with Austin centered on Sixth Street and the University of Texas college crowd. A push by the city to get more people to live downtown led to a new growth area along Second Street by the lake, with the convention center at one end and condos with street-level retail up and down the street. The new Central Library, which opened in October 2017, was constructed on Second Street, at the opposite end from the convention center. The goal was to build a sense of community downtown and encourage children and families to use a downtown library.



Austin Builds a 100-year Library

According to Faulk, the vision was to build a dynamic community space that would sustain a multitude of uses over time. The challenge, he says, is that there's no way to forecast what a library will be in the future. "From the basic infrastructure to the architectural design, we were creating a library that would change and adapt for the next 100 years. So everything—from raised floors to moveable walls—is designed with the understanding that where things are today are not where they might be tomorrow." For example, he says, libraries traditionally have wired computer systems located in one area such as a computer lab. But because Austin built the library with raised floors, a computer can sit anywhere. As needs change, it will be easy to access and move the flexible electrical conduits and cables to accommodate and change the layout of an area.



Faulk says every decision had an impact on other decisions. The way the library was situated on the site at the end of Second Street lent itself to three front doors, not just one as originally conceived. People can enter the building in three different ways, and one of those doors can be used to admit program or meeting attendees, even when the rest of the library is closed. Three entrances mean three places for patrons to return items and so the new building has three small rooms with minimal automated sorting capabilities rather than one large one. The building captures natural light through an abundance of win-

dows and those windows provide beautiful views. With so much to look at – the lake, the butterfly bridge, the Second Street EcoDistrict – why not make it easy to access library services with comfortable furnishings where people would naturally want to gravitate?

Take the Technology to the People

In the early days of planning the new library, the original thought was to have a big lab with lots of computers. But that concept was superseded by the idea of the library as a community place with technology accessible every place people want to use it. "People don't need to sit at a desk with a computer," Faulk says. "Let's give them devices and let them use them wherever they want – on the beautiful wraparound porches with ceiling fans, on the rooftop seated in comfortable outdoor furniture, sitting by the window looking out at the park, or people-watching overlooking the lake or Second Street. Once we made the decision to let people use devices anywhere they choose throughout the building, LaptopsAnytime became a natural fit."

As Faulk describes the progression from desktop computers in a designated lab to making devices available to people wherever they want to sit, he readily admits the experimental nature of what they're doing now – barely two weeks after the opening of the Central Library. Library staff reasoned that many people in the downtown location probably have their own devices so perhaps they will primarily need to access the public Wi-Fi. The as-yet unanswered question remains: if library devices are readily available, who will check them out and what will they check out?

LaptopsAnytime Provides Flexibility and Choice

There is a very heavily-used 10-mile hiking and biking trail that goes around Lady Bird Lake in downtown Austin. Would some of those people who come downtown without their devices to walk, jog, or bike also stop at the library if they could easily check out a device and find a comfortable spot to read their email or browse the Web? What device would they choose? For Faulk, this was a question that could not be answered except by offering multiple devices – and enough of them – so people could always choose what they wanted, not just what was available.



“One primary reason we selected LaptopsAnytime and their self-service kiosks was because we didn’t have to settle on any one device,” Faulk says. “Their kiosks allow us to offer multiple types of devices in one kiosk. Not knowing what people will want we offer five different devices – Windows Lenovo Ultrabook, MacBook Air, iPad, Dell Chromebook, – and in the children’s section, we have tablets with AWE learning software. But to truly know what

people want, we must ensure they always have a choice, otherwise how will we know if they really wanted to use an iPad but settled for a PC because that’s all that was available?”

There are five kiosks throughout the building, each one holding thirty devices. Specialized, high-end Windows desktops and Macs are available for people who prefer those options. Faulk says the library invested heavily to insure options are available. “Right now we’re in a steep learning curve so we’re giving our customers a varied selection. As time goes on, we’ll learn what they want based on what they choose to use.”

