

Rovers: a new library role and a new way to market the profession

On the 12th of March this year, the Rover Team at the Swinburne Library won a Vice Chancellor's award in the category of Leadership and Service Excellence, an award for displaying outstanding customer service. What the team provides is a frontline IT and general problem solving support service to students using the library.

"I love the Rover Service! It's incredibly helpful. When I have a problem I feel confident that my issues will be managed."
– Susan, June 2009.

Thirty seven per cent of all queries being asked now at the library are for help with IT services. This equates to well over 2000 queries each week and this number has itself grown by 76% in the last two years. In an environment where students used the 300 library desktop computers over 467 000 times last year, having IT help readily available has become essential to the effective running of the library.

"You guys are amazing, I do not know what I would do without you, thank you very much, my internet has not worked for ages. Keep up the amazing work, we need more of you people"
– Rebecca, August 2009.

In addition to managing this resource, the library also manages the loans of over 300 laptops and provides at any one time over 500 wireless connections to support use of both these laptops and of students' personal laptops within the library. The Rover Team plays a major role in ensuring that everything runs smoothly, and also in aiding students to use these resources more effectively.

"Rovers are extremely helpful to me! My computer crashed and I couldn't open my files so I went to the Rovers and they fixed my software issue and I got my files back"
– Zubair, November 2008

Swinburne has arguably one of the best wireless networks of any Australian university, but connecting to any secure network can be tricky as there are a large number of variables that can cause problems. The Rovers have connected literally thousands of student laptops and have turned what could have been a potential cause of frustration into a positive experience. On the first day of semester one 2010, the Rover Team connected over 300 laptops, iPhones, and other portable devices.

The IT help itself, however, is only one of the many benefits derived from this service. The service improves student satisfaction, helps to make students feel more supported, and enhances the reputation of Swinburne as a great place to study. Another equally valuable benefit is that it has proven to be a great way to recruit people into the profession who may never otherwise have considered working in a library.

Student satisfaction

Being a University of Technology, technology support is vital in maintaining and strengthening the university's reputation. Whether a student relates to families and friends their experiences either positively or negatively has a long reaching effect on future student enrolments. Rather than students becoming frustrated because they are struggling to connect their laptop to the wireless network, having difficulties using the printing system, or their laptop has just crashed and they have lost all of their work on their latest assignment, they instead walk away from the Rovers feeling very grateful for the support that Swinburne has provided them with.

"Service is very good and the staff are very friendly too. It's the best IT service I received so far"

– Jason, September 2009.

As a peer support service which is provided in a more flexible and student-centred way, the Rovers make a significant contribution to the general sense that "Swinburne is a great place to study". Having friendly, approachable help available makes a real contribution to the general sense of being safe and supported which is evident in the way that students use the library spaces at Swinburne.

"The Rover IT help desk are helpful and have successfully solved all the technological problems I have faced while at Swinburne"

– Michael, October 2009.

Prior to the Rover service, students could call the IT Service Desk telephone number for help, but for many students, particularly those for whom English is not a first language, the challenge of working through a complex technical problem via a phone was extremely daunting. The friendly, face-to-face, peer support provided by the Rovers has significantly enhanced the experience of thousands of students and made them feel more valued and included.

"Many students like myself don't have many knowledge about computers so the Rovers help a lot in these cases"

– Monique, November 2008.

"To the Rover desk: What a fantastic service – quick, expert and friendly. Keep up the great work – I'll be back"

– Vita, June 2009

Marketing the library as a place to work

The Rover team has proven to be a fantastic marketing tool for encouraging students to actually consider the possibility of working in a library. The rovers today are drawn largely from the ranks of Swinburne students, many of whom have gone on to other roles within the library.

"I am very comfortable with the Rovers. I suggest we have more people assisting the Rovers coz their job is way way too excellent"

– Sakeena, November 2008.

In the two and a half years that the service has been running, five people whose first job in the library was as a rover, have gone on to more senior library positions. There have also been a few rovers who have since started their library qualifications.

The library consistently and regularly receives very positive feedback about the service. Since June 2008 the library has received 30 written feedback forms specifically about the Rovers, 28 of which were complimenting or thanking the Rover Team for help they had provided. One was asking how the student could himself become a Rover and the single complaint among the thirty forms was that there weren't more Rovers around the campus. Two years after the service first started, we are still regularly receiving fantastic feedback like the comments below:

"Exceptionally awesome. All the Rovers"

– Chandra, November 2009

"Excellent efficient & friendly staff fixed my laptop problem. The Rovers did an excellent job"

– Tex, May 2009.

Ben Conyers
Manager, Logistics & Customer Service
Swinburne University
BCONYERS@groupwise.swin.edu.au