

**Evaluation of Information Services in Public
Libraries:**

Are we providing?

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Acknowledgments

Thank you to each of the Library Services who allowed me to come in and observe the workings, take photographs and distribute surveys. Without these opportunities we would be unable to pursue extensive study in this area. I was able to shift back somewhat and look both objectively and critically at the Library profession.

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1. Introduction

Information: Where is it travelling?

Public Libraries are in an ideal position to initiate the growth of information hubs. The community building, information professionals, computer technology, a captive audience (customers) and the local government infrastructure are already in place.

The importance of providing information to the community is regularly flagged as a key service for public libraries, for example:

In effect, what we do is mediate between people and technology, - as intelligent agents. An information resource centre is an integrated system of people (librarians and clients), technology at various levels, information-management practices (reference interviewing, cataloguing, etc) and values.

Bonnie Nardi; Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart MIT Press 1999.

Nardi believes we are the 'keystone species' of the information ecology. Librarians have been crucial in bringing technology forward. But we are also able to think critically about technological change - not just information technology. Because of our role of *mediating the questions*, we are often dealing with human values and technological change.

By providing a range of information to the customers, reference/information professionals assist in extending the knowledge of the community and help to grow that community. Terms such as 'lifelong learning', 'information culture', 'community space' and 'public space' are now part of the language when discussing the importance of libraries as a significant part our lives in a community. The reality of the 'virtual library', 24/7 access is now embedded in the library structure but it will not replace this 'public/community space'.

The main thrust of the research project will be to examine Reference/Information areas. To assess how they are currently working, what is not working; to analyse signage, displays, desk, seating, shape, colour and staffing levels; to assess where the Reference/Information service is placed in order of priority for each library service.

In the words of Michael Gorman, in his Keynote Speech *Human values in a technological age 2000*:

In this, as in everything else, I call for harmony and balance. We need to look at our work with clear eyes in order to see the real needs of our patrons and not through the lens of technology invariably dictating a technological solution to all problems and non problems alike.

The expansion of technology had begun to create its own shadow over the traditional role and values of the reference librarian. The information highway has accelerated into uncharted territories, forcing change on the foundations of reference services. How is the librarian responding? Have the traditional values

been left on the side of the highway and technology is now the driver.

The traditional culture of the reference librarian needs to embrace and understand change rather than reacting to what comes. By anticipating some of the advancements new technologies provide, information professionals can be confident enough to make informed, critical appraisal and even reject some of the advancements which will not necessarily enhance the services being provided for our customers.

There has also been the contention that some reference/information services are quietly slipping away. This is due to the expansion of Internet usage and, along with that, the assumption that 'you will find the answer on the net'. Librarians will always be the first to dispute this claim, albeit quietly!

2. Methodology

My core method of study was by observation. By visiting each library I made an evaluation using the set criteria which I have established. Two surveys have been conducted: a Staff Survey, and a Customer Survey. I took digital photographs of each library. I concentrated on the reference/information areas, signage and displays, analysing how they are working against my set criteria (see 'Recommendations'). The digital photographs will also serve as an ongoing document for libraries when these areas are being redesigned.

3. Recommendations

After many hours spent observing libraries at work, extensive print research, trawling library web pages, talking to librarians and customers, I have come up with a concept called '*Creating Information Cultures*'. This concept peels away the multiple layers of information provision and serves to offer the core values surrounding what reference/information librarians hope to provide for their customers.

Essentially the concept will assist libraries to 'grow' their information hubs, build up reference/information links in a creative way and respond to the local community needs. By building upon the existing foundations in libraries, the Information Culture can be added to and customised to changing community needs. This concept acknowledges all aspects of the library environment by responding to staff and customer needs.

Each library I entered had its own atmosphere, dynamic, design flow and elements which contribute to the success of the whole space. The reference/information area is a part of this space and this is ultimately impacted by the overall dynamic. If staff can begin to observe these designated areas in the library, and understand how they are working or not working, the next step is to de-clutter each section and begin to change the layout.

(PHOTO)

For example, the print reference collection can be weeded creating potential space. The length of the bays can be reduced and smaller groups of study desks can be situated in an adjacent angle to the shelves. The print reference area no longer needs to be crowded with multi volume sets which are seldom used. Some study desks can be replaced by tables to encourage group study, or for patrons to browse reference materials. I suggest moving away from the study carrel concept which is linear and 'closed' in appearance.