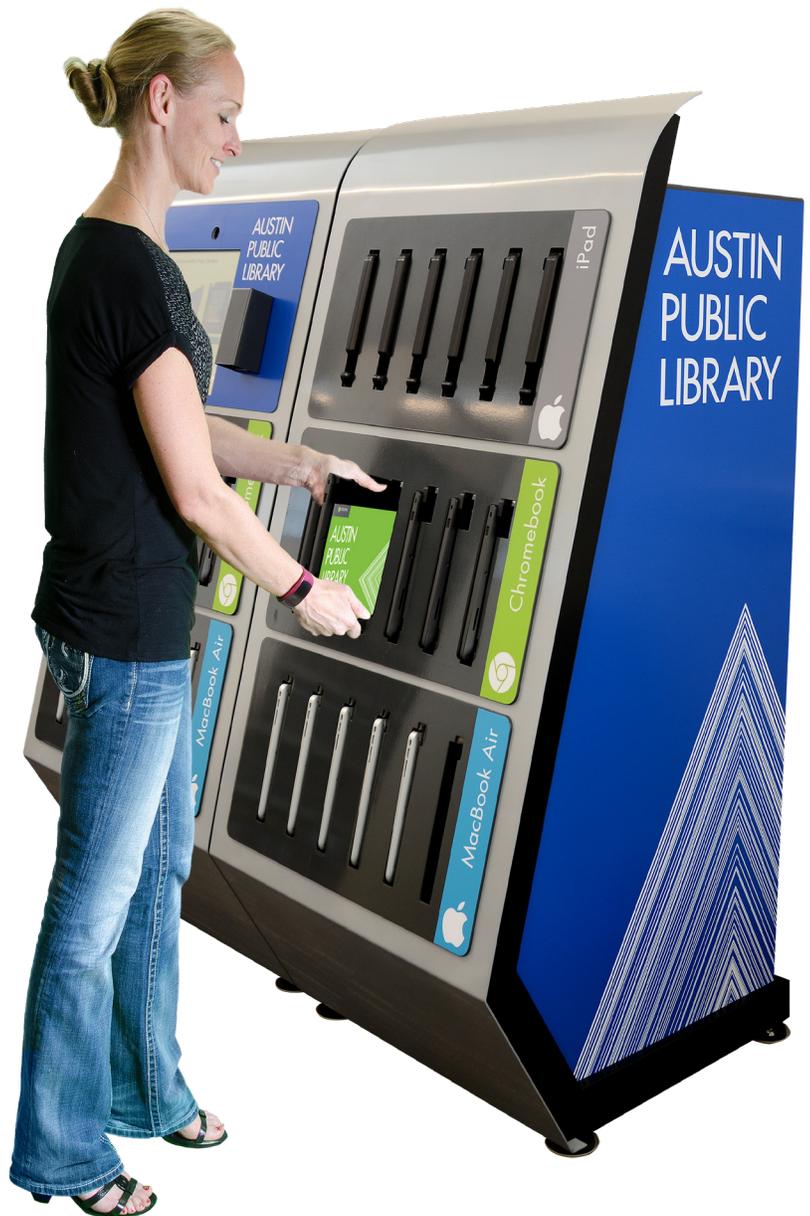
LaptopsAnytime Supports Self-Service Culture

In the new Austin Central Library, visitors won’t find a traditional circulation desk. The building has a single small circulation desk, but most everything is done via self-check machines and mobile stations. Library staff use Workstations on Wheels (WOWs) that can be moved throughout the building to help patrons where there are needs, rather than expecting patrons to come to a permanent circulation desk.

The LaptopsAnytime self-service device kiosks meshed perfectly with the service vision for the new library, Faulk says. “As much as possible, we want our staff removed from the routine circulation process so they are free to roam the library to provide help as needed. The LaptopsAnytime kiosks are intuitive to use, allowing staff to be confident they can point patrons to the kiosks without worrying they’ll need additional help.”

Faulk highlights the following key benefits of incorporating LaptopsAnytime self-service kiosks into their library:

- **Flexibility to offer multiple types of devices in the same kiosk.** As the Austin Public Library continues to discover what devices people want to use, the ability to offer multiple types of devices is critical. “We have invested in buying more devices than we need,” Faulk says. “But unless we give people choices – and their choices are always available – we won’t be able to purchase smartly down the road. We want to understand desire, not just availability.”
- **Effective use of staff resources.** LaptopsAnytime eliminates the need for staff intervention. When devices are returned to the kiosk, they are rebuilt to be ready for the next use. Issues are automatically reported upon return so that staff can pull the device and correct the problem.
- **Secure check out and check in.** Each device has a MARC record which enables it to be checked out through the library’s ILS, just like any other library material. Each device notifies the borrower of its circulation rules regarding return policy and liability. The kiosk has a built-in camera that takes a photo of each borrower to help monitor transactions.
- **Effective use of space.** The primary goal of providing devices is to engage the public in a beautiful and comfortable environment. People who come into the library to use the Internet can choose the device they want and the space in which they want to work or relax. However, Faulk says, beyond the aesthetics and public service of people enjoying the building, there is the actual saving of space. One 5-foot by 3-foot kiosk can hold up to thirty devices in as little as a 6-foot by 4-foot space. When you calculate how much space 30 computers would take in a building, it’s easy to see that LaptopsAnytime has provided the library with the opportunity to utilize space in a way that complements their vision to provide more comfortable seating in more places.



