Electronic Shelf Tags; Technology Boosting Sales at USI

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The University of Southern Indiana Bookstore, a bookstore with a focus on technology, continues its trend of using the latest tech to keep their bottom line healthy and compete with online retailers. Through the use of electronic shelf tags, the bookstore is able to minimize internal costs, communicate with students and offer the same levels of pricing and inventory information on the bookshelf that would normally be found after scrolling through pages of websites.

Mike Goelzhauser, University of Southern Indiana Bookstore manager, said one of the benefits of using electronic shelf tags is the information available to the customer.

"The shelf tag has multiple purposes," he said. "It can display the prices for a book as new, used, new or used rentals, and digital."

Normally, there are multiple price tags manually placed on shelves and on textbooks. Electronic shelf tags inform the student on the inventory status of books and reduce pricing disputes.

"If a particular book is out of stock, the price tag will say so," Goelzhauser said. "It will also let a student know if they need to see the staff for more information about when a book is due to arrive."

The electronic shelf tags have made interactions between the store and student easier, and the benefits to the bookstore are also significant. Traditionally, when the price of a book is changed, modifications are made at the point of sale system and workers manually make changes to the shelf tags. The digital shelf tags eliminate the need to visit each shelf to make changes.

"I can make all price changes on the computer," Goelzhauser said. "As soon as the prices changes are made on the server, the shelf tags update in a matter of minutes. Now we don't need to go out and print shelf tags. It's less labor intensive."

The electronic shelf tags also offer benefits outside of the customer-facing experience:

- Cost savings: materials and labor in producing and replacing printed shelf tags are reduced.
- Margin recovery: being able to update prices almost at will.
- Space/Efficiency: combined with alphabetical shelving, stores can reduce the space needed for textbooks and improve their web order processing times.

"MBS worked directly with MarginMate, (the company USI purchased the shelf tags from,) to create an export process which provides the data needed by the MarginMate software in an easy and fast process," said **Chris Bovi, MBS Systems Sales Manager**. "We also wanted to make sure USI had flexibility to take advantage of the solution to the greatest extent, so instead of limiting the data we provided in the feed, we included any and all elements that could be placed on the tag."

Wayne Perry, MarginMate Vice President of Sales, said electronic shelf tag technology has been used in Europe since the early 90s and has been used in a variety of industries, including furniture stores and office environments. The type of shelf tag used by the University of Southern Indiana can store five lines of information and be updated from anywhere in the world. This type of flexibility, and ability to share information with customers, puts the store on a playing field with the likes of Amazon.

"We can place more data in front of consumers," Perry said. "With more information on the shelf edge, such as the quantity on hand or if we are out of stock, we can provide the same type of experience as online."

The University of Southern Indiana Bookstore prides itself on being on the cutting edge of technology.

"The shelf tags were more of a want initially," Goelzhauser said. "Then it became a cost-saving measure. I told my boss about the new product, and he told me to go ahead and do it."

Goelzhauser said the transition from their original shelf tag system to the new system was easy. They adopted the new shelf tags in August, and the integration with their MBS Systems have been seamless.

"MarginMate gave us the training on their software," he said. "It was easy to do and worked smoothly with our MBS System."

From term to term the user has the ability to change all book prices en masse. Prior to rush, Goelzhauser said they can completely wipe the prices from the old term and set up the prices for the new term, or do it one book at a time, whatever serves them best.

"In the old days, if a customer had a question, they would have to come to an employee, we would write down the course and book, go back to a computer and find the answers for them," Goelzhauser said. "Now the answer can be on the tag."