



# OLD DOG, NEW TRICKS: REPURPOSING THE DUE DATE CARD

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## QUESTION

When due date stamps have been replaced by a receipt printer, how can security tag de-tuning cards be disguised and, at the same time, serve a useful purpose?

## SETTING

The Gibson D. Lewis Library serves the University of North Texas Health Science Center, a graduate-level campus serving more than 1,100 students in medicine, public health, and biomedical sciences.

## PROBLEM

To improve efficiency and service, Lewis Library's Circulation staff began giving check-out receipts to patrons at the close of each transaction. Since the receipts show the due date of each item, stamping due date cards was no longer necessary. The cards themselves were necessary, however, to desensitize the Checkpoint security tags that protect circulating books. But inserting unstamped cards could have negative consequences for the library:

- Make it appear that the staff was engaging in duplicative work and wasting the time of the patron.
- Alert patrons to the card's security system function, therefore tempting him/her to defeat the system in the future and to tell others how to do so.

## SOLUTION

Since the due date card could not be eliminated, we decided to turn it into an information resource for patrons. Printed on the front of the new card are library contact information and a list of account management features that are available in the online catalog. On the reverse side are step-by-step instructions for renewing materials online.

## PRODUCTION

Our intent was to have a supply of the new cards professionally printed, in order to achieve a high-quality, professional appearance. We had observed that a very heavy piece of paper, such as cardboard, would desensitize the security tags. After testing several different printing papers, however, we determined that none of them would do this effectively.

This left us with commercially produced de-tuning cards. Fortunately, blank de-tuning cards are available from major library supply vendors. At 3" X 5", however, these pre-cut cards are too small for most printing presses, so we tested them with library computer printers. We found that some of our inkjet printers would accept the small paper size and do an acceptable job of printing the text.

Once assured that our new cards could be printed in-house, we acquired an adequate supply of them, formatted the text with Microsoft Publisher, and printed them at minimal cost. For space reasons, the design did not include graphics. The blank cards were available in white only.

## EVALUATION

The new information card was put into use on April 3, 2007. During a 19-day period in September and October, a random sampling of patrons (n=24) were briefly surveyed about their use of the card when they returned circulating books to the Circulation Desk. The survey was administered orally by Circulation staff members using a prepared script and a color-coded copy of the information card.

Only 17% of the patrons surveyed reported having ever used the information card; in response, we will plan a promotion to increase awareness and use. Of the patrons who had used the card (at any time), all of them used the instructions for online renewal. One also read the list of online account management features. None reported learning about these features for the first time through the card, but the responses recorded for that question were incomplete.

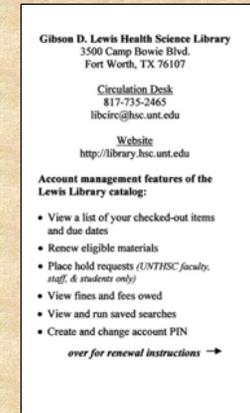
The survey responses also included a few useful comments, including the suggested addition of library hours. One patron commented that it was "hard to understand how to renew books." Another had used the information cards as bookmarks.

Circulation staff members were also asked to provide feedback on the impact of the information cards. Here are some of their responses:

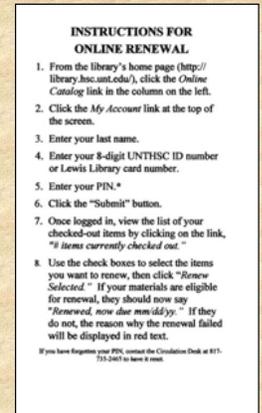
*"The cards rock and the patrons really appreciate them. The most often heard phrases are 'Excellent!,' 'COOL,' 'Thanks!' and 'That's a great idea.'"*

*"I've noticed a huge decrease in calls asking for items to be renewed. Usually when I mention that they can do it online, they are happy to do it that way."*

*"Not one person I spoke to had even looked at the card before that. I have noticed a definite decrease in 'renewal' phone calls, though. I've now developed the habit of pointing out the card to all comers."*



card front



card back

In addition to the survey, we also examined online renewal statistics to see if there had been any noticeable increase after the information card was introduced. In the six months that followed, the average percentage of renewal transactions completed online was 21%, compared to 14% for the same months in 2006. In September 2007, this figure was 31%, double the percentage in September 2006. A possible explanation for this most recent increase is a heightened awareness of online renewal resulting from our evaluation survey. Time will tell if this change in usage will be sustained.

## RESULTS

The new information cards replaced the old due date cards, furnishing patrons with library contact information and instructions for online renewal. They also promote other online account management services. For Circulation staff members, they serve as a quick-reference card when providing online renewal instructions by phone. Use of online renewal has increased, and the survey data and staff comments indicate that the information card has been a contributing factor.

Cards are occasionally damaged or worn out, so the supply must be periodically replenished. Since they are produced in-house, this is a quick and simple process. A bigger concern is that a significant number of them are not returned. We assume that most patrons keep them for future reference, as they would a library bookmark (this was confirmed by the survey comment). Potentially, however, they could be used to defeat the security system. We initially considered a fine for failing to return the card, but decided that patrons would see this as petty. We are considering adding text to the card that instructs the patron to return it with the book.