(PHOTO)

(PHOTO)

If the library interior is essentially neutral in colour, order chairs and tables in bold fresh colours such as earthy red, apple green, and new signage to enhance the direction of the reference/information area. Utilise and promote the burgeoning availability of online databases. Find out what customers are regularly using. Create a lean, clever collection of key reference tools. These are some key concepts to think about when evaluating the reference/information area in your library.

4.1 Evaluation Criteria

Desk Design & Placement - How furniture is placed in the reference/information area will directly affect how customers use this space.

Colour - It has long been established that colour has an affect on human behaviour in the interior environment. This knowledge can be used to enhance

the functional and atmosphere within the library.

Primary Colours

Red - Can be an energising colour, a morale booster and one which inspires passion

(PHOTO)

Blue - Has a calming affect, encourages thought and reflection although too much can be draining

Yellow - A stimulating colour which promotes optimism and creativity

Secondary Colours

Green - A restful colour which assists with a focused mental attitude and is associated with health, the environment and balance

Orange - A powerful and uplifting colour, too much will be over stimulating and intense

Purple - A spiritual, self reflective colour which can be both warm and cool. How you combine purple with other colours will influence the effect it creates

Brown - A stabilising colour which has a stabilising effect, though too much can promote stagnation and melancholy

(PHOTOS)

Information Spaces

Staff & Skills

Print Reference

Internet Availability

Online Databases

Way-finding

Lighting

Key concepts to consider when evaluating Information Services

- DESIGN
- SIGNAGE
- COLOUR
- INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
- MARKETING THE SERVICE
- PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
- COMMUNICATION
- CHANGE
- PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

Quick Evaluation Survey for Library Staff

1. When entering the library, how long does it take to find the Information Desk?

Reference/Information Desk should be sited in the first 30 seconds of entering the library.

2. Is there a librarian at the desk?

The presence of a librarian will help to establish contact with the customers and reinforces the importance of face to face reference/information services

3. What is the height of the desk?

Will customers need to stand or able to sit down as they wait for assistance?

4. Is the Signage in the library clear and fresh looking?

5. What is the colour and design of the Reference Desk?

6. Line of sight from the desk- can you see internet computers?

7. Is the Print Reference Collection adjacent to the reference/information desk?

8. Are there reference/information librarians rostered to rove around the library during busy periods?

9. Do staff wearing name badges?
10. Is there regular Information Training for staff?
11. Are there 'Study Desks' in the print reference area?
12. Are reference/information librarians responsible for acquisitions in reference area?
13. Does the library service have a form or procedure for 'deferred' reference enquiries?
14. Clear signage, either the word 'Information' or sign of '?' Key Ready Reference tools should be within easy reach of desk staff

4. Research

Library Case Study A

Library Case Study B

Library Case Study C

Library Case Study D

Library Case Study E

Library Case Study F

Library Case Study G

Library Case Study H

Library Case Study A

Branch 1

Library Case Study A is Australia's largest Public Library network with 32 Branches. Until 1999 the service worked within a *'pyramid structure'*. There were 22 neighbourhood libraries which were at the bottom of the structure with inadequate information resources and services. So two thirds of the Library Service could not provide a satisfactory Information Service. This led to customer & staff frustration.

The service has now embraced the 'hub and spokes' concept where by each of the 32 branches has equal electronic/information resources. Floor spaces may differ considerably but the newly empowered reference staff are able to meet the present information challenges. Band 3 and 4 librarians run the reference desks.

The Branch 1 Library is a dynamic space from the moment you walk through the doors. Books are placed on electric blue pyramid style display stands. The signage for the Information area is in bright blue neon. The furnishings are soft greys, timber, earth red carpets and feature walls around the library are in a rich yellow. The colours, textures, dynamic displays, blue neon signage signal to the customers to enjoy the space, spend time, be stimulated and extended.

It has been established in colour psychology, bright blue reflects warmth and serenity, while red is energising and assertive, and yellow can promote positive feelings. Colours have been chosen to enhance customer experience in the library area.

The librarians are also responsible for new memberships and this provides an excellent opportunity to promote the information services. Reference staff

provide introductory training on the Internet. In the past 12 months 17,000 people have received training. The benefits of these significant changes are illustrated with the large increase in memberships and increased number of information enquiries.

The annual statistics for the Library Case Study A reflect their success. The 2000-2001 Survey Statistics show there were 425,344 reference enquiries for a membership of approximately 305,422.

