Libraries: adopting business strategies for customer service
Customer Service and Public Libraries: musings from the front line
‘Word of Mouth’ – a strategy for staff to engage with customers
Read on the wild side – Summer Reading Club 2010
READ on the WILD SIDE

Summer Reading

Summer Reading Club 2010 Wrap Up - Go to page 22 to read all about it
Featuring this month – Customer service

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My friend Regina and I identified each other as kindred souls over the tea urn on our induction day with the then-named NSW Agriculture, when we posed the question, ‘do you believe all the evangelistic guff we’ve heard this morning?’ She also acknowledged that she decided to be my friend when she found out that I was a librarian. A friendship based on profession may seem an odd approach, but as Regina tells it she was scarred for life by her encounter with a librarian during her postgraduate studies who “treated her like a fool”, a sanitised version of her rather colourful description which has become an urban legend. Thankfully time, and subsequent adoption into the library family (at one stage my staff presented her with a ‘library monitor badge’ in appreciation of her help at functions), has blurred her memory of the seminal incident. However the fact that she still bleats on about it 25 years later is evidence of the result of bad customer service.

If asked I believe we’d all say we give great customer service and point to surveys that describe libraries as safe, welcoming spaces. But safe and welcoming doesn’t necessarily equate to good customer service. I would suggest that we’ve all been too busy listening to our own self-promotion and have become a little complacent, that the concept of excellent customer service has the potential to pass us by. Maybe I’m becoming a grumpy old woman; increasingly I react against poor customer service and dispatch e-mails and letters outlining my gripes. Equally I feel it’s important to recognise excellence and to emulate the standard of others.

I’m currently working with a project manager on extensions to our building. He’s long been a library supporter so I was somewhat taken aback last week when he asked, “why do you library people confuse the public by what you call things?” In response to my shocked look he pointed to our main desk, “why do you call it a circulation desk? Fair enough you don’t have a sign that calls it that but I’ve heard you all direct people to it by that name which is even more confusing, and what exactly does it mean?” This started me thinking about much of the signage in libraries, which can be decidedly customer unfocused from the ‘do not’, signs to the library terminology for materials. Reference means ‘stays here in the library to us, but our clients view it as resource they can refer to. Why not simply say ‘not for loan’ – that spells it out loud and clear. Some of us are getting into the bookshop mood and moving away from the traditional terminology, but even then we’re often going for trendy versions of existing library language with no constancy across the board.

Having just worked with Kevin Hennah, staff at Central West Libraries are always on the lookout for examples of best practice. Last week we gave a big tick to the street level signage at the Stanton Library in North Sydney which clearly indicates the hours of opening and the fact that the returns shute is available outside these times. I immediately made a ‘note to self’ to introduce something similar for my branches. I’ve been downstairs before opening too many times over the years and seen someone park their car, get out, and walk across to our doors only to find that we’re closed. It’s OK if they want to return items – the shute is there – but if they want to collect a reservation, undertake research, or use the internet they’re not going to be too happy, and rightfully so. It’s enough to make you want to stand still and blend into the shelves, so they won’t see you and fix you with an accusing glare!

As I write this both of my parents are in hospital: Mum in Sydney and Dad here in Orange. It’s been a hectic couple of weeks. The two hospitals are very different and reflect the variance of the Australian health system, but the customer service experience in both has been outstanding and has given me cause to reflect and interpret for the library situation. Everyone along the way has introduced themselves and taken the time to explain what is happening and why. Do we do that? Hospitals are intimidating, especially when you enter via Accident and Emergency in the back of an ambulance as Dad did. For many people hospitals too are intimidating places that reflect bureaucracy. There are unfamiliar layouts and signage, not to mention highways of rules and regulations. Let’s be honest. some of our colleagues hide behind these rules or use them as some kind of perceived power. I think it is time to examine our attitudes and procedures and draw on customer service methods in the wider community.

If you read the ALIA Board Blog you will know that while I was in Melbourne in January I had the need to request a room change. The young woman on reception accomplished this with minimum fuss and a great deal of grace. That she was able to do so reflected that she was equipped with the authority to be able to make that decision and act accordingly. Do we delegate that same control to our staff so that they can act quickly and address an issue before it becomes a situation? What those delegations are will depend on individual libraries, and the people best suited to tell you about the triggers are front line staff. It’s a conversation I’d recommend.

I will freely admit that despite 35 years in the profession, I still feel wary of using some libraries due to their signposting layout and customer interaction. Possibly a politically unpalatable thing for the ALIA President to say, but the truth no less. If I feel that way, how do our communities feel?

Oh and for the record despite the unusualness of the name, the Regina of this story is not Regina Sutton, State Librarian and CEO, State Library of NSW. However the two have met and refer to each other as ‘the other Regina’!
Underpromise and overdeliver

We all have our own personal ‘Customer Service’ motto and in the context of a professional services organisation, this is one I have sometimes used with my colleagues. Sometimes it is far better not to promise great things but instead promise what you know you will achieve or do, and then surprise your customers or colleagues by overdelivering on your promises.

We should all value the customer service that we receive whether it is internal, external, or retail customer experiences. But what is customer service? Or maybe I should ask, what is customer service to you? It is different for everyone and in each situation. As ALIA is a membership based organisation, our members are our customers – but they are also the creators of our customer service experiences. We are all part of the ‘service’ of our Association. Our Board, Standing Committees, Advisory Committees, Group office holders, conference committees, and other volunteer groups give internal customer service to create the ‘ALIA experience’. When you see the ALIA logo, you should expect a positive and professional experience and quality products and services.

In this context I also encourage and advise our ALIA volunteers to underpromise and overdeliver with their time and energies. If now is not the right time for you personally or professionally to be part of a committee or an activity – that’s OK. Better that you identify time constraints or contribution skills that you may not have right now and save them for overdelivering them later on when the time is right.

The Board gives customer service to members through their leadership, decision making, and correspondence with members – and driving the organisation’s strategic direction. In our revised organisational chart for the National Office, we recognise them as delivering better outcomes to our internal staff, that is an appropriate level of staffing to meet the services we deliver to our external clients.

Our National Office staff have been revisiting our values these past few months, and have also identified quality of products and services as one of our core office values. ALIA National Office has a small team of staff in Canberra. Last year all ALIA staff had their customer service skills refreshed with a two-day training course. But National Office is not the only point of customer service for members. As a member, you can also receive local customer service from the Local Liaison Officers in your state (listed to the right), and other services delivered by project offices and contractors such as our editors. To consolidate this team of ALIA customer service operators, we brought the team of LLOs to Canberra for a training day in late March this year. I know that all of my staff put in extra efforts for our members. If you do have any feedback to the ALIA staff, you can email it to enquiry@alia.org.au or call the members line on 1800 020071.

How do you, as a manager, recognise good customer service by your staff? How do you as library staff recognise each other’s customer service excellence? How do you react to receiving bad customer service and how do you reward good customer service – both internally and externally? The theme of customer service will continue in Board Blog posts during April, so continue the conversation at http://www.alia.org.au/blog. You might also like to comment with some of your own ideas there. Our thanks to all the contributors to this edition of inCite for the great range of good ideas from all sectors – read on.

So to finish – if you haven’t ‘underpromised and overdelivered’ lately, I hope you keep it in mind next time you aim for quality customer service.

Safer Internet Group update

The Safer Internet Group now includes the Australian Library and Information Association, the Inspire foundation, Google, Yahoo!, the Internet Industry Association, the Systems Administrators Guild of Australia, and the Internet Society. All partner organisations have agreed with the Core Principles – released on 15th February 2010 at http://www.alia.org.au/internetfiltering and are working together to further the debate against mandatory internet filtering. The draft legislation is yet to be tabled. Further meetings of the group continue during April as well as talks with ministers, advisors, and other key stakeholders.

The ‘new’ PLAC

The membership of the Public Libraries Advisory Committee was approved for change in 2009 and the new members were officially appointed in March. We welcome representatives from all of the State Public Library Associations and Public Libraries Australia who join with current ALIA members to work on this committee. The main focus continues to be outcomes from the 2009 Public Libraries Summit, including the National Vision and Framework for Public Libraries and the National Standards for Public Libraries. Other projects for this committee during the year include the Public Libraries stream for ALIA Access and the next Survey of Internet Use in Australian Public Libraries. The next face-to-face meeting of the committee will be in Auburn in July on the day before the Public Libraries NSW Country conference.
Editor,
I was surprised to see the latest inCite devoted to reading. Some years ago when I was working for the Queensland Dept of Primary Industries I wrote a paper on the reading habits of Extension Officers. At the time a DPI manager said I was in the wrong culture, and a university professor criticised my paper for its lack of a statistical survey, perhaps unaware of qualitative surveys. It was a time when ALIA was adjusting to the impact of computer science, and I thought the psychology of reading was overlooked, to say nothing of the matter of literacy.

David Mason BA AALIA
william.mason6@bigpond.com

PS: I’ve been waiting 25 years to write that.

PPS: I think the idea that Library and Information science research must include mandatory statistical surveys is flawed, as I’m sure Einstein didn’t use any sort of survey to conclude e=mc2.

Should Councils charge for library loans - ALIA President Jan Richards asks?

Dear Editor

I’d just typed an email along these lines to President Jan Richards in response to an ALIAPubNews Broadcast that flicked past my eyes, and was encouraged by a colleague to submit my thoughts as a letter to inCite.

Our reasons for NOT charging for loans in our public (and other) libraries are vested in the notions of public good, public education and democratic freedom – to name a few. They are quite high minded and in these days of economic rationalism – yes it is still and democratic freedom – to name a few. They are quite high minded and in these days of economic rationalism – yes it is still with us – don’t wash with many politicians. And I am beginning to wonder if there is a shift in community appreciation of our public libraries and the fact that access to their collections of all types remains free? I wonder if the economic issue is taking over? The reason that I mention this latter aspect is because in my class of 40+ internal students yesterday, I asked the class if economic reasons were the main reasons that they considered working? 100% said: yes. Not one (and I asked a supplementary question) would admit that they might work because (a) they liked it; or (b) they felt they might be making a contribution to society. I then asked if any had belonged to community groups? One hand went up!

Our reasons for free public access remain very relevant. They are ‘feel good’ and if readers have been keeping up with some of the stuff coming out of the US recently, some of their public libraries are being threatened with closure to save money. One thing I loved about the Americans (I’ve lived there) was their respect for education and intellectual stimulation and public good. After all, they don’t have the equivalent of Crown copyright: government information is supposed to be freely available for the public good.

On a broader scale, we are having huge and underlying issues in WA, i.e. little to no recognition of the worthiness of the heritage of our state: built, recorded, and biodiverse, by politicians of any persuasion, and the time has come to work on this and seriously. How? I am still thinking about it, but there is a groundswell among archivists, historians, my greenie mates, and not too many librarians that I can see. Where are the librarians? Good question. I’m looking and can find little active and demonstrated interest in such matters.

Where does ALIA fit? Well we do the surveys and find out that not so recently now, people have appreciated their public library; we get the gate counts from ABS and see the number of visitors. But what impact is this having on the politicians? Not much it seems? I liked the idea of the Library Ambassadors, but how much are we using this and similar concepts?

The draft National Framework for Australian Public Libraries link was on the same ALIAPubNews e-bulletin. The proposed vision is:

Australia’s public libraries, united behind common goals and ambitions, sharing best practice, contributing to strong communities, valued by people and government, continuing to provide universal free access to information, knowledge and ideas, and confirming the importance of their role for future generations (p. 4).

This might be OUR vision, but is it the one of all politicians? It should be. NSLA is doing some interesting stuff – but how much of this does the great unwashed Australian public know about? We know about it, but do they? And on a related issue, Biddy Fisher is the new CILIP President and is challenging the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown to have a teacher librarian in every school. Go Biddy! This sounds catchy, but it is things like this, with professional and political support behind them, that might just work. And might just bring the profession back onto the radar screen?

For what it is worth and typed in great haste as I really should be getting on with something else.

Dr Kerry Smith FALIA
Dept of Information Studies
Curtin University
k.smith@curtin.edu.au

Note to Members
We welcome letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector. It is important to note that the opinions expressed in Letters to the Editor are those of the authors and not necessarily the official policy of the Australian Library and Information Association.
Deadline for letters is available on the website and they should be no longer than 250 words. Please include your name and postal address as anonymous correspondence will not be reproduced.
Conferences

ALIA Information Online Conference and Exhibition 2011

With less than 12 months to go it’s time to check your calendars and get ready to join us for 2011, our 15th Information Online Conference & Exhibition.

Planning is well under way. Our call for abstracts closed 31 March and we have been busy contacting potential international and local keynote speakers. The dates are set and the venue booked. Our new website is live and we are planning some new features, and you will be able to follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

The dates to remember are: 1–3 February 2011. The place to remember is: The Sydney Conference & Exhibition Centre at Darling Harbour.

