

Where's the Dewey?¹

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Abstract Just about everyone in the library and information sector has by now heard of John Stanley and his ideas to alter the way we see library and information services by encouraging them to meet the needs of the customer rather than our traditional classification systems. Palmerston's new purpose built library has taken this concept on board and designed a collection which moves away from the traditions of the past towards the models of the future. Taking a more retail-based approach to the library and its service and examining how customers search for their selections was a grounding for altering the way the library collection was arranged. Rather than following a strict classification system Palmerston Library decided to try something different. Broad subject groupings were selected and given descriptive, non jargonistic titles. These groupings were then designed into living rooms giving them a distinctive feel while allowing opportunity to move away from the traditional shelving arrangement. The new library has seen an increase in both loans and membership since opening and while there has been some criticism about the new layout, favourable comments have far outnumbered the negative. Discussion regarding the living room concept and feedback on its progress since opening will be undertaken in an effort to provide practical guidance to other library and information services contemplating a change in direction. The ultimate goal of any library should be to ensure that its customers' needs are being met and the Palmerston Library will be provided as an example of a service endeavouring to fulfil this goal.

History

The need for a new library was identified clearly in 2000 with the release of the Palmerston library strategy 2010. The report highlighted that the Palmerston library service was a "good quality traditional service" but given the forecasted demographic change it was emphasised that as the role and function of the library evolved in line with population changes so too would the needs of the library. The need for more floor space, staff, materials, IT, multi-media, programs and a stronger emphasis on cultural and community considerations would be a direct result (Macroplan, 2000).

So started the long and very intensive research and planning phases for the development of a new library for Palmerston, with the focus clearly set upon ensuring that the future needs of the Palmerston area were going to be met. To assist with this phase a series of Library consultations were held both with the general community and with key stakeholders. A number of roles and services were clearly identified by participants for any future development and included:

1. retaining/enhancing the emphasis on existing services, especially books.
2. ensuring an emphasis on IT
3. developing the library as a community centre
4. promotion of arts and culture (food for the eyes)
5. providing a range of specialist spaces
6. strong emphasis on local history
7. provision of outreach services
8. building strong partnerships
9. incorporation of facilities such as conference rooms
10. a focus on youth and children
11. enhancing access for all – including disadvantaged groups.

(Ramos, 2002)

From this initial community consultation a library reference group was formed ensuring continued input was received from community and other stakeholders. On

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advice from consultants it was recommended that to achieve a shared vision of the library as an inclusive, vibrant, community focused centre of lifelong learning it was essential that there be active community involvement and ownership of the initiative with the implementation process being driven by active partnership building (McIntosh, 2004).

The reference group's main roles were to:

- ensure active community involvement in any future development of the library
- provide information and feedback to the community and stakeholders
- ensure program development met the needs of key stakeholders
- promote and raise awareness of the library as a community hub and centre for lifelong learning
- provide input to council on issues relating to development of the library
- advocate for and support positive development in relation to the library.

Membership of the group was open to any community member or stakeholder and included representatives from other Territory libraries, Defence, Charles Darwin university and Palmerston residents. Members attended meetings held every three months and discussed issues including: new library development, lifelong learning program, partnerships and service delivery.

The actual plans for the Palmerston library went through a number of variations. The initial idea was for the library to remain in situ with an extension and renovations to the building. There was then a plan to co-locate the library with the planned recreation centre. For various reasons these first two plans were dropped in favour of building a purpose built library on land separate to the council building.

A number of issues had to be overcome before a final site could be selected, one of which included the planning and re-development of the vacant land adjoining Goyder Hill and the landscaping of Goyder Hill and renaming to Goyder Square. Once this was complete building commenced and after numerous hurdles the library was officially opened to the public on April 23rd, 2006.

The vision

Anyone who has visited Palmerston library will have noticed the layout is quite different from traditional libraries. The idea for the collection layout was born from a visit by the previous library manager to various New Zealand libraries and in particular Palmerston north city library. Many of these libraries had successfully implemented a living room arrangement for their library stock while also applying retail theory to their operations. It was felt that Palmerston's new purpose built library offered a unique opportunity to apply both retail principles and living room formats (McIntosh, n.d.)