Through the hub and spokes concept, which has been adopted in the last 12 months, \$300,000.00 has been spent on reference /information services out of the total library budget of \$600,000. So rather than following the general standard for reference expenditure, which is 10% of library budget, they have allocated 50% with full council support.

To enhance reference/information facilities a number of the 32 Branches are installing '*Learning Lounges*'. Essentially this is a designated area in the library, near study and reference facilities, which provides CD-Rom tutorials for a range of software programs. Customers can either use these facilities as an individual or in small group situations. For example, a local Small Business will use the Learning Lounge to train new staff in software programs. There may be community groups through Centrelink who require such facilities.

Branch 2

The Branch 2 Library has established a very successful Learning Lounge. The design is open and welcoming, the furniture of apple greens and red fit unobtrusively into the curved desks. These colours reflect freshness and growth (green) while red compliments with dynamics and energy giving.

This Library Service demonstrates the key elements in my concept of *creating an information culture*. There is complete support from government infrastructure for libraries to help in the process of building smart communities. By combining resources, local government and the libraries have begun to produce excellent outcomes for the whole community.

Library Case Study B

Branch 1

Library Case Study B, Branch 1 Library is in main shopping area near the bay. This branch is approximately 10 years old. Floors to ceiling style windows frame the Newspapers/Magazine area, bringing in plenty of natural light and there is close proximity to the shopping strip and hub of the community.

The Returns side of the circulation desk is the first part of the library you see upon entering. The height is about 1.5 metres with a returns slot. It gives the customer an *abrupt* or '*confronting*' message as they enter the library environment. A patron cannot have a conversation with circulation staff at this point, as they are deterred by the physical barrier of this section and its height.

When you move around the desk it becomes waist height and more welcoming. The colour of the desk is a cobalt blue. In regards to the psychology of colour, 'blue' is thought to be a calming colour though too much can become draining. In relation to Feng Shui, blue is a yin colour and too much can create a negative energy flow. Many blues are viewed as 'cold and unwelcoming' so it is suggested to use the softer hues for interiors.

A skylight directly above the circulation desk lights up the whole area naturally and works to soften the library's colours. The carpets are a deep grey with blue flecks which translate into a practical work based area, not just leisure bound. At end of the circulation desk is a low deep grey desk with one chair for patrons.

The reference/information desk could be easily missed. There are no overhead signs or anything on the desk to reflect its purpose. It appears to be 'hidden' behind the circulation desk as an after thought, thus giving the message that patrons would really have to be willing to search out reference assistance rather than having it presented to them as an essential part of the library's service.

Attractive new book displays run throughout the library area, which help to create a fresh environment and serve to entice the patron to spend time there. Personal Internet instruction and email terminals are provided. As you move further into the library there is a beautiful Japanese style garden in a glassed in courtyard. From the reference/information area of the library, customers can sit at desks or Internet terminals and enjoy the serenity of the outlook. The courtyard also ensures natural light comes into the library and certainly helps create an ambiance conducive to quiet reflection and study.

There are three Internet terminals at the entry to the reference/information area, which have practical benefits for ease of use of the collection and web access. To the right of the reference/information area there is a hub of computers. The reference librarian is hoping to create a 'hub' of Internet terminals and re-direct the role of librarian to be an interface between customers and the usage of the Internet. He would like to extend this role into a roving librarian practice.

There is the belief in this service that the reference desk is becoming obsolete, as the electronic technologies have forced a change in the way people are finding information. There is exposure now to such a wide range of options for information access. The idea of the reference librarian sitting at the reference/information desk waiting for questions is really reflecting the old style of static information.

This belief is further illustrated by the style and positioning of the reference/information desk. Formats are becoming more dynamic, so the information librarian must too be seen as pro-active. The librarian must be able to anticipate customer requests with an ability to customise information needs. These are some of the issues which library staff have to tackle. From my visits to libraries, and through observation, there is still a clear need for the presence of a prominent information point/desk within the library. Library professionals are still viewed as the personal link between customers and their requests for assistance with information. So the information desk in Case Study Library B should be placed in a more prominent position. By working through the

Evaluation Criteria and key concepts I have listed, the success of the information/reference service will certainly be enhanced.