ALIA and the Conference Committee are committed to ensuring conference delegates will be presented with cutting edge, innovative, practical, and well-researched papers and case studies covering the following themes:

- Library spaces
- Knowledge services and enterprise content management
- Digital assets and rights management
- E-literacy
- Information architecture
- Measuring our services
- Emerging technologies
- Professional development
- Search tools and techniques
- Publishing
- Information management
- How we deliver our services

The ALIA Information Online Conference and Exhibition is the leading conference and exhibition for the online information industry in the Asia-Pacific region.

For all the dates and details go to our website.

Keep up to date with any new announcements by subscribing to the News & Updates features or through the Information Online Blog on our website at http://www.information-online.com.au/

Follow us on… twitter
For tweets and posts please use the hashtag #aliaioc.

ALIA Access 2010 Conference

Wednesday 1 – Friday 3 September 2010

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

The ALIA event of the year
(you wouldn’t want to be anywhere else!)

Register Now! Early Bird Registration closes 12 July

Visit the conference website for registration information and to register online. ALIA Members are entitled to a discount of up to $300 on the full registration fee. Don’t miss the chance to be involved in what is sure to be one of the most innovative ALIA conferences in years!

Conference Program Released

Access all areas – the ALIA Access 2010 Conference program is structured to provide delegates with multi-choice stream of rich content. The only problem will be choosing! Live web streaming is also available for selected sessions for ALIA Members who are unable to attend the conference.

The preliminary conference program is now available to download from the conference website http://conferences.alia.org.au/access2010/.

Q & A with Graham Black, Conference Chair

1. What are you most looking forward to at the conference?

Brisbane in September is normally beautiful – the days are warm and sunny and there is still a chill in the air (at least for us Queenslanders) in the evenings. While we don’t have much control over the weather we are looking forward to presenting our members and other delegates with a dynamic conference. We’ve only had 13 months to plan and deliver ALIA Access which is not much time to prepare and plan for a conference of this magnitude (there’s nothing like a quickly looming deadline to focus the mind!) so we decided to do something different – a conference that’s more engaging and more focused on our members’ areas of interest.

2. What highlights can delegates expect to experience at the conference?

I expect there will be a number of highlights for delegates. Firstly, there’s the stream or symposium approach to the conference. This will give each of the participating sectors or interest groups an opportunity to discuss debate and showcase issues, trends and achievements in their own sector/area of interest. Secondly, there’s also the converse – the opportunity to engage with other sectors/interest groups. Thirdly, we’re trying new initiatives such as live video streaming of selected sessions. It won’t be the same as being there but it will enable those who can’t attend the whole conference to participate via the net. We’re still working on the finer details with this so once we’ve got it sorted we’ll advise members accordingly. Fourthly, a new approach to the conference dinner – what we’re calling the ‘Dine Around Dinner’.

3. Can you tell us a little more about the ‘Dine Around Dinner’?

I’ve been to some great conference dinners – good food, great music, good company. I’ve also attended some dinners where the alternative drop wasn’t what I would have wished for and the meal was so loud I couldn’t talk to my colleagues at the same table. As we’re doing something different with the conference proper, we thought we’d do something different for the Conference Dinner. Brisbane has some great restaurants around the conference venue in South Brisbane. The ‘Dine Around’ dinner will give delegates the opportunity to choose their own restaurant from a selected list of establishments and when they get to the restaurant they’ll be able to choose their own food and drink up to a specified value. Delegates will be able to pre-book their restaurant with their registration. We’ll be encouraging delegates to liaise with their colleagues prior to the conference about where they’d like to eat.

4. What do you hope to gain by attending ALIA Access 2010?

Where do I start! Getting ideas and inspiration from other sectors, I work in the higher education sector. Over the past couple of years I’ve attended a couple of ‘broad church’ conferences where I’ve picked some really interesting strategies and approaches to customer service from some of the public libraries that probably wouldn’t have been discussed in my ‘home’ sector. Meeting members of ALIA from across the nation to discuss their needs, what the Association is doing well and what we can do to provide new or enhanced services. And finally, there is always catching up with colleagues over a coffee or cleansing ale!

Available now!

Library and Information Week and National Simultaneous Storytime merchandise

Visit www.alia.org.au
Literacy training in public libraries for ACE Providers

The grant funded by ALIA/ALA provided opportunity for the delivery of a wider spread of programs in the community in both the library and through community based centers. By up-skilling and enabling volunteers, the City of Tea Tree Gully Library will offer a range of training opportunities in 2010, focusing on web 2.0 and literacy to a diverse range of groups including youth, the over 50s, elderly, and special groups such as the disabled, migrants, and refugees.

The first project focused on the opportunity to work with TAFE to provide training to tutors in the Northern Metro area, and also develop a pool of volunteers who can deliver training on behalf of the library to the wider community. Through a four week training course, these volunteers are now registered with the City of Tea Tree Gully Council and are able to deliver adult programs to the community twice a week in the Community Learning Centre.

The second project was aimed at up-skilling existing trainers with the knowledge and tools to present on web 2.0 technology. This program is offered through the Jack Young Centre in Salisbury, and through our Community Learning Centre.

Adult education is an important element in our communities of today and through working with service providers, community centers, and public libraries we can work together to ensure that education remains a key focus and continues to contribute to the overall development of individuals and the community as a whole.

Melaina Tate, Librarian, Library Partnerships
City of Tea Tree Gully Library
melaina.tate@cttg.sa.gov.au

Upcoming Courses

The next two months are a busy time on the professional development calendar.

ALIA’s Professional Development and Careers Manager will lead a 1 hour Q & A-style teleconference on 27 April to answer queries about professional development.

On 5 May, Sue McKerracher, who acted as ALIA’s Disaster Recovery Project Manager, will facilitate a FREE 1 hour teleconference discussion on disaster preparedness within the library and information sector.

FOLIOz is back with an excellent course in May Making Your Case Successfully (Machiavel) – 24th May–9th July 2010

This course aims to provide practical skills in developing and delivering a case for new or continued resources. The course is supported by real-life case studies and evidence on individual and collective management decision-making. See the ALIA Training calendar for more details. http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/pd/services/training.calendar.html

Also in May, Dr Irena Yashin Shaw PhD will be running the telecourse Public Speaking with Confidence.

For Queensland members, Adam Le Good will be presenting three face-to-face courses in Brisbane from 18-20 May, Managing Challenging Clients, Fundamentals of Supervision, and Leading Others Through Change.

These are just a few examples of the many opportunities on offer. For more information, please visit http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/pd.services/training.calendar.html.

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Manager wanted – Librarians need not apply

From the desk of the Library Provocateur

About lunchtime one Thursday not too long ago, as I was ransacking my desk drawers for chocolate or paracetamol (whichever came to hand first), the phone rang. It was a colleague calling to share the news that another large organisation had appointed a non-librarian to its top library job – the latest in a long tote of library manager ‘scratchings’.

As the details were revealed, my rose tinted spectacles flashed to red. Not only had a non-librarian been appointed to a hitherto ‘professional’ position without the transparency of an open recruitment process, the appointee came to the job from a customer service background elsewhere in the organisation. Even more galling, if that was possible, the appointment was seen to be exclusively ‘addional responsibilities’ tacked on top of an existing management position external to the library. Talk about making the library staff feel valued!

As I huffed and puffed down the phone to my colleague, it was the revelation of the new appointee’s background – customer service – that added insult to vicarious injury. How dare the organisation do that, when the library profession itself is so customer-centric, and has such a wealth of talented supervisors and managers ready to step up?

I mean, the profession has management talent going begging – we do. Don’t we? As I hung up the phone and reflected further, I started to have doubts.

It is my firm belief – an article of professional faith, if you will – that libraries are best managed by library qualified professionals: for the same reason that schools are best managed by teachers, newspapers by journalists, and, if we are honest, hospitals by doctors.

As librarians and library technicians, in common with other professionals, we share a body of knowledge and a set of professional values that are intrinsic to our professional practice and should not (indeed cannot!) be abrogated to others.

This is not to say that we should be insular or parochial, particularly when it comes to professional development and growth. In my early career, the library managers I most admired actively added to their professional body of knowledge at every opportunity – whether through further study, mentoring, or acting appointments outside the profession. It was their goal, or so it seemed to me, to create a package of professional and managerial capabilities second to none. They were highly effective managers and active, aware library professionals.

It was also not uncommon in my early career for library managers to be promoted into more generic executive roles – such was their management capability and standing as leaders. It still happens today, but seemingly less often – perhaps because some of the stepping stones to higher level management have disappeared from libraries.

I worry that our profession has become progressively cynical and apathetic towards the practise of management.

If workforce surveys and conversations over the past decade are any indication, you could be forgiven for thinking there is dearth of managerial talent from which to make appointments. I personally do not believe this to be the case. The raw material is still present in the profession, and in many cases, may only need some gentle encouragement to take the next step.

Too often though I hear at conferences and in tea rooms that gifted and energetic practitioners are not seeking advancement because the role of manager is seen to be too troublesome – not worth the money! Related to this, library manager colleagues tell me they struggle to find library qualified supervisors and team leaders for their libraries. To fill critical gaps they sometimes have to look outside the profession.

I would be the first to agree that no amount of money is ever really enough to compensate a middle level manager for the degree of anxiety and stress that they might experience on occasions in their work. But that is only part of the picture and the rewards, in my experience, typically outweigh the costs – particularly if the individual can see where their contributions as a manager are making a difference: to colleagues, clients, and the profession.

The trouble seems to be that many talented colleagues with designs on management roles either self-select out at crucial points in their careers, or become so frustrated with the stop-start nature of progression within the profession that they seek fulfilment elsewhere. The situation is not helped when critical stepping stones into library management are removed or bestowed on others outside the profession. The challenge for our profession is to help those with any inclination towards management reach their full potential.

Clearly any difficulty grooming talent within the profession is compounded when organisations – some of them library organisations – no longer view librarians as being capable of managing a large and complex library service. If organisations are consciously overlooking librarians when recruiting managers, we need to understand why it is happening and decide what is to be done about it.

I would contend that the issue is more complex that it first appears, and that it needs to be debated and a response clarified within our profession as a matter of urgency. To do otherwise is to ultimately give up a large measure of influence over our collective future as a profession. I could be blunt and say that it is to give up as a profession.

It is a fact of life in libraries – as it is in other professional services – that external appointments to leadership positions are made on occasions, and typically they are made for a reason. The challenge is to understand the thinking behind an appointment, and, right or wrong in our mind, learn from it. Even bad appointments, as we might perceive them, can be instructive.

We should also bear in mind that when external appointments are made, for whatever underlying reason or intended purpose, they bring to the library a range of new skills. If we are serious about reversing the trend, we might usefully learn from our new colleagues.

It is another observation of mine that the professional values I spoke of earlier sometimes don’t mesh with those of the parent organisation – particularly if it is not a library. This mis-match of values, if not recognised and addressed, may alone be sufficient to cause organisations to write job ads with the implied message, “librarians need not apply”.

Here’s a loaded question for all of us to consider: what are our personal and professional values (can we actually identify them?) and how do they relate to those of our organisation? If you answer this question honestly, you may be surprised at the response.

Thus I would further argue that any debate we have within the profession around the question of non-librarian appointments to management positions probably needs to occur in the wider context of compulsory ‘professional development’ – a critical professional value.

Others have argued and I can but agree that if we are not prepared to do more as individuals and collectively to enhance external perceptions of us as ‘professional people’, more library manager positions will be lost to us. And with the loss of those positions, we lose the capacity to influence the direction of our libraries and ultimately our professional practice. We lose control of our professional destiny.

As Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric was once famously quoted, “control your destiny or somebody else will.”

That is our challenge, and time is running out.
Libraries: adopting business strategies for customer service

The information, education, and entertainment marketplace is crowded, and customers are demanding new styles of service. Consequently, libraries are implementing business techniques to build patron loyalty, to remain useful and relevant. This article outlines the most valuable and transferable corporate approaches: how many does your library do?

Management

Niche establishment means determining your uniqueness. In libraries what can you provide that Google and LexisNexis can’t?

Localisation is necessary, and even global franchises adapt to their context: McDonalds made burgers from chicken in India. For libraries, studies showed different patterns in rural and metropolitan areas; in America, there are more computers per head in country libraries.

Codify customer service in the mission statement – the Miami-Dade public library aims to “provide a 5-star customer experience”. Some organisations draw up a separate customer service charter: Australian libraries include Macquarie University and the State Library of WA. Extend the responsibility of excellent service beyond ‘front-of-house’ personnel, and make it inform and affect everyone’s actions. Train staff in customer relations, and refresh their skills. The library at the University of Wollongong does.