The retail applications were derived from John Stanley's recommendations, made as a direct result of his tour and report on NT libraries in 2003 including:

- increase exposure to maximum number of items to maximum number of customers – this will increase impulse buying.
- Sign key product categories
- Face out books – book-facing displays increase fiction circulation by 90% and non-fiction circulation by 25%.
- Product category placement and design – demographic groups do not mix within a library environment. Materials should be positioned according to a category and branded to identify it to its target market.
- Exposure at the counter provides customers with a final and lasting impression.

- Develop a reading zone for men.
(Stanley, 2003)

The key is to think like a customer rather than like a librarian.

The living rooms

The Living room concept has been a major component of the new library. The criteria used to establish placement of resources in living rooms was based on

- audience
- application of retail principles including analysis of layouts of popular book stores such as Borders and Dymocks.
- Analysis of other living room arrangements at Palmerston North Library NZ and Newcastle region library.

The determination of living rooms was initially based on the design of the new library as space predetermined placement. Five main set spaces were established and arranged around the perimeters of the building, these included:

Culture & heritage

Youth

Sound & Vision

Children

Lounge

Planning for the shelving layout and groupings was dependant upon the arrangement and number of identified living rooms ensuring that living rooms were co-located with other living rooms of a similar or complementary nature i.e. parenting resources near the children's living room.

Initial division of living rooms was based on broad subject groupings and Dewey classification. User-friendly names, signage and branding was planned to highlight these living rooms. The main living rooms were identified by the library reference group and a peer review of classifications resulting in the following groupings:

1. culture & heritage
2. lounge
3. children
4. youth
5. sound & vision
6. classics and contemporary literature
7. the arts
8. business, law, politics and management
9. philosophy and society
10. food, lifestyle and leisure
11. health, sport and motivation
12. parenting and reproductive health
13. horror, crime, mystery
14. science fiction and fantasy
15. romance and relationships
16. war and westerns
17. science and animals
18. ready reference
19. learning, language and travel

From these groupings library staff were assigned the task of developing user friendly, client focused names for each living room. The final living room names after numerous re-writes and amalgamations became:

1. Culture & Heritage
2. The Shed (DYI, motor manuals, recreational fishing)
- 2a. Business Class (business, law, management, politics)
3. Kiddy Kats (children)
4. Youth topia (youth)
5. Sound & Vision
6. Top Shelf (classics, literature, poetry)
7. Mind, Myth & Magic (philosophy & society)
8. Exploratorium (food, lifestyle, travel)
9. Blood, Sweat & Attitude (health, sport, motivation)
10. Family Matters (parenting, reproductive health)
11. Crime Scene (crime, mystery, horror)
12. Imaginarium (science fiction/fantasy)
13. Love & Liaisons (romance & relationships)
14. Cowboys & Conflict (war, westerns)
15. Animal, Mineral, Vegetable (science, botany, zoology)
- 15a. Boab collection – environmental
16. Ready Reference
17. Mind Tools (learning, language, history)