The study/reference area has L shaped shelving which helps to create an 'alcove' study area. The left wall of this area is glass to the floor and is overlooking a Japanese style garden with a waterfall and some bonsai plants. The Japanese sister city has designed the garden. There is an overwhelming feeling of tranquillity along side the reference/study area, which would certainly influence customer behaviour and the way in which they interact with this area. Such a design encourages quiet reflection and study. This is a working example of Creating an Information Culture, which effects the way people respond to and behave in designated spaces.

Library Case Study C

Branch 1

The entrance of Library Case Study C is all glass and corrugated iron, which brings the outside into the library. The front foyer has grey carpet, coffee tables, a small shop and coffee bar. There is a cosy, inviting lounge area on your right. There are *Catalogue Only* computers on stand up desks. Black computers, timber and steel blue desks on grey carpet. Magazine displays are in diagonal lines, giving an open, uncluttered feel. Colours of steel blue and light timber give the library space an ultra modern, functional feel.

Blue has the effect of creating a relaxing interior space. Combined with blond timber, light grey carpet and the infusion of natural light, blue provides the library has a spacious, calm welcoming atmosphere. The height of the shelving is approximately 5 feet and the signage is clear and simple as it is hung by wire from the ceiling. There are skylights in the centre of the ceiling and timber hangings which are shaped like waves to diffuse the sunlight.

The circulation desk curves around to your left as you enter the library. There are 4 Check-Out terminals with staff assisting. The desk is waist height with steel shelving on the customer's side for books and bags. As you come around the corner the Information Desk is set out separately. There is a blue 'Information' sign with the 'I' Icon. The surface of the desks has a marble, speckled finish.

The desk can be occupied by 3 reference librarians. They have a computer each with access to catalogue, Internet and databases. There is a blue glass partition on the desk which is used to disguise computer cables and a wall beam which blocks easy access between customer and reference/librarian.

This Library is officially and proudly canvassed as a library of the future and rightly so. I spent a number of days at the library both as a customer, researcher and assisting behind the information desk. Internet bookings were made in a booking folder and memberships are completed at the Information desk. Several library brochures are handed out during this process, but nothing specifically promoting an Information Service.

The Reference Collection is situated at the left of the Internet terminals, which are available for research only and have no email access. This is approximately

5 metres from the reference/ information desk. As one librarian commented, *"We are not an Internet café; we are a research library...."* There are 40 of the computers in front of the Reference desk, which patrons can use for research, word processing and excel. Library staff believe they could not manage the demand for email and the issues which inevitably come with it.

The signage in corporate blue defines the Study & Reference area. Print reference consists of approximately 10 bays, many of which are half filled. The dynamic of this space could easily be remedied. Librarians could conduct a weed of this area, take away the empty bays and move shelving into an alcove style which would freshen up the area. This structural/space change could then influence a change in the customers and how they will use the area. The customers will be enticed to use this area as it will offer more private browsing and reading space.

I found the same result when I changed the pattern of shelving and weeding the collections. The space was refreshed. There was room for study desks extending from the bays. Students and other patrons are now more inclined to sit in the reference area for study, reading and using the print reference collection which is now within reach.

The previous Branch Library 1 had a great strength in its Corporate Reference collection, which was in high demand. Now these companies have their own resources, the population is growing and real estate is booming. Here is a great opportunity to evaluate the current Collection Development policy and provide a reference collection which is responsive to current community needs. The Colleges and TAFE nearby influence the type of demands placed on the service. There are also 5 computer kiosks to the immediate left of the Information desk which are on offer for short term patrons, for Internet, word and databases.

Study tables and chairs have been placed along the left side of the library next to the windows and the print Reference Collection. All of the desks are beautifully finished, blond & dark timbers, black computers, red, grey and plum coloured chairs.

The overall impression is one of freshness, state of the art design and up to the minute technology which is always in use. Within this modern context we still need to be mindful that technology and modern buildings alone will not fulfill the Information/Reference equation.

Library Case Study D

This Library Service has a Dedicated Information Point such as an Information Desk which is staffed by a librarian or a trained para-professional. As you walk into the library the **Information Sign** is prominent in black and yellow and sighted easily from the entrance point. The circulation desk in jade green is immediately situated at the right hand side of the entrance.

On the left side, as you approach the Information Desk, there are 12 Internet terminals which have Internet/email access, word processing, catalogue, home page. Before a customer uses the Internet they must read the 'conditions of use'.

There are four terminals dedicated for non-members and six to library members. There is also a self booking system on a round table near the Information Desk. Opposite this desk are three reference computers for immediate research use. This self booking system sets up 'trust' between staff and customers, which contributes to the success of the system.