Earn trust by keeping your promises. All businesses know reputations take years to gain and seconds to lose.

Demonstrate a social conscious: more and more consumers favour companies that support and do charitable work. Note that in the 2009 bushfires in Victoria, libraries like Orange City became aid centres.

Respond to trends in recreation, health, and the economy. For libraries, stock books on (in recent years) knitting and Pilates and, during the GFC, assisting patrons in checking job ads and preparing CVs.

Promote your organisation and keep your customers informed: issue press releases, newsletters, and flyers, and make use strong media relationships. Libraries could perhaps establish a regular page or column in the community newspaper.

Membership

Becoming a customer should be as simple as possible; make library registration no more complex than subscribing to a commercial provider or opening a credit account. Increase appeal by rewarding patrons, at random or according to a scheme, and run competitions, especially at festive seasons. In both businesses and libraries this could be respectively longevity of membership and Easter, Christmas, Mother’s Day, and Father’s Day. Libraries can also focus on sector significant occasions like Library and Information Week.

Continuous improvement is necessary to retain clientele. Frequently evaluate your performance, and broadly source data: try ‘mystery shoppers’, suggestion boxes, surveys, and feedback forms. Note more responses are received when distributed online, as users find it more convenient to complete.

Product

Ensure currency of product [collection], and obtain multiple copies of in-demand items [bestsellers]. Restructure purchasing when format preferences change (a library example is DVDs versus videos). Pricing is a primary factor in attracting customers; whenever possible, keep costs low, and give advance notice of the start or increases in charges. Libraries in like the City of Stirling this relates to fees for photocopying and laminating, and the introduction of overdue fines.

Virtual environment

Customers expect businesses to maintain a 24/7 internet presence, with an online catalogue, FAQs, and digitised materials. The website must be easily navigable, and accuracy is paramount. Companies garner respect by staying up-to-date with tools and technologies; therefore libraries should use wikis, blogs (Amazon has Amazon Daily), Twitter, and Facebook. Links to other sites add value to the customer – note podcasts and virtual tours are provided by Curtin University’s library, and videocasts are streamed by the State Library of NSW. Customisation fosters goodwill; for instance, Amazon maintains customer profiles to flag new items that might be of interest. Libraries can also prepare and upload “Who writes like” lists.

Physical environment

It has been long contended that libraries can become a social hub or (after home and work), the ‘third place’ for citizens to congregate. To rival pubs, cafes, and gymnasiums, consider having food and drink vendors onsite, co-tenants (for example, in Wanneroo Library and Cultural Centre, there is also a gallery and museum), and inviting societies to hold meetings (for libraries, consider historians and genealogists).

Visual appeal and placement are vital. Good stores have a welcoming entrance and immediately visible staff to assist visitors. They put new displays close to high traffic areas, and organise the most popular sections near the entrance. Libraries should look at Dymocks’ layout – for instance, the first shelves contain fiction. Clear signage is crucial, as are aesthetics: retailers install comfortable furniture, well-lit and roomy spaces, and pleasant decor. Libraries can learn from Borders, who encourage sitting and browsing. However, enable either short or long visits (express shopping versus ‘mall trawls’) by designating obvious pathways and service zones.

Interaction

Staff boost patron enjoyment with welcoming and approachable verbal and non-verbal mannerisms (smiling, nodding). Roster non-desk time – customers prefer to ask roving workers for help, and name badges and uniforms assist identification. They also like being escorted to sections, rather than pointed in the direction.

However, remote mediation is becoming the norm, which heightens the need for unambiguous phrasing. A library example of distance interaction is the reference facility, ‘Ask a librarian’.

Patrons wish to choose methods of communication, so let them nominate how they are contacted, be it by mobile, email, SMS, RSS, or other. They also prefer options for fulfilment, like loan, print copy, digital copy, or purchase. Participation and convenience bring satisfaction and control – note that today’s consumer wants self-service (ordering/ therapists), self-checkout, and the opportunity to add tags to content. In response, libraries can change their catalogues to permit comments, and install card readers. Public libraries in the ACT were early adopters.

Speed reduces customer frustration: answer phones within four rings, acknowledge those waiting in queues (make eye contact or say “Be with you soon”), or open another lane / service point. In libraries, this might mean another barcode station, and promptly follow up queries.

Solve problems quickly – most businesses respond to complaints within 24 hours (e.g. BigPond); they then rectify the situation and/compensate the customer. In the past, the University of Wollongong Library offered coffee vouchers. Understand the power of word of mouth, for instance, the restaurant rule-of-thumb is that a bad experience is told to up to ten people. Libraries are already disadvantaged by the battleaxes images: try defusing conflict by using the supermarket ‘Sorry-Glad-Sure’ speech (“I’m sorry you had a problem with our service, I’m glad you told me about it, and I feel sure we can work it out”).

Meeting patron needs has always been part of library operations, but now the balance of power has shifted. For libraries in the 21st century, as it is in the business world, it’s your customer, but their way.

Leith Robinson
Ph D student, Curtin University
lkrinson@bigpond.com

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Ph D student, Curtin University
lkrinson@bigpond.com
Customer service: musings from the front line

“One of the things I learned in library school is that when people have an information need, they’ll always ask people they know before they ask a librarian. The trick is making sure that librarians are some of the people they know.”

Jessamyn West

One of my first assignments for my graduate diploma in Library & Information Management was to understand information-seeking behaviour of library patrons by going ‘undercover’ and observing the desk staff at my chosen library, and report my interaction – very book and dagger stuff. The librarian on the Ironically titled Help Desk did not look up from her work, and when I did catch her attention, looked like she wanted to be anywhere but there. By the end of our exchange, I ended up apologising to her for bothering her. Was she simply having a bad day? Needless to say my assignment made for some interesting reading.

Public libraries as we know are mercurial beasts subject to the whims of so many elements: budget, changing technologies, the internet, a savvier clientele, competing interests, outsourcing, an ageing library workforce, and did I mention budget? In my experience, librarians are professional, wonderfully innovative, informed people who believe in the ethics of their profession. So how do we get this across to the people we are serving and to the Councils that are financing us?

The answer is simple, by providing quality, friendly, targeted, and professional customer service. I’m not talking about the over enthusiastic approach: blinding smiles and would you like a side order of crime fiction with that? I don’t think that approach works for Australians. Rather we need a customer service attitude that welcomes our patrons, is polite, approachable, helpful, and professional. We should treat our patrons the way we want to be treated, not standing awkwardly by, while the librarian is busy doing more important work.

Which leads me to my first point: acknowledge the patron. Whether it’s a smile, a hello, or saying “I won’t be a moment”.

Listen to the patron, and I mean really listen. We all know that most people are not really sure what they want and they don’t want to appear silly or stupid. So if it’s a difficult enquiry repeat the question and then, using our brilliant reference minds, narrow the problem and (hopefully) give the patron what they want.

Refer, confer or defer! If we can’t answer a question, ask for help.

Know our stuff! There is no point touting our wares, if we have no idea how to use our own databases. Product knowledge is give good customer service. Library managers train your staff: they are worth the investment!

Library policies are integral for the smooth running of the library. Why? They provide an operational base for us and ensure fair and equitable treatment of our clients.

I have clocked many tours of duty on the front desk, and I confess that it is not always easy to be all things to all people. The library is a magnet for the weird and wonderful and my last observation as we navigate our way around the patrons, all the while running all our programs, is that patience, passion, and a healthy sense of humour are the keys to delivering quality service as well as maintaining our sanity!

Helen Kassidis
Burwood Library
helen.kassidis@burwood.nsw.gov.au

Electronic Resources Australia

Australian libraries working together

Electronic Resources Australia (ERA) is a consortium for all library sectors offering Australian libraries a collaborative purchasing opportunity to provide their users with free access to quality electronic resources.

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For more information
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‘Word of Mouth’ – a strategy for engaging with customers

Our customers love us – the free local public library with books, CDs, DVDs, toys, wireless, internet, baby time, and great comfortable environments. But do they know everything we offer?

At a recent meeting a group of our City of Onkaparinga Library team leaders and promotion staff with a passion for marketing and promotion strategy thought about our marketing plan and our budget and how to engage with those who do not know how wonderful we are. We had a shared ‘moment of truth’ about our regular customers being unaware of the breadth of our services. Then there are those who are yet to become customers.

Alongside marketing and promoting to attract new users we decided we need to promote ourselves to our current users. We have trained our staff in customer service, with operating principles and changes to procedures to support them in becoming more customer friendly. We have trained staff in engaging, used the ‘fish’ philosophy, changed our library décor with lounges, bright colours, art work, and other retail approaches. We have changed our collection policies to remove old, worn items, and to display in a more appealing manner.

But we still need to get the word out there.

And so Word of Mouth was born. Word of Mouth is a strategy designed to encourage all staff to take ownership of their role in promotion. We select a topic of the week or fortnight which promotes either a service or an event. Staff are asked to focus on this one topic and engage with customers.

The first topic was launched in the last few weeks of January when parents were low in cash, and children bored: “Ask me – What’s free to do in Onkaparinga?” The focus was to promote our community information service and the huge range of free activities available to families over the holidays.

I visited each of our six libraries and talked to staff about the concept and the first program. We provided staff with:

- A badge saying – “Ask me – What’s free to do in Onkaparinga?”
- A poster and multiscreen promotion slide.
- A list of links to relevant documents, web sites, and other information to assist staff. A reference link was available on a central place on our library intranet.
- A handout staff could provide to customers with relevant sites and pamphlets.
- Suggestions about how to promote the topic at each branch including displays of books, pamphlets etc.
- Emails to all staff with a link to the intranet site encouraging them to engage in the program and to have fun.

How did it go? Well, we expected customers to ask the questions – but they didn’t. So we realised staff needed to take the lead.

Our next program was linked to Library Lovers Week. The idea this time was not to promote a service, but to engage with customers so they leave having had a great experience.

We are continuing with our program, the next focus on a service – our newspaper related databases using the theme: “Ask me about”. We will continue to monitor the success of this strategy. Hopefully the Word of Mouth will spread and be a natural process for staff to proactively engage with customers and have fun!

Julie Morgon
Team Leader Hub Library, City of Onkaparinga Libraries
julmor@onkaparinga.sa.gov.au

What the MSIT Library has learned from the retail industry

What has Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE Library learned from the retail industry in regards to customer service and how have they implemented what they have learned?

First, MSIT Library staff realise the importance of giving our customers what they want and need. Retailers obtain feedback from their customers through the use of surveys, telemarketers, or competitions. Feedback from MSIT customers is obtained from either talking directly to customers, our teachers and students, or by more formal means like questionnaires and focus groups. The suggestions made by our customers have been implemented in the way we provide our services and resources and in the type of services and products we provide.

Open when the customers want you to and make good use of advertising and promotions

Over the years MSIT have opened when customers want to use the library. Justice students and teachers have used the library on a Saturday. During the week the libraries have opened until 8pm for teachers and students to access resources when it is most convenient for them.

MSIT Libraries advertises the fact that customers can access our library catalogue and databases 24/7 during library orientations and with brochures and book marks. These are provided throughout the library and in packs sent out to students.

Promotions such as competitions and special displays are held throughout the year in the MSIT Libraries, but particularly during Library and Information Week or when students exhibit their assignments. MSIT are fortunate to have art and fashion students that are happy to display their projects in the library. The library also takes advantage to promote its services during other events like the Vintage Fashion Fair held at Mt Gravatt campus.

Roving Reference

It is rare to walk into a retail store without staff shouting out a greeting or approaching customers to ask how they can be of assistance. MSIT library staff have become roving reference librarians by sitting in the student areas and by roving around the library looking for opportunities to assist. This prevents students from ignoring the reference desk if they feel intimidated.

Training

Retail staff realise the importance of training with regards to serving customers. It is also important for library staff to hone their skills. At MSIT Library, staff have participated in their own specially developed training such as Customer Service in the Library or through ALIA PD courses such as the recent Managing for Service Quality.

MSIT Library staff take note of specific instances of service that has impressed them in retail stores and link it back to the way they serve customers in the library. These points are brought up in monthly staff meetings.

Michelle Coxsen
Library Technician – Alexandra Hills Learning Precinct
michelle.coxsen@deta.qld.gov.au
SHHHH! Libraries in the closet

A recent comment by Jan Richards in the January 2010 Frontline told of her heart-warming experience of seeing an elderly library patron feel comfortable enough to spread out her sewing on the library tables and proceed to use the public space as a ‘community living room’.

This got me thinking about who is actually included and who is excluded in our ‘community living rooms’. In my role as Internet Librarian at Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV), I hear a lot of stories from young people about the blocks to accessing information about themselves. I’m talking about same-sex attracted young (SSAY) people; young people who are questioning their sexuality. Ross, a seventeen-year-old, told me how he found a book about coming-out stories in his public library, but he was so worried about the reaction he might get from the librarian at the issuing desk that he didn’t know what to do. Eventually his desperate need for information led him to tuck the book up his jumper and walk out of the library with the book hidden.