The branding

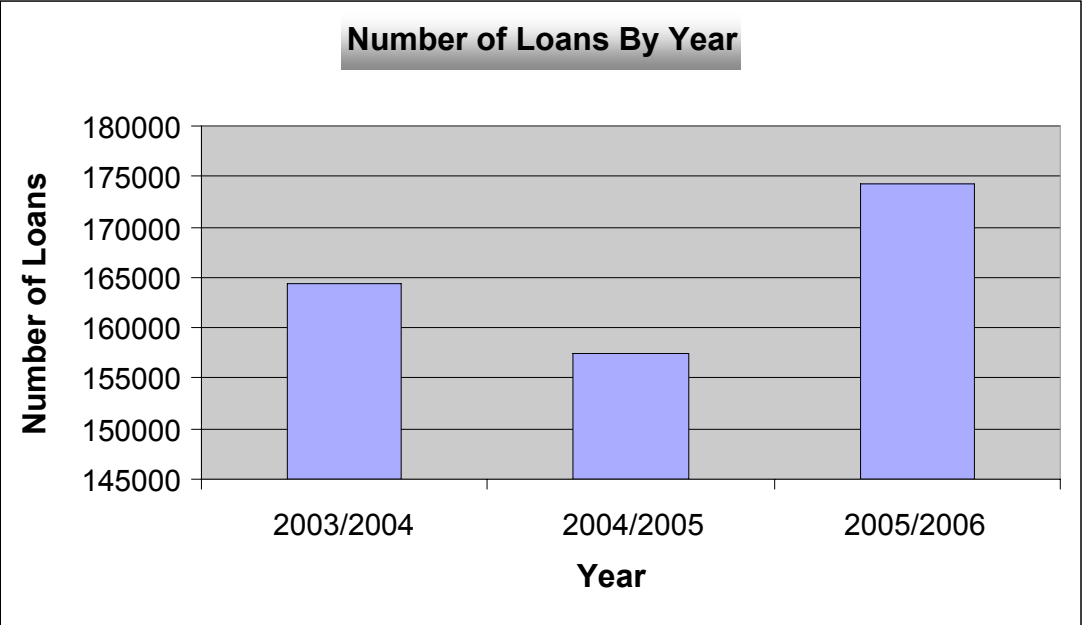
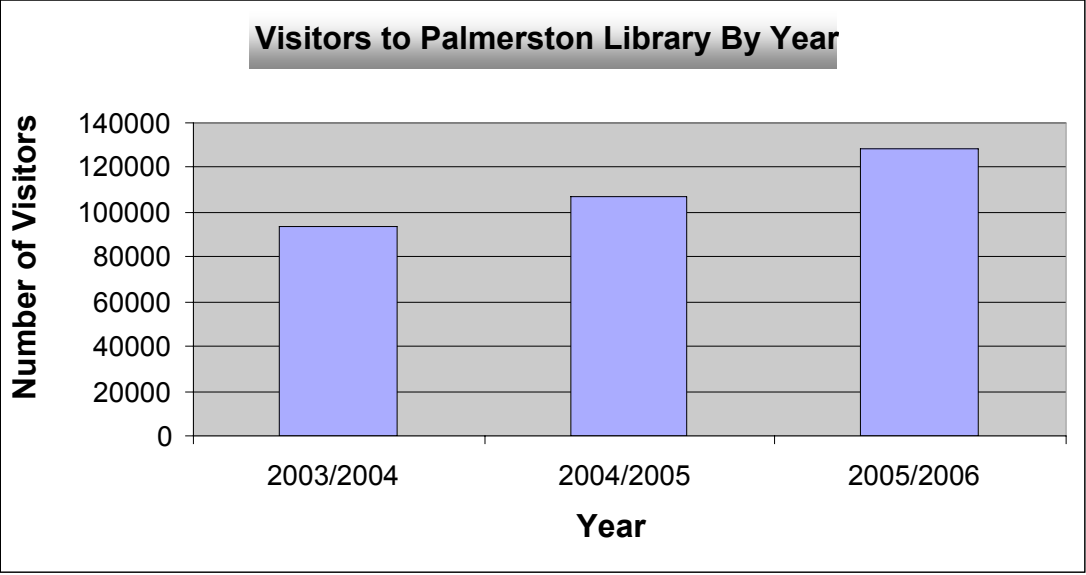
Linked closely to the construction of living rooms was the development of a corporate branding for the library. Once again a reference group was drawn together to test the vision of the library and to get ideas to inform branding, including interior design.