I sat with the reference librarian, who is also the IT Officer, for the morning. Customers approached the desk after being referred from the circulation desk or walked directly towards it. A good range of questions were asked.

One gentleman wanted books about Sukarno and the leader of Malaysia. The Librarian checked the catalogue and then logged onto Kinetica, found specific titles in public libraries in NSW, and organised an Inter-library loan.

A young girl came in and stated she didn't want to be a nuisance, but she had been a trainee in a retail store and had been unfairly dismissed. The catalogue was checked for books on the subject, then we went to reference and looked at The Law Handbook. I then suggested the Government Directory and we found the appropriate department in Employment & Training which looked at issues of unfair dismissal. He was able to give the customer some good contact numbers.

A patron wanted to find out the contact details of the Engineering Journal (Australian Institute of Engineering). The librarian checked online but there were numerous sites. I suggested the Directory of Associations, that gave the Web address. Once on the website we found contact details and the advertising costs.

Some customers came up wanting information on clairvoyance and psychic readings. Several books were located on the catalogue and reservations were arranged. Somebody then requested books dealing with grief and loss.

The print Reference Collection consisted of two long bays on the left side of the Information Desk, so it was convenient for the librarian to access the collection. They are also 4 paces from the Internet terminals so that any IT troubleshooting can be dealt with effectively.

After spending time at the reference desk, I was able to witness the 'flow' of the information service. There was an unspoken professional confidence surrounding the staff.

The print reference collection is several metres from the information desk, which gives an additional degree of credibility to the importance of the Information Service. The web page has 'Information Services' in the top section of the page, so customers who have Internet access will also pick up the prominence of the information service. Over the three hours the reference librarian was able to respond to a mixed bag of questions, and able to glide between web sites and databases, and retrieve items from the print collection and conduct complicated searches.

Each time this transaction occurred, the confidence between librarian and patron is confirmed and the positive conclusion to the interview leaves a lasting impression. I also observed patrons who were reading or researching in the

reference area that they became a part of the *reference process*, be it in a non-participatory way. They are sitting in close proximity to the Information Desk and they pick up slices of conversation or they will sight the librarian retrieving items from the print collection. All of these activities become part of the larger picture in the reference process.

By creating an active, face to face reference area which offers options for customers, it becomes a pivotal place within the library. So the *reference links* have been created: web page, virtual reference, library pamphlets, a consistent, professional service within the library, a designed reference space which acknowledges the needs of the customers. Without these *reference links* the *information culture* within the library will not have a chance to flourish. Library Case Study D has the reference culture in place, and there begins the ongoing organic process to keep the service evolving with all of the above influences.

Library Case Study E

Branch 1

Library Case Study E is as vast as it is new. With glass and steel, the exterior structure of the building appears to lean toward the customers as they enter. The dominant colours of the interior framework are beige and gold. The desks and end shelves are in a mock timber and rich brown.

The walkway carpets are a pale plum and they skirt the circumference in a circular flow. Lighting is comprised of soft down lights which are offset by mauve columns around the library.

As you walk into the library, the circulation desk returns area is on the immediate right side. The Reference Desk is a separate horseshoe shaped desk several metres ahead of the circulation area. The colours are timber, aubergine and beige. A reference librarian is sitting at the desk. There are three chairs for customers. Signage is simple but effective, in a Perspex sign saying 'Information'.

There have been numerous studies and documentation on the effect of colour on our behaviour: the aubergine (purple) shades of mauve, framed by rich brown tones, encourages a calm, thoughtful and caring environment. The browns in the timber shelves and framework offer a level of comfort and security to the customers, (though excessive use of brown can produce a heavy, melancholic, gloomy environment).

Already the physical foundations for growing an 'Information Culture' are in place. The Information Librarian is rostered at the desk which reinforces the importance of providing information to the customers. There is acknowledgement for the customers to be comfortable and welcomed as seating is provided.

The Library Case Study E Branch 1 has a dedicated Reference Information Desk, with a semi circle desk at the end of the circulation area, clear signage and comfortable seating for customers. Hence the design of the information environments in this Library Service creates both an expectation of high level

service and an understanding of client needs.