“My series of books titled Hot Hits is kept on the school library shelf, but as one school librarian said to me: ‘I must confess that I keep this one (Hot Hits Re-Mix) under the counter because of the strong themes about same sex attraction and sexuality’. When I asked her how the kids would find it, she replied ‘oh I know who they are and can easily suggest it to them.’” – author Bernie Monagle.

The same author tells another story of other books about same-sex attraction disappearing from the school library shelf almost as soon as they were put there. The books reappeared years later tattered and well thumbed. It took one brave pupil to take the books out or steal them and then pass it around for the not-so-brave to pick up and read.

The Dewey Decimal System as recently as the 1960s still categorised homosexuality under deviants and outcasts. Considering how far things have improved, even in our own profession (gay and lesbian subject headings 305 – 306), it’s still a shock to realise that libraries aren’t the welcoming community living rooms for all of us.

Over the last few decades the situation for gay and lesbian people has improved dramatically due to factors including decriminalisation in all States and Territories, equality legislation, and greater openness in the media. On the whole this is great news, but it also heightens the uncertainty many people face when deciding whether they disclose their sexuality. Lesbian and gay people still encounter hatred and abuse. Homophobia is still a big problem in Australia. Thirty-five percent of Australians aged 14 and above believe that homosexuality is immoral.

How can you make a difference?

There are many ways in which you can signal that your library is open and welcoming of GLBT people. Imagine yourself as Ross, the seventeen-year-old young gay man. Walk through your library and see it as Ross might. What would you like to see that signalled to you that this library includes you as a valued patron? Is there a section on lesbian and gay topics? Are books about gay and lesbian issues readily available and included in the collection? Are there posters or signs that include you? Are the free gay papers available and on display along with all the other local community papers? Does the library subscribe to magazines directed at gay and lesbians readers?

Not everyone will feel safe or comfortable walking up to the ‘gay section’ of the library. Can you set up a safe area in your library where an internet access computer terminal and online catalogue is in a space where other people can’t see what the patron is looking at? This way a GLBT patron can look up information confidentially.

You can visit an SSAY support group in your area and ask the young people what they would like to see in their library or take a selection of books of interest to them that they can borrow. You can suggest that they can reserve books online and collect them in person. By meeting you they can feel safe about coming to the library.

It’s not enough to say that “oh we don’t have those types of clients in our library”. How do you know? These are all very simple steps which can be taken to make your library a safe and inclusive space for GLBT people and to truly create a welcoming living room for ALL the community.

The Gay and Lesbian Health Victoria (GLHV) website (www.glhv.org.au) although aimed at health providers and GLBTI people, does offer useful information and resources. GLHV also provides service provider training, again check out the website for more.

Sunil Patel
Internet Librarian/Information Manager
sunil.patel@latrobe.edu.au

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New library, new opportunities

What do you do when you’ve got a brand new library? Develop a new proactive customer service model to go with it.

Since the doors of Gordon Institute of TAFE’s new East Geelong Campus opened on 5 October 2009, we’ve been rushing off our feet. Why? We’ve started doing things a little differently. And our customers – staff and students from disciplines as diverse as plumbing, IT, remedial massage, and interior design – have been flooding in. In our previous library, our practice was largely about library staff: what was easy for us, what made sense to us. Moving into a brand new, purpose built building gave us the fresh start we needed to rethink that approach. As we prepared for the move and imagined our new space, we found ourselves thinking more about our customers and less about ourselves. Now we put our staff and students firmly at the centre of what we do.

We started with a thorough collection review. Over five thousand items were reviewed and withdrawn. “Do we really need a text for every version of Windows?” we asked ourselves. “Do our customers want or use it? Do they need it?” We quickly realised asking ourselves wasn’t the most effective way of gauging needs. We had to ask our customers. We invited teachers in to tell us what they needed and wanted. Decisions were made through formal meetings, walk-in perusals, and timetabled ‘dotting’: a yellow adhesive dot stuck on the item spine to say “Keep this one. It’s useful”. So when we arrived in our flashy new space, we brought with us a tight, focused collection: relevant, up-to-date, and tailored to our customers’ needs.

Next we arranged that collection in the new library. Our staff, customers, many of whom have enjoyed a long tenure at the Institute, are creatures of habit. They would walk to the same spot in the existing library they had been walking to for years, find what they expected to find, and leave. Our challenge was to make collections easy to navigate while also shaving staff and students the things they’d habitually been missing. Carefully and exhaustively planned subject hubs are meeting this challenge. We’ve taken some risks. We increased display spaces. We interfiled DVDs and journals with books. We upset Dewey order for library staff? Yes, but it’s getting easier each day as we become more familiar with the layout. And suddenly there’s more shelving for library staff? Yes, but it’s getting easier each day as we become more familiar with the layout. And suddenly there’s more shelving for library staff? Yes, but it’s getting easier each day as we become more familiar with the layout. And suddenly there’s more shelving for library staff? Yes, but it’s getting easier each day as we become more familiar with the layout. And suddenly there’s more shelving for library staff? Yes, but it’s getting easier each day as we become more familiar with the layout. And suddenly there’s more shelving for

RFID and a self-service kiosk give staff and students the means to check out their own items. Library staff are free to do other things, like talk with people about books or DVDs, or provide one-on-one database assistance, or discuss an assignment. We can now invest time in our staff and students without having to intermittently duck back to the counter to issue items. We’re learning people’s names. And they’re coming in again and again. Has the introduction of self-service killed our interaction with users? Not in the least. It’s enhanced it. Is the routine checking out of items really customer service anyway? Or is customer service having the time to assist and build relationships with customers?

We don’t care much about the noise our customers make. We don’t mind if they move furniture. Or if they eat or drink in the library. Instead, we promote these things so our customers understand that the library is their space. We’re working with students for whom the library is not familiar territory. Vast reams of rules and dos and don’ts won’t make them want to come here, let alone hang out or borrow. So our couch has some grubby footmarks on it. We’re delighted: it’s evidence that young apprentices are making themselves comfortable in the library.

How do we know our new customer service model is working? Simple. The library is always busy. Staff and students are in it. More is being borrowed than ever before. Our old regulars have made the move with us and we’ve gathered new regulars along the way. People ask for our help more, and now offer theirs – suggesting additions to the collection or new things to do in the library. And these relationships are important, not just for confirming that what we did works, but more importantly because they are integral to helping us continually improve and tailor their library and its services.

Customer service and the Unconference

On Saturday 20 February 2010 Gold Coast City Council Library hosted an Unconference, PodCampGC.

Why?

Library staff were confident there was a demand for information about social networking tools and applications to be delivered to a more tech-savvy audience. An Unconference environment was trialled as being the most suitable way of responding to a need that library staff could not clearly define. We wanted to let the customers choose the service they wanted.

We offered the venue, speakers, access to online tools via laptops and WiFi, the broad topics, and a draft program. Participants self-registered online. The participants refined the program on the day including adding/removing topics, ordering the sessions, and questioning the program. Therefore the participants dictated the flow of knowledge based on their needs.

The Unconference format required speakers to be knowledgeable on the topic and fluid in their delivery; the flexibility to repeat sessions due to demand, expand on some aspects or offer more detailed content, adapt language and delivery to the varied levels of the audience, and allow session lengths to expand or contract to meet participants’ needs; a number of speakers who could contribute to each conversation, enriching the experience and providing differing life examples; participants’ engagement and the freedom to ‘vote with their feet’ and move to a different session; the ability to talk on unscheduled topics e.g. we incorporated a jargon busting session after the participants identified this need; and plenty of time for questions, avoiding a formal ‘lecture-style’ format.

Conclusion

Requests for more similar events, ongoing interest in the Twitter hashtag created for the event #podcampgc, the enthusiastic participation on the day, and the fact that the majority committed to a full day at the event indicates PodCampGC was a success. It was rewarding from both the staff and participants’ perspective to successfully hold an event where the participants could request the topics to be discussed and staff could respond to their needs.

Ruth Thomas
Librarian, Gordon Institute of TAFE Library
rthomas@gordonontafe.edu.au

Lisa Miller and Louise Pieper
PodCampGC Organising Team
lmiller@goldcoast.qld.gov.au
Face up to it and get social in your library

Every library needs to market and promote their library to ensure customers know they exist. Newspaper sales, phone directories, and magazines are all losing their impact in society and it is harder to get your message across using these media formats. I am not suggesting you stop doing this form of interruption marketing, but you do need to spread your message a lot further using different media.

The first challenge is, do you spread the message? In the good old days, you had control of your marketing message, but today the reverse is true: the consumer has control of your marketing message and that will not change. The game has changed forever and a lot of libraries are being left behind.

A retail example of this occurred recently. It happened in a hardware store in Connecticut, USA at 9.00am. A customer went into the store and the cashier processed their query and took the sale without looking at the person, and carried on talking over the phone to their friend. When the transaction was finished, the customer asked “Do I get a thank you for dealing with you?” The salesperson looked up and said, “It is on the receipt; what else do you want?” I heard about this incident about three hours later in Western Australia – the wonders of the social network.

The customer is now in control and can spread the message about your library, for good and bad, around the world in a matter of seconds. The key is that you should be a part of the communications chain. You cannot own it, but you must be part of it.

Read the book

If you are puzzled about what the social media is all about and how to use it for your business, then a good place to start is to read Paul Cheney’s excellent book, The Digital Handshake, 7 proven Strategies to grow your business using social network.

When I present at conferences I ask how many people in the audience in their leisure time are involved in social networking; on average about 75% of people put their hands up. When I ask how many organisations are involved in social media networking, I am lucky if I get five hands go up. As customers we are talking about our experiences with libraries and retailers, but as libraries the majority of us are not getting involved in the conversation.

Look at the facts: 22% of the world’s population are online, 200 million are on Facebook, and 125 million on My Space. That is before you consider the 133 million bloggers and 195 million cell phones used in the USA. When it comes to social networking, around 62% of the population are involved. What a marketing opportunity.

Research by Edelman Public Relations in 2006 introduced some interesting facts for retailers, and the same applies to libraries.

We may think we are trusted with the advice we offer our patrons, but the research shows that we are three times more likely to trust comments and advice on social media from people we believe are just like us. The result is that 67% of buying or borrowing decisions are influenced by word of mouth marketing from other people. The consumer today is looking for real advice, not marketing messages.

According to research carried out by Home Textile Today and reported on the web on February 11, 2010, Facebook is the top social media with 50% of shoppers using this website and following on average five retailers. Is your library being followed on Facebook?

What does this mean for you?

What worked in the past will not work in the future. You need to be doing less with traditional marketing and more with social networking channels. But, where do you start? There are numerous avenues out there and you could soon get lost and give up.

I am a great believer in keeping it simple.

Facebook is being used by many businesses with great success. IKEA, in Malmo, Sweden have their manager promoting furniture on Facebook and this is working tremendously well. A chain of pubs in the UK are using Facebook to drive their business and anyone who goes to their Facebook page can download a coupon for a free ice cream as a dessert when they order a meal. It is time for libraries to get on board the trend and start marketing themselves on social media tools.

Make sure you tag your library name with Google so that if any one mentions your library you can see what they are saying and respond quickly and join in the conversation. You may be able to diffuse a difficult customer service issue or reward a patron for promoting your library.

Leading retailers are experimenting with social networking to see what works for them and what does not. Leading libraries need to do the same. The key to success is for all service providers to jump in now – to leave it could be the most damaging thing you do to your organisation in 2010.

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info@johnstanley.cc

John Stanley
Re-imagining customer service in Western Sydney Institute TAFE Libraries

TAFE clientele necessitate a unique library environment. A good proportion of the TAFE library’s clients are people that have decided to make a difference in their lives. These students may have come from overseas and have little English, they may be living with a disability, or are simply ready to make a career change or return to study after a long time away from the workforce.

Western Sydney Institute TAFE Libraries have embraced the changing face of customer service delivery by adopting a holistic approach with a theme of education. By recognising the differences in our clients and adapting the way we deliver services, we are able to build strong working relationships with staff and students.

A student of Blacktown College Library recently remarked on the completion of his course that the librarians made him feel “valued and important”, demonstrating the relationships TAFE libraries can foster with their students. The TAFE library allows itself the flexibility to offer the sometimes special care and attention needed to build a student’s confidence and help them thrive within the educational environment.

It is common practice at Western Sydney Institute College Libraries to see beyond the basic textbooks and passwords and endeavour to provide a service and environment that keeps up with changing vocational training delivery methods while acknowledging the individuality of the students’ needs.

Western Sydney Institute College Libraries cover seven college campuses across North West and Western Sydney, as well as providing an invaluable remote library service by flexible delivery through OTEN.