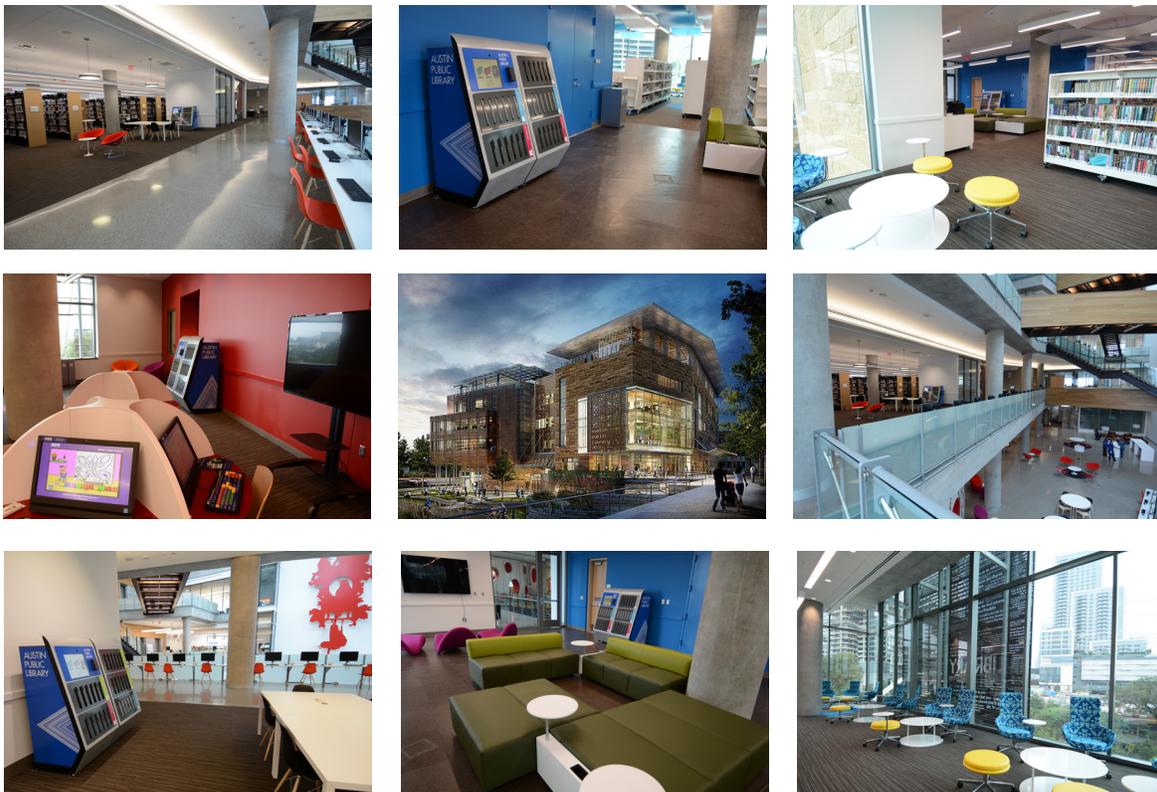
From Grand Opening to Societal Change

After just a few weeks the new Austin Central Library is far exceeding usage expectations. Faulk knows there will be growing pains and, for now, the staff is working hard to keep up with demand. "In the first days after opening, three out of every five people coming in the doors didn't have library cards. Often libraries equate the underserved with the economically disadvantaged. But that isn't always the case. We have an underserved population of entrepreneurs and financially secure people who now are walking in our doors. This is an incredible outreach opportunity for us."

Faulk views the partnership with LaptopsAnytime as a key component of this outreach opportunity. "Many of these patrons own and use at home the same high-end devices we are providing in our LaptopsAnytime kiosks. They are also using them here, side by side with those who can't afford their own devices or comparable high-end devices. Libraries have always been the great equalizer between the haves and the have-nots, creating a common ground for engagement. Now that common experience encompasses technology and provides the opportunity, through proximity and shared experience, to engage people from different spheres in each other's lives."

Shortly after the library opened, Faulk saw three boys doing math together at a white board in one of the conference rooms. After they left, he went down to see what they had left written on the board. It said, "This is an awesome library!"

As gratifying as this is, Faulk muses that the real work begins now. "Austin is a special town and this is a special place. But we need to change society if we want to be successful in the future. We've built a foundation for the next 100 years. Now we need to provide the programs and services that will make a difference now—and over time—in people's lives."



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