The confidence surrounding the provision of information to customers is also reflected in the statistics in the Annual Survey of Public Libraries and the survey response from the librarians. Customer satisfaction with Information Services was 85.6% where as in 2001/2002 satisfaction level increased to 100%. All librarians I surveyed stated they have monthly training with online databases. There was a uniform response to the impact of the internet.

Nine out of the ten librarians acknowledged that their role has changed with the introduction of the Internet. The uniform response to these questions reflected a clear confidence within the staff of the information culture of the library service. This clarity is then translated across to the customers through the workings and success of the library service.

Retrieving information in all available formats was the clear response when I asked librarians 'what are their main tasks'. The key change to library information services was seen as unanimous: the expansion of information technology in various formats.

As I observed the customers and staff in the two branches, Bonnie Nardi's theory of *Information Ecologies* and the Librarian as a *Keystone Species* was reflected in the 'flow' of the working library. I have extended this idea into the concept of 'Information Cultures' within the library service.

Library Case Study F

Branch 1

The colours are cream, sky blue, grey and aubergine. High ceilings, down lights along the walls, large windows providing natural light immediately provide a pleasant ambience.

The Information Desk is opposite the Circulation Desk at the right hand side of the entrance. It contours into a horseshoe shape. There are four Catalogue Only Computers at this desk, which is an excellent way of setting up communication between customer and librarian. Behind this desk is an 'I' for information sign, which is well above eye level. There are two stools behind the desk for librarians, though no one was stationed there during my visit. Circulation staff regularly came across to the Information desk to assist the customers.

The height of the desk is such that customers must stand and wait to be assisted with an enquiry. A combination of high desk and small signage hanging from a high ceiling creates minimal impact. There is an extra shelf on the front which could become an added barrier when conducting the reference interview. Customers can feel discouraged by physical barriers.

Despite the excellent Web Page, where information is clearly promoted as a service, this message is not being translated to its potential at the physical branch level. A librarian wasn't rostered on the Information desk when I was there. It was also confirmed at the time that a librarian wasn't always rostered. Customers appeared to stand and wait at this desk.

When librarians are seated at the Information desk, they have their back to the print reference collection, the study area and the Internet terminals. This limits the amount of observation which can be conducted by librarians on the flow of the information areas, and can perhaps limit the ability to anticipate when someone needs assistance. These are not huge problems but they can easily be remedied by the following three steps.

- Reduce the height of the Information Desk
- Position the librarian's seating on either side of the Reference areas
- Two chairs to be placed on either side of this desk

Attractive displays are evident throughout the library, reflecting a creative, busy community. The interior colours are light and fresh. The shelves are mauve, with white tables and red chairs for study. The layout of Branch 1 Library Case Study F appeared to work well. The colours, lighting and furniture certainly make it a comfortable community place, which would certainly entice the customer back.

Library Case Study G

Branch 1

This is a busy branch library. The library desk staff are friendly and helpful. Large windows frame the entrance to the library, bringing in some natural light. The location works in that it is close to schools and public transport. The interior of the library is in beige and brown, and is outdated in appearance. According to colour psychology, too much brown can produce a heavy, melancholic, gloomy environment.

The reference area has old wooden signs. . The quiet study area has wooden desks. These are set out in a linear classroom style. The information desk is a horseshoe shape and separate from the circulation desk. There are two seats and two computers for librarians, with chairs for the customers. The bench top is black. A lot of clutter and computer cords are visible to the patrons.

The library space is busy with people, but the lack of flow in the floor plan creates a disjointed space. Potentially there is energy within the library as patrons are using facilities. The interior colours of dark timber and wooden signage, cluttered desks, strip fluorescent lighting and minimal natural light combine to create a difficult space.

Despite the absence of modern, fresh design, the customers and staff appear to make heavy use of available facilities. There is a willing, captive audience in Library Case Study G Branch 1, who are probably grateful for the existing service. A range of improvements could be made which would refresh this community space and bring it up to its full potential. Improvements would have a range of positive flow on effects. Ideas previously discussed such as use of colour, fresh signage, elimination of the clutter in areas. Remove some study desks, change their placement and break up the print reference areas to encourage new paths and customer movement.

Branch 2

The entry point is filled with a 'horseshoe' style circulation desk, then directly ahead is the Information Desk. This is a beige 70's style rectangular desk. Dark timber frames the desk, and two musky pink chairs are placed for customers. The reference print collection is on the back walls to the right of the desk. The study area has lines of study carrels with strip lighting above. With minimal natural light and the structured linear desk space, the area is dark and unappealing. The OPAC's are on wide timber benches. The overall effect of the space is tired.