Emerging technology is always being considered and used as a viable way to deliver services, like Adobe Captivate sessions for off-campus students to learn how to use the catalogue. A future consideration is the use of podcasts to provide start of semester library orientations to staff and students alike.

In the last eighteen months, Baulkham Hills College Library has had to address the issue of serving students at the new Castle Hill campus which does not house a library. They have introduced an online request process and delivery service for both students and staff. They have also taken on the role of providing ongoing display material for this campus.

Blacktown College Library remains committed to providing a non-threatening flexible service for the high population of students from NESB. This college is split into two campuses and the library has adapted by providing a Mobile Library that travels to the classrooms, enabling students who may have not even considered using the library to borrow, and increase library awareness. Blacktown College Library also has embraced the TAFE students of the future by working with the adjacent childcare centre and providing storytime and craft sessions. Beautiful new children’s books are available for the centre to borrow; this of course has a flow-on effect to the children’s parents, most of whom are currently studying, to see the library as a comfortable and comforting learning environment.

Each of the campus libraries houses a Learning Centre. In some libraries, these rooms are used as shared computer rooms, but in all cases they are primarily for running tutorials on subjects from computing to resume preparation. These are very popular with students who may need out of classroom support, and provide access to learning support teachers who are able to cater to an individual or small group of students. Blacktown College Library has just introduced a library tutorial that is available for those that need extra assistance with research skills, referencing, or searching online databases.

A grown-up Library Lovers Day

Building relationships through events such as Summer Reading Club, Story Time, Home Work Help, You Tutor, and Library Lovers Day are busy but fun forms of customer service.

Having noticed that most of our events had been aimed at our younger members, we thought it was time to focus on an event for the adults. Library Lovers Day seemed the perfect choice. Unfortunately we left our run a little late, so we weren’t able to roll it out in all our 11 branches. Mareeba staff jumped right in and decided on a champagne breakfast on February 15th and ‘Blind Dates’ with a book. Blind Dates were available for two weeks starting from February 8th and helped to create a buzz.

What was all this blind date business? It really got people talking and bookings for the breakfast filled up fast.

The champagne breakfast was a huge success; we even got to sing Happy Birthday to one of our guests as it just happened to be his 87th birthday. A small survey was handed out in the shape of a heart card asking guests what they loved most about our library, bellies were filled, and a pretty but simple paper heart craft was offered. We catered for 40 people.

Interaction at these events is such a personal and fun way to build relationships. It definitely reinforces in our borrowers a sense of ownership of the library, its resources, and its staff. The time staff and customers spent together having a cuppa and chat allowed us to get on a personal level with members of the library. This sense of familiarity makes the customers feel more comfortable about asking for any help they may need now or in the future.

At TRC Libraries we love our work, enjoy customer interaction, and want to promote our libraries as a venue for community fun and learning.

Sandra Phillott
Library Assistant Mareeba, Tablelands Regional Council
sandrap@trc.qld.gov.au

Rebecca Davis
Librarian, Blacktown College Library
rebecca.davis@tafensw.edu.au

Rebecca Davis
Librarian, Blacktown College Library
rebecca.davis@tafensw.edu.au

Sandra Phillott
Library Assistant Mareeba, Tablelands Regional Council
sandrap@trc.qld.gov.au
Surviving the ages

Throughout history, libraries have always maintained high levels of customer service. It is a part of our heritage and, from this glorious past, we can derive great examples of customer service still easily applicable in the modern world.

Individual attention to client needs is a key component in providing quality service in any industry. Much like today, many libraries’ continued existence is owed to a higher funding body, and to the clients it serves. Regardless of individual rank or title, it is long-established tradition that kings, queens, and chief ministers are always accorded equal respect when they came to the library. Even today, councillors and junior ministers are also accorded the same respect as was paid to royal families and nobility.

Libraries in the past also understood the need to innovate and change according to available resources. Around the twelfth century, service standards began to be applied to the books that many libraries had acquired. The chaining of books to shelves or a reading desk ensured these limited resources were protected from willful damage, and that members could obtain access to the largest collection of knowledge at any single time.

During this time, loans policies also began to be applied. Monastic libraries required surety (in the form of land) before loaning could occur to individuals. Instead of fines, borrowers faced excommunication, damnation, or anathema if items were not returned in good condition. In 1212 the Council of Paris decreed that the threat of anathema should be removed from lending conditions. Later this interpretation was rescinded by executive management in organisations where the libraries serve a higher purpose. Pope Sixtus (1585-1590), for example, decreed that no book should be removed from the Vatican Library under pain of anathema.

Many libraries however, made do with various curses that were as individual as the scribes who replicated books. These have now been removed but what librarian would not want to include something like the warning below in a loans policy, to ensure that all library materials would be returned on time and without damage?

Who folds a leafe downe
Be devill toaste browne,
Who makes marke or blotte
Be devill roaste hot,
Who stealith thisse boke
Be devill shall cooke.

Libraries have always assisted people regardless of political or religious views. From Hulagu Khan (grandson of Genghis) to General Franco, the destruction of libraries has always provided an important focal point for armies, conquerors, and reformists. The destruction of the Royal Library of the Samarid dynasty and the burning of the Jaffna Public Library in Sri Lanka, are two examples of the need to destroy cultural history that has made libraries a prime target in militant situations. This service, although intrinsically counter-productive, demonstrates that libraries can be useful in a variety of situations, including warfare.

To a lesser scale, libraries have also had a historic but central role to play in censorship. Book burning, for example, has long been a pursuit advocated by both theologians and dictators. It has often provided a rallying point for rampaging mobs, and, happily, libraries have always been seen as ample providers. Again, this type of need has resurfaced across history – from Emperor Qin Shi Huang’s decision about all books not written in Qin, or Hitler’s anti-Semitic crusade – and has been met by a variety of libraries.

So where to next for customer service in libraries?

Given the recent interest in visual displays, floor-walking attendants, and a single library card – retail stores should continue providing a lead in this area during the first decades of the twenty-first century. Promotional offers or giveaways, colourful advertising brochures, and better use of space through floor plans based on client needs rather than traditional expectations are all on the cards. A rising number of Generation X and Y households don’t want to spend their leisure time waiting in queues, and collecting books from the library may be a secondary activity to walking the dog or going for a run.

But just be wary of any customer service activity that involves ‘Ask Me How’ badges, or any form of head-gear which repeatedly emits fluorescent light or sound every 5-20 seconds.

Trust me, the Mongols will be knocking at the door soon enough.

Vena McGarry
venalibrarian@gmail.com


5. Ibid.

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**Have You Been CKDesigned? They Have**

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**The Gateway - Randwick Library, NSW**

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**The Little Spot (Children’s Area) - Randwick Library, NSW**

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**Library Planning & Design Specialist**

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Information delivery and web 2.0

Reference and information services. The words never meant much to me before I started working for City Libraries Townsville. I have an Information Technology background and directly supported the library staff and patrons from time to time with IT issues and problems as they arose. The amalgamation of our neighbouring councils, and therefore their library services, opened some interesting options for me and I moved into the library in a role supporting the network infrastructure, hardware, software, and staff queries. I also took the opportunity to work with the library’s online presence.

Here in our library we have started to experiment with an online reference/information service using web 2.0 tools. We have figuratively stepped out of the building and have starting meeting people where they need the information the most. Using Twitter we have setup our very own library ‘Twinformation’ service (http://www.twitter.com/townsvillelib). People can ask questions and be sure to get timely responses from any of the three staff monitoring the page. We are no longer binding our patron’s quick questions to a lengthy drive to their local library, now we ARE where our patrons are, but that’s not all.

The point of this exercise is to provide information to the public in a quick and easily accessible way, but it’s the way we are going about it that’s different. We are now able to actively address the public by monitoring the “twitterverse” for potential questions and queries. By doing this we can respond and offer service in a way that we’ve never reached out before. Not only are we reaching out about book or research related queries, this has given us the ability to be excellent civic preachers by responding to questions regarding local history, restaurants, sports teams, and other attractions that locals and visitors alike may be interested in. The point to consider here is that we don’t believe we can be an authority on everything. Therefore we use online tools and community collaborations to help justify our responses and provide reference to those tools where applicable. For instance, if someone was asking where they might find local campsites in the Townsville region, we might use the EPA national parks website (http://www.derm.qld.gov.au/parks/) to show a list of campgrounds based by region. This not only gives the end user something to look at right away, it helps them to help themselves.

With all these online tools how do we know which one to use and how best to use it? Twitter is only one method of delivery. There are new tools coming out that are showing promise. Google has been working hard on the web 2.0 front with their latest releases Wave and Buzz. Wave has the potential to go far with online collaboration and Buzz provides some good opportunities to connect with users (a la FriendFeed). However there is no silver bullet in the case of what works. Do some research and find what will allow the best method of delivery for your information. What are you providing? Where does your target audience ‘hang out’ online and how can you use that to connect with them? These are the sorts of questions you should be asking prior to implementation. Other options may involve using a Facebook fan page as a means to connect with current and potential patrons, or setup a Skill account for your library. Get the public involved with games and competitions. The idea is widely publicised but in any case it’s a game of getting into the user space and out of the old ways of the past.

In my limited experience, it seems to pay to get back to basics. Don’t be limited by policy and procedure, stop that state thought process and start thinking about what the customer wants, where they spend their time, and how they access online resources. Think of the best, most fun way to deliver information and remember that sometimes the simple answer is also the best one.

In our example, the Twinformation service took about three hours to set up, from the get go, including brainstorming implications, staff resourcing, and branding the page. The exact policy and procedures were developed and put into place in the days after the launch and as issues arose.

Neal Thorley
Desktop Administrator, City Libraries Townsville
neal.thorley@townsville.qld.gov.au

Summer enhancements to Curtin clients’ virtual and physical experience

While the majority of Curtin Library’s clients enjoyed a break from study and teaching over the summer months, library staff prepared to improve both their virtual and physical experience in 2010.

The library overhauled its website (http://library.curtin.edu.au) with changes that are far more than cosmetic. Usability testing, card sorting, and analysis of usage statistics for the library’s previous website revealed that it needed to be simplified, and content needed to be de-jargonised and reorganised to improve accessibility.

Taking a fresh view of the website was important so library staff worked closely with web-design experts within the university’s Digital Media Unit. Our aim was to develop a site which is far more intuitive and user-friendly and better meets the needs of our diverse clientele.

The comments from clients have been overwhelmingly favourable. “I love the new look,” said one client, with others commenting: “It’s much easier to navigate and directions are clear and user-friendly” and “What a breath of fresh air this new site is!”

Physical facilities were also significantly upgraded with enhancements to two floors. The library’s entry level now provides a vibrant area ideal for interactive study. Medium and large tables to accommodate study groups of various sizes have been extended throughout the area, while custom-designed booths and benches provide opportunities for group discussions. Comfortable flexible seating abounds, with some placed strategically near lifts, stairwells, and entry points to allow clients to catch up with friends or work while watching the world go by.

Another level has been reconfigured to consolidate it as an area for quiet study with plenty of individual workstations and larger, powered carrels installed to provide students with enough space to accommodate books, papers, laptops, and other mobile devices.

Lesley Budrovich
Communications Officer, Curtin University Library
l.budrovich@curtin.edu.au

18 inCite

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Revitalising libraries for the self-serve generation

In November 2008 I was awarded the Margery C Ramsay Scholarship by the Library Board of Victoria for my application entitled Revitalising Libraries for the Self Serve Generation. My plan was to look at libraries in Australia and New Zealand to identify what is working across the country to ensure that libraries continue to develop, stay relevant for their customers, and become the third place in the lives of their communities. I was also interested in how we, as library professionals, adapt to provide services in what is becoming an increasingly self serve environment.

I visited libraries across Australia and in New Zealand, and discovered that while we are making great bounds in innovative spaces and technologies, we are often leaving our staff behind. On many visits I asked, “what did you do with staff around these changes?” or “what training did you give to staff to support customers?” Often little or no training was given, sometimes they just ‘got used to it’, other times staff had training in the use of the equipment with little thought put into how these changes may impact workflows and the interactions between customers and staff.

In many libraries, when we take on a new staff member we train them in the system, we train them in our processes, we have them shadowing on desk, and then we let them loose on our customers. We focus heavily on how things work, but in an environment where most things work on their own, we need to start putting more emphasis on where staff fit into service delivery and how service excellence can be achieved when staff are not needed in the same way.

In short, we need to change the way we deliver our training. Above and beyond the basics, we need to coach staff in being able to identify opportunities to interact and support customers within the self-serve environment, more than knowing the processes; they need to be confident with the technology, the environment, and themselves.