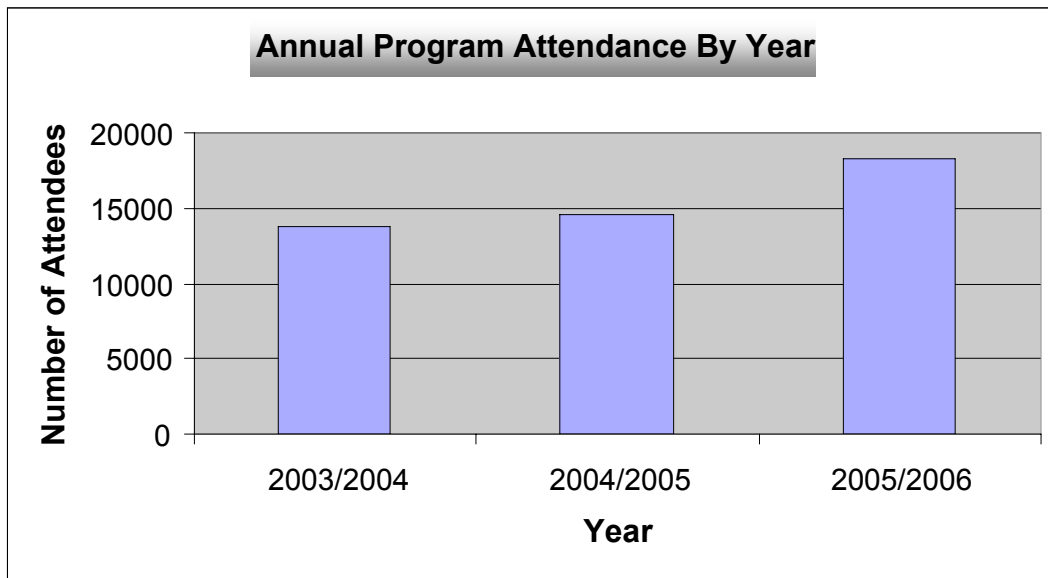
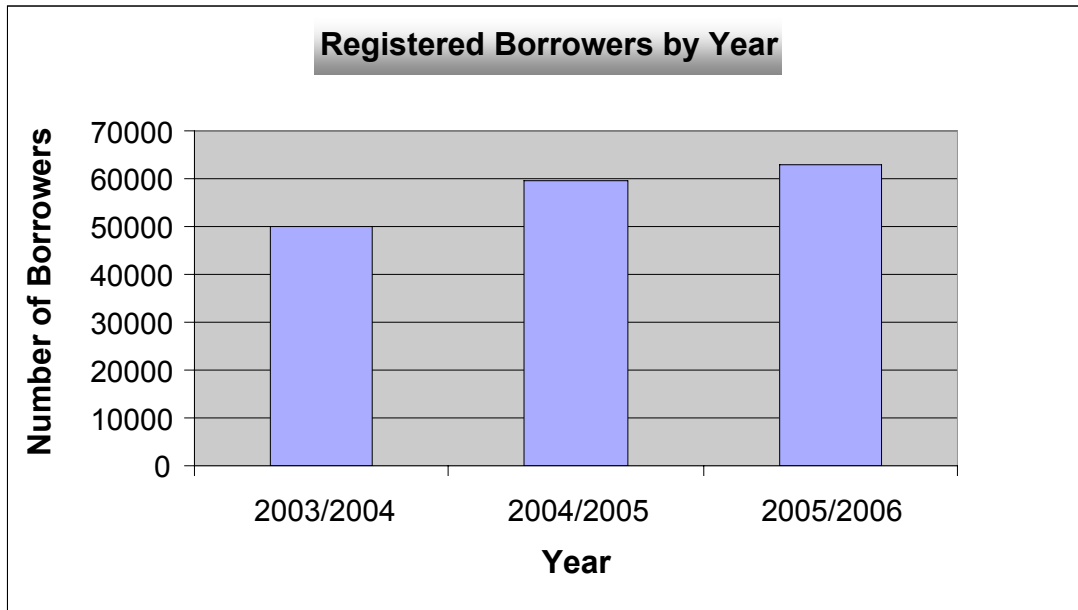
The idea of branding was discussed with the reference group, staff and other key stakeholders specifically that branding is more than a logo or marketing, it is about reputation, image, and overall appeal and is an emotional attachment. It is what people see visually, feel emotionally and experience. To build brand equity it is important to stand out, and to do what you say you will do. Most importantly the branding needs to reflect the feeling of the library – building on its soul or foundation.