I have come into these two branch libraries with a fresh eye. After visiting over 30 libraries in 3 states in Australia, my observations are simply one of a critical, but constructive eye. There are a number of changes which can be made here to remedy these areas in this library.

At the end of the day, the library is a vital information provider for the large and diverse community. It cannot achieve an excellent provision of service without considering the key elements which contribute to creating a dynamic information culture in this library service.

Library Case Study H

This was the first 'Global Learning Centre' developed in Australia and it was first opened in 1995.

As the City Council saw its community slipping into recession, with ever increasing levels of unemployment due in the large part to the closure of many of the industries and coal mines that had once been its livelihood, the Council decided to set [...] a new course towards the future. Their goal was to make [their city] Australia's "smart" city. To make this goal a reality the Global Info Links project was born.

Wesley Tatters

Columnist, Internet Daily News Global Info Links.

To achieve this goal the City Council defined two main objectives for Global Info Links. In the words of Scott Balson, the Development Manager for Global Info Links, "The main objectives of Global Info Links are firstly to Create Employment and Business opportunities for the people ... and secondly to bring the people ... into the information age".

The Library Case Study H was created with a positive, dynamic purpose in mind. This aim is certainly reflected in the design of the library. Walking into the library you are immediately greeted with strong colours of green, aubergine and yellow.

The signage is clear and easy to follow. There is a display of famous chairs attached to the wall with a short history of each chair. A lounge area is just around the corner. Because the library consists of three storeys, there is a lift as well as stairs. The staircase is decorated by a stunning drape of hand designed

fabric cascading from the ceiling down to the ground floor. It has the immediate effect of drawing you up into the space to explore the other levels.

The reference/information area is on the second floor and the desk is directly opposite the top of the stairs. Two signs identify this area so the customer won't be confused about its purpose. The desk is a light purple colour, semi-circular in shape and there are four comfortable chairs for patrons. There is a pastel yellow feature wall behind the desk, which also serves to highlight the area. In terms of colour psychology, purple creates an atmosphere of calm and peaceful reflection, while yellow promotes optimism and clear thinking. The presence of these colours in the Information area cleverly compliments its purpose. Trained librarians are rostered at this desk and the print reference collection is only a few paces away. In terms of flow and way-finding, this Library has been designed with great sensitivity and respect for the needs of the local community. The librarian at the desk demonstrated a wide range of databases she uses to assist patrons.

The library's Home page is also simple to use, with an emphasis on information services reflected in the available online databases, subject guides, ask a librarian and more. According to the annual library statistics for 2000-2001, Library H has approximately 40,590 library members and received 31,222 reference enquiries in that year. So it may be assumed that a high percentage of members use the Information services.

5. SURVEYS

Staff Surveys

56 Surveys were completed

The survey results reflect the significant impact the Internet has had on the role of the Information Librarian. Most tasks either involve or are affected by the Internet. Issues we now have to consider within libraries concern allowing email access and/or online games, and permission for the use of internet by children.

Many of the libraries I visited had just been redesigned, newly built or were anticipating upgrades. In all of these cases the considerations surrounding both the placement of internet terminals and how many there were had a direct impact on the use and design of the library space.

Questions and Sample Responses

Key changes which have occurred in your library service over the last 2 years?

Reliance on electronic information

Library being the community hub/meeting place

Easing up on traditional e-mail conditions - accepting them as a legitimate use of the Internet

Move toward more IT with information needs in mind

Redesign of library

Restructure of Management team

Establishing a 'stand up' reference desk

Roving Librarians

Patron expectation that *all answers can be found on the Internet*

Online catalogue has given patrons opportunity to search the catalogue from home
Move to change the name Reference Desk to Information Desk

Introduction of 24/7 virtual reference

Downgrading reference collection in branches in favour of the regional centre

Increase in collections, increase in number of patrons

Main Tasks on the Reference/Information desk

Professional reference interview

Assisting patrons

An increase in demand for IT troubleshooting

Ready reference, directional, instructional assistance

Staff/public training, client education programs

Changes in main tasks

Clients have higher expectations now of the type of information they are wanting

We have to be 'experts' on the Internet

Greater move towards the 'virtual library'

More online user education being conducted

A new circulation/reference desk

Customers are less inhibited to come up and ask a question.