In a place that has many more books and computers than staff, we need to guide staff to the understanding that they are the most important part of our service. As part of my research I undertook customer surveys on the shopping experience at book and AV retailers. Overwhelmingly customers expected staff to be available, friendly, and knowledgeable. While traditional training covers the knowledge of processes and systems, ways must be found to model service delivery with regard to accessibility and relationship building.

Self-serve technologies are actually removing staff barriers to interacting with customers. With the reduction or removal of traditional desks, staff have the opportunity to floor walk and interact with customers among the shelves. Self serve options for customers offer staff freedom from repetitive circulation transactions to talk to customers about the variety of services and activities available at the library and within the community.

While the changing library environment supports this new way of working, it is important to be mindful of staff, to ensure that staff are supported through changes. Staff who have worked in a traditional library environment for some time will need training not just how to use a new piece of technology, but how to work it to their advantage, making positive changes to their workflows and interactions with customers.

From my research I have designed a training package specific to the self-serve environment, offering staff the opportunity to workshop their individual customer service experiences and identify a consistent approach to creating positive customer interactions. In addition I created team games to make the learning of technology more engaging and give staff the opportunity to start sharing new skills immediately.

In March 2010 Hobsons Bay Libraries will open a fifth branch and I will see the culmination of my scholarship research. Altona North Community Library is adjacent to a P-9 school and busy shopping precinct. Within the space there will be themed subject lounges, quiet study areas, meeting rooms, a gaming zone, children’s library, and a café. Technology wise it has all the bells and whistles including RFID self serve terminals, PC self booking, wifi, and a print management system with self-serve recharge. However for me the most important aspect of the new library is not what can be seen, but what can be felt. For me success will be the seamless integration of technology and customer service – confident and knowledgeable staff, creating a welcoming vibe and a positive experience for customers.

Joanne Smith
Hobsons Bay Libraries
jsmith@hobsonsbay.vic.gov.au
Five minutes with Elizabeth Kostova

1. It took you ten years to write your first book, The Historian. How did you stay motivated?

It was a labour of love. I was doing a lot of teaching and odd jobs, but writing it was my escape. It was hard-work, but also a pleasure. I loved the research aspect of it; it was a way of focusing in on something I was interested in.

2. I know that there are plenty of people in our profession who were a bit thrilled to find that Dracula was after a librarian, a keeper of knowledge. Where did that come from?

I needed a reason for why Dracula was collecting librarians, and it came to me as I wrote the story.

3. Did you start with the library story or the Dracula story?

I started with the Dracula story, but I’m so obsessed with libraries and scholarship that it just keep creeping in.

4. Do you plot ahead, or do you write as you go?

I had the structure of The Historian when I started, and then plotted it from there. The Swan Thieves I did very differently. I had characters I love and the general arc of the story but I wrote in long bursts the parts that engaged me. It was a great way to write a story, but it took a long time to edit. It took me a year just to edit and reorder the book.

5. In The Swan Thieves you write from the male 1st person. Did you have a hard time getting into that head space?

Yes, I did. I always have my male friends, male writer friends, read over the male parts. They often tweak parts: ‘oh Marlowe wouldn’t drink that wine’. I love the challenge of writing characters who are very much not me.

6. Your books seem to explore the importance of the arts to our humanity. Would you like to expand on that?

When I wrote The Historian I spent 10 years engrossed in some pretty dark history. When I began looking at paintings, it was a kind of relief. I started to think about the really beautiful things we created, the miracles of human life. It felt like an antidote. There is something so amazing about standing in front of a beautiful painting, the past it creates, the time it came out of or defied. It’s a beautiful thing.

7. How was following up The Historian after it was such a success?

A lot of people have asked me that! I was lucky that my publisher was very supportive of letting me write the next book I wanted to write. There’s something about the writing process that doesn’t allow you to think about anything else. I’ve never been interested in writing to a market, and I’d been writing seriously for 20 years before I published my first novel. It’s a habit and a way of life. Even if I hadn’t published The Historian I would have kept writing.

8. What are you working on now?

I started a new novel in November. It’s so new a project that I’m not talking about it because I’m afraid the energy will run out. But it does involve a lot of historical research.
the well-loved series X-men thrown into the mix. Even better, it's Australian and there recognisable landmarks throughout the text, making one wonder if perhaps it's possible, that there are walking among us, the Rare.

**U is for Undertow**

Sue Grafton  
Pan MacMillan, 2009  
ISBN: 978023711372  
RRP: $32.99

_U is for Undertow_, the 21st Kinsey Millhone mystery, is a strong addition to the series. Kinsey is an ex-policewoman private investigator in 1980s Santa Teresa, California, and her current case concerns a child's kidnapping and death 20 years before. Michael Sutton, a child himself at the time, has suddenly recalled seeing two men digging in the woods – could they have been about to bury a body?

Grafton mixes flashbacks – not only in time but in points of view – with Kinsey's present day work. The consequences of family environment are the major theme, and both positive and negative parent-child interactions are presented.

Sufficient back-story is given to refresh the memory of long-term fans and to bring newcomers up to speed. As with the latter stories, this one includes more of Kinsey's personal life, and shows the maturing of her character: rigid loner Kinsey expresses emotion and contemplates getting a pet!

This book is well-structured and can be read in chapters or chunks. Other critics have reported the lack of surprise in the denouement; however I did not find that it reduced my reading pleasure. I did note the occasional use of noughties (not eighties) slang. Overall, _U is for Undertow_ is a book treat.

**The Preposterous Frog**

Beverley George  
illustrated by Tumi K. Steyn  
Kenilworth Tales, 2010  
ISBN: 9780957883178  
RRP: $15.00

In our multicultural world, children (and teachers) often come across names that are unfamiliar and a challenge to pronounce. _The Preposterous Frog_ takes this problem and engages with it in a gentle tone that is at once practical, imaginative, and wise.

The concepts of names, identities, and friendships are explored through characters that are both real and sympathetic, be they a frog, a goldfish, or an owl. George's characters live in a safe but not completely untroubled world, where there are challenges to be met, friends to meet, and solutions to be found to life's difficulties. Charming black and white drawings from emerging artist Tumi K. Steyn extend the characterisation and enhance the sense of calm that pervades the text. This collaboration between an Australian writer and a South African illustrator amply demonstrates the sense of goodwill and cooperation that underlies this deceptively simple, well-told tale. Attractively presented in a delicious froggy-green cover, this soft cover book is nevertheless sturdy enough to withstand many re-readings. Suitable to be read to preschoolers; independent readers to Year 3.

**Book of Souls**

Glenn Cooper  
Arrow Books, 2010  
ISBN: 978009547785  
RRP: $32.95

Glenn Cooper's race-against-time thriller _Book of Souls_ is the sequel to his bestselling novel _Library of the Dead_ about an ancient library protected by the US Government that holds a shocking and dangerous secret. Filled with historical intrigue and conspiracy theory, _Book of Souls_ has been compared to _The Da Vinci Code_, however the novel lacks the sophistication and believability of Dan Brown's bestseller. This is not to say it is without merit, but it is fair to say that the comparison to the cult classic breeds unrealistic expectation in the reader.

_Book of Souls_ is an enjoyable read with plenty of pace that uncovers a mystery hidden for centuries. Imaginative and interesting, the novel segues into different moments in time as each new clue is unravelled. Former FBI agent Will Piper is likable as the main protagonist, and his flawed struggle to overcome his personal demons and unlock the secrets of the library once and for all keeps the pages turning. It doesn't have the makings of a big budget Tom Hank's movie, but if you're looking for some intrigue and fast-paced action without getting bogged down in historical detail, _Book of Souls_ will definitely appeal to you.
**Alice Springs**
The Alice Springs Public Library’s Summer Reading Club this year was very popular. We had approximately 105 children and teenagers sign up. Toby Mathews, who was in the 13–17 year old age group, participated in the Club because he wanted to win the prize of an MP3 player for his mother, whose birthday was the day of the presentation and BBQ. Toby read a total of 110 books and won both the MP3 player as well as the mystery prize for his age group, which was a digital camera. His mother was very proud of him and very impressed with her birthday present.

**Bellingen**
On Friday 15th January NSW National Parks Senior Ranger Barbara Webster and Bellingen Shire Council Ranger Brett Hannaford spoke about what they do as National Parks and Council Rangers. Senior Ranger Barbara bought some fluffy friends along to help share the importance of looking after wildlife, and Council Ranger Brett explained about the importance of registering animals, notifying the Ranger of any dangerous animals, and other tasks that he performs. As well, the libraries offered Read on the Wild Side competitions with prizes to all children who entered and a $50 book voucher for the winning adult prize.

**Blacktown**
During a special presentation on Thursday 18 February, 2010 Blacktown City Mayor Charlie Lowles congratulated the children who participated in the Blacktown City Libraries third Summer Reading Club, in the Bowman Hall, Blacktown, as there was nowhere in the library large enough for a crowd of over 650 participants.

**Burnie**
Michael, from All about Reptiles delivered sessions about snakes to 3 libraries along the coast. It attracted over 80 children and adults at Burnie, over 100 at Devonport, and 140 at Smithton. Michael brought out slithering tiger snakes on sticks and a blue tongue lizard and python to be ‘patted’. Cleaning the table afterwards, I reflected on what we had all learned: that tiger snakes come in a range of colours; copperheads are unpredictable; and that snakes don’t poo very often - my lucky day!

**Cairns**
Cairns Libraries celebrated with a couple of wild (and one wacky!) workshops in January to celebrate the SRC. At a drawing workshop, children learned basic drawing techniques, drawing wild Australian animals and a not-so-Australian, but very wild tap-dancing monster! Where the Wild Things Are Storybook Adventures Workshop involved a dramatic reading of the classic story with children donning Max and Wild Things costumes and puppets, acting out the story before making their own Wild Thing costume out of various craft materials.

**Cessnock and Kurri Kurri**
For the first time ever, Cessnock and Kurri Kurri libraries invited adults to join the Summer Reading Club, under the premise that adults demonstrate to their kids (or grandkids) that they value reading, and showing kids they will have a bit of fun by joining the previously kids-only club.

Adults handed their reading logs in, one stating: ‘I read some interesting books so the staff don’t think I only read mush’. In total 25% of our entrants were adults, making this a very successful venture with great follow-on effects for adults and children.

**Griffith**
As an extension of our Book Week live reptile show, Griffith City Library followed on the jungle theme with the Summer Reading Club. This year was our biggest yet, with over 130 participants. We were fortunate to have the sponsorship of our local cinema, who donated free movie passes to all those who signed up for the Summer Reading Club.

Encouragement prizes were handed out along the way with some kids flashing their bright wristbands when they next came in to the library. Comments from mum and dad were also very positive.

On the final day of the challenge we invited all children who signed up to a free movie screening of The Wild (still going with the whole jungle theme), and pizza. On one of our hottest days in January (40 degrees +), the library was the place to be!

**Leeton**
Things got wild at Leeton over the summer. We decided to incorporate the showing of Where the Wild Things Are at our local theatre with the Read on the Wild Side promotion.

Robert and Charlie (our inflatable rhino and crocodile) were incorporated into a jungle display for promotion and were featured on the front page of our local
Serious fun all round!

Clowns! Juggling, diabolo, devil sticks, hula-hoops, unicycle, and amazing acrobatics were all the go, as well as balloon-twisting and drawing circus animals (a workshop provided by artists dressed as clowns!).

Payneham

They came one, they came all,
They came in a veritable stampede.
They came small, they came bigger,
They came alone, in pairs and in packs.
They read mysteries, thrillers and romance,
Fantasy, science fiction, adventure and humour.
Great migrations of bodies moved in unison towards the celebratory party,
Where promises of prizes, games, magic and glitter awaited all.
A cacophony of roars, yelps and squeals of delight was heard emanating from the throng,
Whose eager tones told the tale of their excitement over a great summer of reading.

Kiama

Was there something in the air at Kiama this year? I don't know – but this year the Summer Reading Club attracted a record number of participants.

We had 141 children register and, between them, read a total of 1540 books. Our only promotion was posters around the library and flyers to local schools.

Prizes were the same – no bikes or televisions or holidays – just the usual assortment of donated items. The holiday weather was great. Endless sunny days – not a rainy, reading day in sight! Was it the news that all books read could be added to their Premier’s Reading Challenge tally? Maybe it was the amazing wrist bands, tattoos, and stickers they received when they returned diary sheets! What was the reason for increased numbers? I don’t know – but I am really glad that 91 children spent at least part of their summer reading.

Can’t wait for next year! (well maybe I can wait a bit...)

Narrabri

Narrabri Library had a huge response to the Summer Reading Club. We had 102 registrations and 33 reading logs returned. We constructed a nine-foot-tall palm tree made from balloons, complete with a monkey, in the library which proved a great way to introduce the promotion. We ran weekly competitions which were also well supported. Twenty-nine children attended the prize giving party and prizes were presented by our mayor.