From these discussions the focus group developed a branding concept, which was built on by a contracted firm. The final result was the tiger striping and motto “let your imagination grow wild” which has been effectively utilized not only throughout the library building but also on letterhead and brochures. This has allowed the service to create an easily recognisable image and reflects the overall feeling of the library.

Since opening

The library is a totally new concept for Territorians and as expected the change was not greeted with approval from all. Thankfully however the positive acceptance of the new layout was greater than the negative. Importantly the new library and its new layout drew back in past users while also attracting many new members. Loans, members and visitors through the door have all increased considerably and attendance at programs and events has also risen quite dramatically. The graphs below highlight the current figures as compared against previous years and the increase is clear.





(Annual report, 2006)

It has also been found that in many cases those who initially displayed disapproval towards the new system have actually come to relish the changes, case in point – one elderly customer approached a staff member for assistance and expressed that initially she had hated the new layout but now she loved it – she had come to realise it was now easier to find authors who wrote in her favourite topic.

Lessons learnt – what to do, not do and what worked

There are numerous positive aspects to the new library and many things that have worked well however there are also some issues that could have been done differently.

- Steer away from using made up terms to name the living rooms – customers generally haven't found it amusing.

- Don't split up the LP/SW into living rooms – the majority of elderly just want a LP or SW, they don't want to have to search multiple living rooms. For those who are infirm having to move between multiple areas of the library can be tiring and get frustrating.
- Leave plenty of lead in time to assign living rooms and be aware that assigning a run of Dewey numbers will not necessarily pick up those items which have been incorrectly catalogued and classified. You will end up with items in a living room that don't meet the criteria.
- Try wherever possible to keep an author in one living room. Customers searching for an author get annoyed when they have to search across multiple areas.
- Make sure stickers designed to differentiate between living rooms are different. If the colours are similar for 2 living rooms it is highly likely you will find them incorrectly shelved.
- Keep some Dewey signs – there are those who still want to follow the numbers.
- Make sure staff know the new layout and are positive about the changes – this will send a clear message to customers.
- Staff need to be prepared to handle complaints- not everyone will like the changes and staff need to be able to respond in a positive and responsible manner.
- Record, record, record
- Don't react to criticism – take it on board and use it for future planning.
- Celebrate the hard work and any successes. Make sure the positive compliments don't get lost amongst the complaints.

Conclusion

Implementing the living room concept is definitely a worthwhile endeavour however it does require careful planning and most importantly the involvement of the end user in the planning. Major change to a service will have an impact on everyone, for some the change will be viewed in a positive light, for others the change will be unwelcome. This must be remembered when planning for the future and staff must be ready to be able to handle customer responses in a responsible and positive manner. It is important to keep in mind when planning, designing and delivering a new service that the library service is about the customer not the staff.

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Sarah White's library career began in Ipswich, Queensland, where she was employed as a library assistant, while studying for a BA in Library and Information Science. This was followed by a move interstate where, for about eight months Sarah worked in a variety of fields including a school library. Another interstate move, this time to Nowra, NSW, where she moved back into the welfare field, working with people with disabilities. To keep her library skills up to date, Sarah remained a member of ALIA and worked as a casual at the local TAFE library. She then moved into a Defence library based at the Naval College in beautiful Jervis Bay. Just as she settled into this position, they moved again – this time to Darwin where she became Branch Manager, Darwin City Library, then moved into the collection development librarian position. Sarah stayed with Darwin City Council Libraries for over three years before another posting saw her move to Sydney where she managed the Castle Hill library. Definitely the high point of her career so far, managing a state-of-the-art, purpose-built library, the first to install RFID and an RFID autosorter. But Sarah is now back in Darwin, this time managing the Palmerston Public Library.