Due to a redesigned desk, there is more room for staff and it has boosted the morale

The Internet is now an extension of our reference services

A need to constantly keep up with technology

We deal with a wider range of clientele due to the Internet

Provide 'systems support' and have become 'Internet trainer'

The Internet is just another resource to utilise or suggest to patrons as an alternative to books

Training

Database training

HTML, Web sites, CLIB, Gulliver

Zoom text, LIAC, Scanner

Middle management

Virtual Librarian

Open Road

Marketing

Number and Type of Customer Questions

Less questions, though they need help manoeuvring around the Internet

More customers are using the Internet. If they come to us the questions are more complex.

Same amount of questions, but harder ones.

Is there any marketing of the reference/information service?

No, but the reference desk is highly visible

Bookmarks

No, not enough recognition is given to the reference area & the promotion of it

Marketing/promotion of remote access

Marketing of specialist collections

No: Majority answer - 66%

Market Business Collection to local Business groups

Market Reference/Information service through newspaper and webpage

Through the programs we run and internet training

Word of mouth and posters

Employing a Marketing Strategist

Through the Home Page

Pathfinders

Need to do much more to promote a modern image

Politicians need to gain insight into what libraries are providing for our society and culture. This would help the overall image

People still think of libraries as 'books only'

Is there a Combination - Reference/Circulation Desk

Yes 4 No – 6 [66% of libraries visited had separate desks]

Reference area is not visible to staff

General moves to have reference collection/computers closer to enquiry desk.

Media Perception on Public Libraries

Yes, there still tends to be an outdated view

Low level of awareness in the range of materials and services available and that they're free!

Traditional view of libraries is still prevalent

Not enough interest to portray us as anything

Increased awareness of Internet availability

Old fashioned view of the librarian with a bun

Absolutely! Glasses, bun, middle aged, only female, obsessed with *quiet*, tidiness, drab attire.

Libraries portrayed as stuffy, unfeeling places where weirdos hang out and work.

Today's Librarian is, *Vibrant, intelligent, dressed in modern clothes, different hair styles, and males with earrings.*

Librarians in jeans, snappy t-shirts, and those who do interesting things after work in their spare time.

Going to your library can be a real treasure hunt

Go to your library for advice

The media still persists with the 'traditional' view- they don't seem to realise

that libraries and their staff have moved on

Very little media coverage

Still the old fashioned grumpy type

Stereotypes stick, latest Star Wars movie- elderly librarian with glasses and bun

Most Popular Search Tools

Google - most popular search engine on the Internet

Reference Desk on the Internet

Almanacs

Electronic library on the Internet

Medline

Europa YearBook

Gulliver

Ebsco

ANZ Reference

Hard copies, Britannica, World Book, Car Manuals, Course Guides, Health & Science Books

Customer Surveys

100 Surveys were completed

Quantitative Results

Main Reasons for coming to the library:

73% come to borrow books

33% come in to use internet facilities

28% to borrow magazines (most of these respondents also borrow books)

What do customers like about the library service?

35% enjoy the friendly staff and overall atmosphere

30% commented on having easy access to a wide range of materials

35% no response

Web Page Usage

5% used the Homepage

5% used 'Ask a Librarian'

Miscellaneous

9% of people coming to the library could not find what they wanted

These results are a small sample but they still give some indications of what is important to the customer when they come to use the library service. The tradition of 'Borrowing Books' is still alive and well. It also reinforces the ideas surrounding human behaviour.

A range of core values, needs and aspirations won't change dramatically despite technological advancements. Some might argue that technology has influenced customer behaviour, in that core values which contribute to the fabric of the community are more conscientiously maintained in an effort to retain the essence of our communities.

While a third of patrons use internet facilities, this figure is probably influenced by the demographic profile of the area in relation to whether there is Internet access at home. It certainly highlights the fact that Internet access is very important for all library services to maintain.

The atmosphere and friendly staff at 35% was a significant response. The word atmosphere could be described as something intangible and yet its importance for the library space can never be underestimated. The friendly staff contribute to this perception of atmosphere as do many other factors which I have commented on. It is something which can be felt upon entering a space and it will influence the visitors' decision as to whether they will return.

As I have discussed throughout the report the interior design of the space will influence how the space is used and consequently the atmosphere which is created. A thoughtful, responsive design will motivate staff and affect how they respond to the customers. A design which is considerate of all the stake holders can only create a vibrant and interesting space which then grows an atmosphere which draws everybody in.

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