Onkaparinga

The Onkaparinga library service has delivered its annual Summer Reading Club, and for the first time children have registered online using Evanced Solutions’ Summer Reader software. Summer Reader helped library staff manage in-house registrations and offered an online registration self-service option for customers. Summer Reader also allowed staff to easily collect and manipulate statistics and produce reports.

Young library customers registering on-line have read over 3844 books and chalked up 2000 reviews, passing comment from Eric Hill’s to John Boyne’s Boy in the striped pyjamas.

Wentworth

On registration, each child received a pack containing instructions, reading lists, tattoo, wrist band, sticker, book mark, activity sheets, and reading records. As each book was read, its title and reader were marked on a special snake scale. It was wonderful to see the library snakes grow in length as the children read their books. After reading 10 books, the reader was eligible to submit an entry in the prize draw. There were 4 categories of readers, from pre-school to 14. The program ended with a snake activity session and prize draw.

West Gippsland

Unprecedented numbers of young readers joined up to ‘Read On The Wild Side’ at West Gippsland Regional Library Corporation this year. Some of our participants read well over 100 titles. As a reward for their hard work, we invited them to be party animals and make their own wild creations with modelling balloons. This event was held at two of our libraries and we would recommend it as a fun, easy-to-manage, inexpensive event for our summer readers. All you need is modelling balloons, balloon pumps, snacks, and some adults on hand to help the very little readers.

Yarra

For an ongoing summer activity Yarra Libraries’ Summer Reading Club made up book boxes containing 4 or 5 picture books that highlighted Australian authors and/or fitted the ‘wild’ theme. Kids read the books in the library and entered a competition by answering some questions. We rotated the boxes around the branches fortnightly. It kept the Club momentum going.

Maitland

Reading was promoted at Maitland City Library as a summer leisure activity, with over 600 books read by local kids who registered for the program. The reading program was supplemented with a range of fun activities on a wild circus theme. The exuberant Circus Avalon entertained and energised kids, including free workshops and performances filled with terrifying tricks and teeth-clenching traps, juggling, diabolo, devil sticks, hula hoops, unicycle, and amazing acrobatics were all the go, as well as balloon-twisting and drawing circus animals (a workshop provided by artists dressed as clowns!).

Serious fun all round!
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Get involved! New Graduate participation in ALIA

Do you see emails to the lists but don’t know who’s who and what’s what? Are you not even sure what the new grad list is, but you’ve seen events on Facebook or Twitter? Confused by all the acronyms we librarians love to put on everything we do? Well here’s a guide to what’s going on for new graduates, how all of these committees, conferences, and groups interact, and how you can get involved.

New Generation Advisory Committee (NGAC)

NGAC advises the ALIA Board on issues related to new graduates and students. As an advisory committee, our main function is to discuss the strategic issues related to new graduate participation within ALIA, rather than actively putting on events. When the future of the New Librarians Symposium was in doubt, we did a thorough review of the issue. This involved investigating how NLS had previously functioned, and assessing the positive and negative aspects of the conference as it existed. We created four potential models as to how NLS would work, and took these models to relevant stakeholders – including delegates at NLS4, the membership via the new graduates elist, and to the previous conference convenors of NLS. We then collated the feedback, and further discussed internally how we saw NLS surviving in the future, and what model was the preference to both meet ALIA’s needs and that of new graduates requiring professional development. We then wrote an extensive Board paper, which strategically evaluated all the pros and cons, and recommended to the Board that NLS continue as a stand-alone conference on the ALIA schedule, focusing on new graduate professional development. The timing of the conference has been modified to better sit within the ALIA conference schedule and recruit sponsorship. Current projects include those detailed below. Questions and suggestions can be directed to the Chair, Naomi Doessel, (naomidoessel@gmail.com, @naomidoessel).

New Librarians Symposium (NLS)

NLS was devised in 2002 by our current Executive Director, Sue Huley, when she was working at UQ. Sue saw a lack of professional development for new graduates and so put on the first NLS in Brisbane. It has grown in leaps and bounds since then, to a two-day conference that has in previous years also included a professional development workshop day, a trade exhibition, and major conference dinner. NGAC did a thorough review of NLS in 2008-2009, and recommended to the ALIA Board that NLS continue as a stand-alone conference on the ALIA schedule, focusing on new graduate professional development. The timing of the conference has been modified to better sit within the ALIA conference schedule and recruit sponsorship. Current projects include those detailed below. Questions and suggestions can be directed to the Chair, Naomi Doessel, (naomidoessel@gmail.com, @naomidoessel).

New Graduates Group (NGG)

The ALIA New Graduates Group provides a forum for new graduates to communicate and socialise with colleagues and build relationships and networks within the profession. The group aims to facilitate networking for the new generation of library professionals, provide a forum for the discussion of issues relevant to new professionals, organise meetings and training specifically relevant to students and new graduates, and facilitate the introduction of new graduates into the wider ALIA community. There are currently active groups in Victoria, Queensland, WA, SA, Tasmania, and NT. Join the e-list from the ALIA website to find out what’s happening, and contact NGG convenor Andrew Finegan (afinegan@gmail.com, @librarianidol) to get involved.

ALIA Access New Graduates stream

The program for the What Next! stream at ALIA Access 2010 is shaping up to be an exciting and fulfilling day. We are pleased to announce two of our guest speakers on the day will be Kate Davis, Associate Lecturer at Queensland University of Technology (QUT), and Emerald Leung from Civica Library and Learning. Both Kate and Emerald will share their experiences in the information profession and how it has led them to alternative careers away from a traditional library setting. We will also hear from recent new graduates who are doing some innovative projects in their libraries and with their careers as well as provide practical tips and advice on how to write abstracts, articles, and conferences papers. Look out for the registration information from ALIA and make sure you’re in Brisbane for ALIA Access in September! Convenor Rachel Crowe (rachellcroe@hotmail.com, @rcrowe) can be contacted for further information.

Advisory Committee Projects

Conference Mentoring: As a major project for 2010 and beyond, NGAC wishes to trial conference mentoring for first time attendees at large ALIA conferences. The American Library Association (ALA) runs this program at their annual conference through their New Members Round Table, and it is an opportunity for first time attendees to meet someone more experienced in the industry and in conference participation, and to gain insight into the best way to approach a major conference. First timers would be paired with more experienced delegates prior to the conference, and a conference focused mentoring relationship would be set up. This would be initiated prior to the conference and officially last for the duration of the conference.

Free conference registration: NGAC believes professional development through attendance at conferences is vital for new graduates. In the 2008 Member Survey, new graduates chose value for money at conferences as one of their most important criteria. NGAC believes ALIA can play an important role in encouraging new graduates to attend ALIA conferences by enabling someone to attend who would otherwise not be able to. The conference attendee would be required to write an article for Energise>Enthuse>Insire in inCite on their experience.

Energise>> Enthuse>> Inspire!

...gives a voice to the new generation of library and information professionals. If you have any suggestions or topics for this column, please contact the column co-ordinator Naomi Doessel, naomidoessel@gmail.com
Customer service

In the history of the internet, the concept of customer service has been developed in many ways – the one that interests me most is the way that a whole new category of service provider has arisen. And to illustrate this, all I have to do is look back to what I've been doing over the past few very busy months.

The main area of excitement has been moving house, including selling the old place. In Canberra, we have the benefit of a very good local operation called All Homes (http://www.allhomes.com.au), although there are similar operations elsewhere (and that's one of the big things to come out of the web: good ideas can be copied very quickly all over the place). Through services like this, you can get a good overall view of what's on the market, look at attractive photos of the houses, see how much interest there's been, and contact the agents. Now, advertising of real estate has been around for a long time, but what this type of service offers is ease: it's all there at the click of a mouse.

And when it's time to move and you need to dispose of all those unwanted goods and furniture, there's the online classified sites to look after that for you. (Although I must say that we had really good results from putting up a 'For sale' sign at the front of the house. Even in our quite little street, a surplus bed was snapped up in fifteen minutes.)

Once you've moved, you need to tell a lot of people about your new address, and not surprisingly when you think about it, there's only so much you can do on the net. There are some possibilities, and if you go to eMove at http://www.emove.com.au/, you'll see quite a few organisations that let you do it online, including many government bodies; but the more serious ones (banks and some health funds) will require a signed letter.

After all that we needed to buy a car; and that's where I was most impressed with the help that was on offer. The car makers of course have their flashy sites with brochures, pictures, and videos – but the information aggregators are the real stars here. Redbook (http://www.redbook.com.au/) and its associated site http://www.carsales.com.au for instance, offer plenty of data about new and used cars, including estimated price ranges, full specifications, pictures, and so on. They even have a form that you can fill out to send a new car query to a dealer in your area.

So, the secondary providers – like All Homes or eMove or Redbook – are the real stars now, all giving an extra level of service above that offered by the primary retailers.

Leaving the commercial world aside, there's quite a bit of discussion going on about how governments are providing online services. It's funny how things go in waves: first there were individual agency websites, then we moved to the idea of portals, and now they're falling into disfavour – if we're to believe Andrea di Maio, a Gartner analyst with impressive credentials. In a blog post at http://tinyurl.com/vxca73 he continues his argument that there is a better way to offer services, or at least for a large proportion of them. It really depends on what he's arguing against: a portal or an all-encompassing processing site. I think of the portal as a way of finding an online service, which may be on a generalised payment site or its own site where specific processing needs to be carried out. And Andrea's point about the uptake of portals being lower than expected – or perhaps lower than the figures that have been provided to the decision makers: well, it was ever thus.

Which is not to argue against further development, but few of us would want to go back to the old ways. Ugh!

And finally, a look at alternatives to the customer service that you find in libraries. It's long been recognised that people are inclined to look to their friends first in seeking an answer to a question. Say you're grappling with a problem in Microsoft Word: do you check the online Help features, do you call your local help Desk, or do you turn to your workmate and say 'Hey Tina ...'? And so it is with reference desks. For as long as we've had discussion groups, they're the place where the questions go (one of my groups has the unofficial acronym AKL, for All-Knowing List) and in many cases, the wisdom of that particular crowd can come up trumps.

Now, that's been regularised with Aardvark (http://vark.com/) where you register as someone with 'expertise' in one or more topics and you get to field questions submitted by users. Its business model wasn't clear for a while, but then they were acquired by Google – so I guess that particular question was answered.

The problem is that when you're using it you're really relying on the kindness of strangers (as you did with previous services, like Google Answers) and similarly the questioners may be innocent or not. In my chosen fields, I've provided answers to questions where I'm sure there was an agenda, as shown by the sorts of follow-up questions that came in.

Where this particular type of service is going, I'm not sure. On the web, we've become used to taking in (if not relying on) anonymous information and that's not going to change. I’d be interested to hear about trends in use of Reference Services in all sorts of libraries.

Kerry Webb
kwebb@alianet.org.au

Don’t forget to visit my blog
Promoting freedom in the media

Australia will play host to the new Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) at the UNESCO World Press Freedom Day 2010 conference, hosted by UQ, on May 2–3.

Mrs Irina Bokova will promote media freedom at an international conference on her first official visit to Australia. The conference theme is Freedom of Information: the Right to Know, and Mrs Bokova will give a keynote speech. She noted that Freedom of Information (FOI) “is a fundamental human right that UNESCO is specifically mandated to promote”.

UQ Vice-Chancellor and President, Professor Paul Greenfield, said the university was delighted by Mrs Bokova’s decision to make the conference a focus of her first official visit to Australia.

“Media freedom in all parts of the globe is intrinsic to a flow of factual information, which is essential if we are to identify and address the world’s problems,” Professor Greenfield said.

Mrs Bokova is the first woman to head UNESCO. As a former Bulgarian diplomat and Member of Parliament, she is also the first UNESCO chief from Eastern Europe.

The UQ-hosted UNESCO World Press Freedom Day conference will be the first such event in the Pacific, and will be a feature of the University’s 2010 Centenary celebrations.

Conference details and registration: www.wpfd2010.org
Marsali Mackinnon
World Press Freedom Day Conference Secretariat
m.mackinnon@uq.edu.au

Time to dust off those disaster plans

Blue Shield Australia, a member of the International Committee of the Blue Shield, which acts as the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross, is once again organising a month-long MayDay campaign to remind the cultural heritage sector of the importance of emergency preparedness.

MayDay is the time when libraries, galleries, archives, museums, monuments, and historic sites are encouraged to revisit their disaster plans to make sure they are up-to-date.

The focus for this year’s campaign is Disaster Proofing Heritage Collections – the Blue Shield Australia & DISACT Symposium 2010, a one-day event taking place at the National Library of Australia, Canberra, on Thursday 6 May.

The event will be launched by Jan Fullerton, Director-General of the National Library, and Kate Lundy, Senator for the ACT. Attendees will be members of the cultural heritage sector, as well as individuals and organisations working in the risk management, business continuity, insurance, and salvage recovery sectors.

