



Kettering University Recreation Center

College fitness center attains 99.9% towel return rate with Towel Tracker



Kettering University is a private college located on an 85 acre campus in central Michigan. Its 85,000 square foot recreation center serves approximately 2,500 students, staff members, and alumni, and offers a swimming pool, spa, fitness and free weight rooms, basketball and tennis courts, and an indoor track.

The Towel Situation

Before Towel Tracker, Recreation Center patrons checked out clean towels at a desk by the front entrance. Director of Recreation Services Mike Schaal stated, "A patron would come up to the desk, hand over their ID, and get towels. After working out, they would bring their towels back to the front desk, drop them into the dirty towel basket, and get their ID back." Despite this check out system, towels still went missing. Schaal explained, "People would take three towels, then dump a wad of towels into the dirty basket and say they returned three, when they really returned one or two."

The Solution

In August 2014, a Towel Tracker was installed by the front desk, and its benefits were immediate:

- **Reduced towel loss**

Schaal stated, "We're heavily used for a population our size. We have approximately 14,000—17,000 guest visits each month." Patrons check out approximately 45,000 towels each year, and Schaal observed, "We've lost less than 100 towels in almost two years since Towel Tracker was installed." This equates to a 99.9 percent return rate, and with Towel Tracker, Rec Center management knows exactly who has taken missing towels. For example, Schaal stated, "One time we had a person who checked out 13 towels and hadn't returned them, so we called him up and asked about them, and he brought them all back."

- **Lock tracking**

After Towel Tracker was installed, Schaal wondered if it could also be used to track the combination locks that were still being checked out at the front desk. He discussed this idea with the Towel Tracker team, who came up with a way to attach an RFID chip to each lock. Schaal explained, "We put the tagged locks in a tray on the bottom shelf of the towel dispensing cabinet. Now people can just swipe their cards and pull out the two most common check out items at the same time, which is very convenient."

- **Redirected labor hours**

Previously, the towel check-in and check-out procedure was very labor intensive, but that changed with Towel Tracker. Schaal stated, "Making this process self-serve has simplified it for the patron and the student worker. It freed up time for our employees, who can now care for other responsibilities in the recreation center."

Additional Benefits

- **Increases cleanliness and reduces spread of germs**

The towel checkout process previously used at Kettering's front desk is used at many similar facilities, but Schaal pointed out a problem that this process caused: "When a person was finished working out, they'd come up to the front counter and would often set their dirty towels on the counter while getting their ID back. Then they'd throw their towels in the dirty towel bin, and the next person would come along and put their hand on the counter where those dirty towels had just been sitting. Clean towels would be handed over that very same counter, so there was a potential germ factor in all of this, from patron to employee and vice versa. Removing all of this is just wonderful—you can't put a price tag on it!"

- **Reinforces the school's campus security system**

Schaal stated, "We're an urban campus with locks on exterior building doors, so the school encourages students to bring their IDs wherever they go on campus. The Towel Tracker system reinforces this system with students—they won't get access into the building without ID, and now they won't get a towel either."

Member Reaction

When Towel Tracker was first installed, Schaal said the reaction was very positive. He stated, "We had lots of compliments at first, like 'This is neat!' or 'Wow, that's nice!'" He added, "I think part of this reaction is due to the fact that our students live with technology. So we really have to be up-to-date on technology, because they're at a point where they expect it. If you think about it, they use web-based applications for registration and schedules, and they seem to want electronic everything. So having this technology involving just a simple card swipe is great."



"What I really like most is the technology and the look of the machine, it fits into our facility. It simplifies the checkout process for the most frequently checked out items, and it cleans up the work space, because you're no longer mixing dirty and clean towels. If you're thinking about installing a Towel Tracker, I say do it, because it's a great investment."

*Mike Schaal
Director of Recreation Services*



Summary

Since installing Towel Tracker in 2014, Kettering University's Recreation Center has seen a 99.9 percent towel return rate and a 100 percent combination lock return rate. Schaal summed up its other benefits: "It simplifies the process for checking out the most frequently checked out items, and it significantly cleans up the work space, because you're no longer mixing dirty and clean towels. It also reinforces the idea that bringing your ID to the facility is a good thing." He added, "If you're thinking about installing a Towel Tracker, I say do it, because it's a great investment."



For more information:
www.toweltracker.com