



# South Downs College



**“Computer dating is fine, if you are a computer” (Rita May Brown)**

Librarians often complain about computers taking over libraries and some librarians are apprehensive about information technology. At South Downs College LRC books and computers are fully used, and although I am not 100% confident with IT, the MyPC booking system has been easy to use, and worth installing.

LRC computers are for individual students to use for college work, or lecturers using a room of computers for research with a class. Many of our students do not have a computer at home, so access to one at college is crucial.

The LRC has 4 computer classrooms with 80 computers – but there is never enough to satisfy demand. During the day a member of LRC staff is on duty in each room to help students, and provide supervision. They used to manage a paper-based computer booking system.....

**A booking system was needed, so we checked the other companies to see if their product would work with RM Networks. They didn't. ITS approached RM Ltd to get MyPC to work in a RM environment, and spent time at their laboratories researching, testing and training.**

### **Before**

The paper-based booking system allowed students (and class groups) to sign in and use a computer for an hour at a time, and book up to a week in advance.

It worked fairly well when staff asked students to sign in, but many students wouldn't sign in, or they put in a false name, or they moved to a different room, - and they rarely booked in advance. Classes sometimes took over a room without prior booking.

For LRC staff the system had little control, became time-consuming, and unproductive.

Demand for computers by classes and individuals reached a point when students themselves began to monitor use, and complained about others spending too long on computers, or using them for personal use. None of them were happy about class use (unless they were in the class!).

***“In any moment of decision the best thing you can do is the right thing, the next best thing is the wrong thing, and the worst you can do is nothing” (Theodore Roosevelt)***

A new system was needed and I felt sure there must be a computer booking system on the market, or even a library issue system that could “borrow” and “reserve” a computer.

It wasn't easy, but there are 3 companies with a booking system. Demonstrations were arranged with all 3. LRC and IT staff were impressed with all of them. They all did what we wanted, and had features we hadn't even considered. The decision to buy MyPC was based on appearance and cost.

***“To err is human, but to really foul things up you need a computer” (Paul Ehrlich)***

Sadly there were technical problems at installation, and ITS tried to solve them. A new date was set for installation, but once again it was unsuccessful. It wouldn't work with RM (Research Machines LTD) network.

Disappointed was an understatement; LRC staff hopes were dashed, IT technicians were unhappy about the time wasted, and ITS appeared to have lost a sale. ITS kindly

**“I popped in one morning and booked a computer for lunchtime”**

**“I wish my school had something like this, there were lots of computers but you could never get on them”**

**“A clever and well thought out booking system that is user friendly for staff and students”**

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offered another product for a year free of charge, which was nice of them, but not what we wanted.

***“Failure is not an option. It comes bundled with the software”***

A booking system was needed, so we checked the other companies to see if their product would work with RM Networks. They didn't. ITS approached RM Ltd to get MyPC to work in a RM environment, and spent time at their laboratories researching, testing and training.

***“Life is not about how fast you run, or how high you climb, but how well you bounce”***

It was difficult for ITS to ask South Downs if we would try again, even after successful testing at RM laboratories. We hoped the third time would be lucky and agreed to a dry test at Easter 2005.

***“Success is to be measured not so much by the position one has reached in life, as by the obstacles overcome while trying to succeed”***

The dry test was successful and after a 'happy dance', installation and training was planned for May half term. This would give us a quiet half term to become familiar and make fine adjustments ready for the new academic year. The main worry was student reaction to a change during exam and assignment months. The reaction, if it happened, could almost be described as a miasma of non-event.

Everything works perfectly. Use is mainly drop-in and class research sessions, but I anticipate students will start booking in advance. Students commented to LRC staff and discussed at the Student Quality Review Group that the new system was OK because:

- You could drop-in and use a computer
- booking a computer in advance meant only you could log on
- You could have longer if computers were available
- You know exactly how long you can use a computer
- It's fair!
- Special computers could be reserved i.e. reminds you to save work regularly
- Can find out from any college computer if one is available to use in the LRC before dropping in.
- LRC staff are seen to be more helpful and efficient
- A level IT students found the system fascinating to study (compared to the library catalogue!) as part of their course work.

For LRC staff advantages are plenty, but top of the list has to be:

- Automatic logging off at the end of the day meant they could go home on time!
- Less time spent than on a paper system

- Faulty computers can be removed from the system so they cannot be booked or used.
- Messages can be sent to individual (or all) users.
- Acceptable user policy is displayed and users have to agree to it to log on. Students have no excuse for not knowing about inappropriate use.
- It's easy to change opening times for holidays, and closed days
- It's nice to know there is a banning and I spy facility if needed!
- It prevented one mature student persistently taking advantage of the facilities and helpful LRC staff!
- Advance booking enables staff to use their time more efficiently

We're confident it will work well for the new students in the new academic year, and look forward to using the statistical reports in the future. I have joined the email forum and can see how the system is constantly developed and improved from user suggestions.

South Downs LRC would be happy to be contacted for any advice, or further information about MyPC.

**“Experto Credite”**

(Trust one who has proved it – Virgil)

#### **Quotations from students at South Downs College**

*“It's simple to use” “I popped in one morning and booked a computer for lunchtime” “I wish my school had something like this, there were lots of computers but you could never get on them” “I like this” “a clever and well thought out booking system that is user friendly for staff and students” (quotations from students)*

#### **South Downs College**

South Downs is the largest College in Hampshire with 4,500 full time students and several thousand part time students, from a range of academic backgrounds. Following an Ofsted Inspection it has been named as one of the top colleges in England. *“An outstanding college” Ofsted Inspection*



**This Case Study was written by Sarah Reed, Learning Resources Centre Manager, Carey Winter and James Hare, MyPC system administrators at South Down College.**

**Designed by Info Technology Supply Ltd. Marketing Department.**