Several new initiatives will be launched at the symposium, including ALIA’s new disaster preparedness guidelines for libraries.

To register your interest in attending, please contact Gemma Walker at gemma.walker@alia.org.au or 02 6215 8222.
2009 ALIA Annual Report
Due to final audit report delays the 2009 ALIA Annual Report will be available online in April, and in print in a later edition of inCite.
Members will be advised via email when the Annual Report is uploaded to http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/annual.reports/
All questions regarding the Annual Report should be emailed to executive.director@alia.org.au

Annual General Meeting motions
The request for motions for the 2010 Annual General Meeting closed on 5th March 2010. No motions were received by the ALIA Executive Director.
All members are welcome and are invited to join us in Canberra in May for the AGM - details below.

Rules of Meeting
1. Motions for discussion at the AGM are to be forwarded in writing to the ALIA Executive Director, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston ACT 2604 by Friday 5 March 2010. Motions should be signed by the movers either individually or on behalf of a division/group of the Association. All such motions received will be published in the AGM agenda notice in the March & April issue of inCite and on ALIAnet.
2. All motions to be put to the AGM must appear in this published agenda.
3. The only items that may be raised under general business are those of an informal nature, or those that are within the scope of the business already laid down. Motions of a substantial nature relating to items not covered in the notice of the meeting will not be allowed.
4. If any item of urgency arises which is not within the business of the meeting, the Chairperson has the power to accept it without notice or rule that notice must be given.
5. All motions additional to those on the printed agenda and in accordance with rule 4, and amendments, shall be in writing, signed by the movers (forms will be provided) and delivered to the Chair.
6. When addressing the Chair, the person desiring recognition will properly identify themselves, giving his or her name and affiliations. Only ALIA members may speak.
7. Debate shall be limited to three minutes for each speaker; no speaker may have the floor twice on the same question until all who wish to speak have spoken.
8. Proxies. To be valid, proxies must be in the form set out in the Constitution item 8.2 and be in the hands of the ALIA Executive Director, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston ACT 2604, email address: enquiry@alia.org.au, by 6:00pm AEST on 17 May 2010. Proxy forms must not specify how the holder of the proxy is to vote on specific areas. A proxy must also be a member. A form is available from ALIA National Office or on ALIAnet at http://www.alia.org.au/governance/
9. By general consent, if there be no objection, or by a two-thirds vote, any rule governing the debate may be suspended.
10. The Chair’s rulings on procedural matters may not be debated. The reference for rules and their interpretation by the Parliamentarian will be Joske’s The law and procedure at meetings in Australia, 10th ed, 2007. A Parliamentarian will be appointed to advise the Chair on procedures and to assist in determining the results of a poll of members present if necessary.

All members are invited to attend. RSVP Jenna Walter, ALIA National Office, ph 02 6215 8222; jenna.walter@alia.org.au

President Jan Richards and Directors invite members to join them at 6:00pm, Tuesday 18 May 2010 for the

ALIA Annual General Meeting
Final notice of Annual General Meeting and call for motions
The 22nd Annual General Meeting of the Australian Library and Information Association will be held on Tuesday 18 May 2010 Proposed location, ALIA House, Canberra (TBC)

Rules of Meeting
1. Motions for discussion at the AGM are to be forwarded in writing to the ALIA Executive Director, ALIA, PO Box 6335, Kingston ACT 2604 by Friday 5 March 2010. Motions should be signed by the movers either individually or on behalf of a division/group of the Association. All such motions received will be published in the AGM agenda notice in the March & April issue of inCite and on ALIAnet.
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All members are invited to attend. RSVP Jenna Walter, ALIA National Office, ph 02 6215 8222; jenna.walter@alia.org.au
New members


ALIA welcomes members who joined the Association in December 2009 and January 2010 and congratulates our members who have upgraded their qualifications.

Member to Associate

New Member

Matthew Johns

SA

Andrew Tutt

SA

Peter Reid

QLD

Unity Kerslake

NSW

Holly Adams

VIC

Helen Davis

ACT

Melinda Short

NSW

Susan Bell

QLD

New Associate Member

Catherine New

WA

Natasha Johnston

TAS

Janet Prowse

QLD

Ben Conyers

VIC

Ching Hsiang Kang

VIC

Nadia Patch

QLD

New Institutional Member

3M Australia

NSW

Study Group Library

WA

New Technician

Sally Baxter

QLD

Cvetka Knap-Becker

QLD

Mandy Crawford

TAS

Ying Song

NSW

Emily Hibberd

QLD

New Member

Moira Williams

SA

Sharron Costello

SA

Gloria Hughes

QLD

Melita Brandt

QLD

Helen Williams

QLD

Jules Turner

QLD

Bradley Ockenden

QLD

Rios Hong

QLD

Roy Crotty

NSW

Steven Bird

VIC

Shing Khoo

VIC

Makelesi Rataabua

VIC

Melissa Angelo

NSW

Jason Coleman

SA

Catherine Hainstock

VIC

Shruti Pandey

NSW

Steven Chang

VIC

Natolia Solovuva

NSW

Louise Warren

NSW

Stephanie Bradbury

QLD

Rashieda Abderoof

ZAR

Jane Beattie

VIC

Megan Earl

TAS

Jennifer Lee

QLD

Amanda Edwards

TAS

Claudia Reynolds

GBP

Melissa Ingles

NSW

Tanya Lee

VIC

Bharath Janakiram

QLD

Kirsten Anderson

USD

Shelly Sharma

NSW

Stacey O'Malley

WA

Vivienne Fox

VIC

Marissa Hood

VIC

Marilyn Jones

VIC

Victoria Branch

WA

Lisa Yeo

QLD

Jennifer Richardson

SA

Sheela Knjajic

WA

Ned Wales

NSW

John Hughes

WA

Janice Noble

NSW

Elaine Yo

VIC

Leopoldo Ferrel

NSW

Shelly Nir

NSW

Katherine Stevens

VIC

Bernadette Beard

NSW

Sean Chen

QLD

Kerry Ross

NSW

Readmitting Associate Member

Fiona Stevens

NSW

Matthew Kelly

TAS

Lisa Liston

VIC

Kerry Bedford

VIC

Suzanne Craig

QLD

Readmitting Member

Lisa Breerton

NSW

Events

http://www.alia.org.au/events

ACT


NSW

Check the events listing online at http://www.alia.org.au/events/nsw.htm for events.

NT

Check the events listing online at http://www.alia.org.au/events/nt.htm for events.

QLD

14 April: 9-11 am QOPAL meeting and presentation. DRUG ARM Resource Centre Level 2, 24 Hamilton Place, Bowen Hills Contact Teresa Hayward, 07 3620 8824, library@drugarm.com.au.

24 May: LIW Brisbane Trivia Night. Irish Club, Elizabeth St. Incorporates Qld Library Achiever of the Year award presentation. Contact Claudia Davies, 0407 964 967, claudia.davies@alia.org.au.

SA

Check the events listing online at http://www.alia.org.au/events/sa.htm for events.

TAS

Check the events listing online at http://www.alia.org.au/events/tas.htm for events.

VIC

Check the events listing online at http://www.alia.org.au/events/vic.htm for events.

WA

14 April: 5.30 for 6pm WALTG Meeting. Upstairs at St Teresa’s Library, Notre Dame Uni. Contact Judy Allan, 0892752506, pjallan@arach.net.au.

National Events & Campaigns


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The publisher reserves the right to reject any advertisement or copy considered offensive or outside advertising standards and regulations. The word ‘advertisement’ will be placed above or below copy which in the publisher’s opinion resembles editorial.

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Advertisements submitted to inCite are subject to approval by the publisher. Advertisers are responsible for ensuring that advertisements comply with Commonwealth and state laws.

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No cancellations will be accepted after the booking deadline. For all advertising policies, please visit the website http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/incite/rates.html.

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Member Services

Education
Course recognition: ALIA's course recognition program ensures that courses offered remain relevant to the needs of the profession.
Individuals who successfully complete an ALIA-recognised course may be admitted to Associate or Library Technician membership.
Many employers use course recognition as a professional standard for appointment to particular library and information jobs.
Contact: Dianne Walton-Sonda
ph 02 6215 8221, fx 02 6282 2249
dianne.walton-sonda@alia.org.au

Professional Development
Participate in the ALIA PD scheme to enhance your technical knowledge, skills and competencies and demonstrate your ongoing commitment to professional development.
The scheme is open to all personal and Library Technician members and is voluntary.
Contact: Judy Brooker
ph 02 6215 8216, fx 02 6282 2249,
pd@alia.org.au

Discounts with Partner Associations
AGLIN: Discount rates for conferences and PD
Australian Society of Archivists: Discounted rates for conferences.
Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA): Discounted rates for conferences, PD activities and publications.
IFLA: Discounted rates for IFLA conferences. You will require ALIA's IFLA membership number (available from the ALIA National Office). Full-time students are eligible for Student Affiliate membership of IFLA.
http://www.ifl.org
LIANZA: Member rates for conferences and publications.
http://www.lianza.org.nz

Copyright Services
ALIA offers a copyright advice service to members.
Contact: Helen Roberts, Monday and Thursday, ph 02 6215 8222,
copyright@alia.org.au
http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/copyright/

Interlibrary Loan Vouchers
ALIA can make your interlibrary loans easier with its voucher system. Contact ph 02 6215 8202, fx 02 6282 2249,
vouchers@alia.org.au

E-lists
Discussion lists to encourage communication between members.

Alia Awards
ALIA awards reward and honour ALIA members for outstanding service to library and information services and to the profession. Contact David McInnes
ph 02 6215 8221, fx 02 6282 2249,
aliaawards@alia.org.au

Industrial Relations
All IR queries to 02 6215 8222,
enquiry@alia.org.au

Alia Groups
ALIA Groups represent the many different areas of interest to our members. Groups offer a range of networking and professional development activities.
Contact: David McInnes
ph 02 6215 8221, fx 02 6282 2249
groups@alia.org.au

Alia Conferences
ALIA members receive discounted registration fees to all ALIA conferences, workshops and seminars.


Alia Public Campaigns
Each year, ALIA organises a number of national public campaigns to raise awareness of the sector and values of the Association. Contact: Kamara Buchanan
ph 02 6215 8214, fx 02 6282 2249,

Employment
(The latest job ads)
ALIA offers members convenient web access to employment listings. Whether you're looking for a change or for new staff, ALIA's employment page puts jobs where they'll be seen. The web pages are supplemented by our recruitLIS e-list. http://www.alia.org.au/

Alia E-Newsletters

LIS Management in Focus http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/enewsletters/focus

Alia News

Affinity Program
ALIA's affinity programs provide discounted products and services to members, both institutional and personal. ALIA is pleased to offer you an exclusive range of benefits through Member Advantage, an organisation that specialises in offering member benefits programs to a number of professional organisations.

Alia Publishing
inCite is the premier monthly news magazine for library and information professionals. Free to all members.
Individual issues for sale to non-members.


Australian Academic & Research Libraries (AARL): Quarterly journal devoted to all aspects of librarianship in university, college, and all other types of research libraries. Subscription only. Discounted subscription price for ALIA members.

Alia E-Newsletters

LIS Management in Focus http://www.alia.org.au/publishing/enewsletters/focus

Alia News

Affinity Program
ALIA's affinity programs provide discounted products and services to members, both institutional and personal. ALIA is pleased to offer you an exclusive range of benefits through Member Advantage, an organisation

Key Contacts
Membership
Stephanie Matthews
02 6215 8224
stephanie.matthews@alia.org.au

Professional Development
Judy Brooker
02 6215 8216
judy.brooker@alia.org.au

Events
Kamara Buchanan
02 6215 8214
kamara.buchanan@alia.org.au
Publishing
Kate van der Veer
02 6275 8231
kate.vannderveer@alia.org.au

Education
Dianne Walton-Sonda
02 6215 8218
dianne.walton-sonda@alia.org.au
Copyright
Helen Roberts
02 6215 8222
helen.roberts@alia.org.au
Groups
David McInnes
02 6215 8222
david.mcinnnes@alia.org.au

General Enquiries
02 6215 8222
1800 020 071
enquiry@alia.org.au
It still helps to have an experienced partner

Civica Library & Learning celebrating 30 years of experience with a new look and a superior range of library services.

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Integrated systems are fundamental to the successful delivery of library services. Spydus™ delivers an integrated library solution and encompasses the complete set of library management functions. Designed for Special, Academic and Public Libraries, Spydus is available as a standalone or as a managed service.

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Exhibit™ is a modern archiving solution for all your archiving needs, be they picture, manuscript, photograph, artefact, published or unpublished material. Exhibit includes Web 2.0 discovery style interfaces and is built using the ICA standards allowing straightforward data interchange.

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