

New Library! New Directions! – Adelaide Hills Council, Dee O’Loughlin

Once Council approved a new library for Stirling in 2006 we knew from the experience of other new libraries and our knowledge of our community that there were certain givens -

THAT: Our customer base would grow – however, because we were already a well used library we still underestimated the increase

THAT: we had less space to work with than we had hoped for so needed to be innovative

THAT: libraries are labour intensive – and not only would increased usage result in increased manual handling and pressure on collections -

BUT THAT: Council budgets are finite and it is not possible to keep adding staff and resources

THAT: Stirling has a highly literate and articulate community with high expectations of every aspect of their library – including its technology

AND THAT: Information and communications technology is changing rapidly – information searching has been overtaken by Web 2.0 which in turn is being overtaken by the virtual world of Web 3.0 – virtual life, virtual business - with a healthy dose of cloud computing hovering over everything for good measure.

To manage these issues, we knew we couldn’t simply reproduce the old library in a bigger shinier version.

We had to explore new directions

- in services
- in service delivery

And we had to strategically position our library for the ever faster evolving future.

We identified 3 key strategies –

- Access
- Adaptability and
- Technology

And overlaying them was what I call the 97/3 rule.

Anything – a rule, a practice - inconveniencing 97% of our customers to prevent less than 3% of them perhaps doing the wrong thing is re-assessed – the only exception is legal requirements.

Everything is easily accessible; barriers have been eliminated wherever possible – in the building itself, with staff, customer processes, and information technology.

Minimalist pods plugged into the floor allow customer involvement in transactions, and are pushed around a corner to free the area for after hours activities.

The overall space is open with sliding doors and as much furniture as possible moveable so that staff and customers can adapt and shape spaces to suit their needs.

Reading areas are also home to children’s activities and author talks; the community space used for meetings, home schoolers, Wii sessions, quiet study; the training room for public access when not booked.

With the co-located Council customer service opening at 8.30, the foyer provides a mini-library service, with access to newspapers, magazines, reservations and new books, a coffee machine and a vending machine until the library itself opens its doors.

Our biggest decision was a major investment in technology to target and alleviate increased use, additional materials handling and our already high customer expectations.

Of the \$250,000 raised by the community, the majority was used on technology – on infrastructure and the technology itself. And can I advise all Library Managers to be kind to Council IT staff and keep the communication lines open – it’s worth it because technology is not going away! There’s a real push and pull between Council IT and libraries – we’re extremely heavy users of their resources. But we have enormous community demand with high expectations, Public Library Services and the P2 network and our own aspirations for better and

more efficient services. Someone has to execute and maintain it all - and that's primarily Council IT.

So where did that \$0.25m go – it gave us -

- An overhead sensor to track customer visits and allow more accurate rostering
- A paging system for staff that ensures staff can perform other duties or be a back-up and only go to the Info Desk when it gets busy
- An electronic afterhours chute that locks off when full and powered dumpers that can easily be raised and lowered to assist with manual handling
- Interactive whiteboards and overhead projectors complete with PCs and all the accompanying peripherals that run independently of Council's network, as does the PC available in our 'fishbowl' – the glass room available for Council staff, meetings, JPs – and exam invigilation.

- Touch screen self checks in the foyer alleviate the queues and also facilitate borrowing when the library is technically closed
- There are 22 public PCs – each neat units has an attached hard drive and runs on a separate network so that IT doesn't need to manage security within Council's network. Each PC has headphones, burner, access to skype and messenger, to social networking tools, to games and virtual reality worlds. With poor broadband access in the Hills, they're even used to run small businesses.
- We're looking at web cams for each PC next year and, down the track, considering virtualising our public PCs and, instead of cleaning them hourly through DeepFreeze, moving on to virtual desktops.
- Of course wifi with power points scattered through the library
- And finally - our biggest investment – RFID. It still has problems but it's definitely a faster and more efficient way to handle loans and returns and manage shelf checks and stock takes. It's getting better all the time and we've allowed space in Returns for a sorter when the price gets to a level we can afford.

Does our new library work? Have our new directions gone in the desired direction? Overall yes! And staff have coped amazingly with the changes.

Our biggest challenges in the new library?

- Security for co-located Council staff in an open environment. This has been resolved by removing cash payments. Only small monies are handled.
- The sheer bulk of materials being handled – staff at Stirling handle an estimated 0.44 tonne per hour. We can alleviate but not resolve it completely.
- Our changed intergenerational mix. We've had a large influx – of children but primarily teenagers and young people. It has been difficult for some of our older more traditional library users who are uncomfortable with their noise and the space they take up, their communal use of PCs, and accessing of games and virtual realities when they should be doing homework. We're explaining the importance of digital as well as traditional literacy, we identify quiet times in the library which they might prefer, and we work the floor in holidays and after school to try to smooth out potential situations.

Is there more for us to do? Always! Today's world never stands still.

- We've in the process of joining the LINK network – with Barossa, Clare & Gilbert Valley, Light Regional and Gawler Councils. If the state wide consortium goes ahead, then we will be better positioned to assess our options and, in the meantime, can extend our collections at no cost, share skills and knowledge, and take advantage of consortium purchasing.
- All staff have completed a Web Odyssey to ensure they can fully exploit the social networking capabilities of our soon to be systems upgrade
- We're interested in virtualisation of our public PCs as mentioned.
- We're investigating downloadable audio books – and e-Books!
- We're exploring options for 'hang out' space for our young people.

And we're continuing to build on the relationships developed with community groups and local businesses. We still receive generous donations – and were thrilled to discover that the Stirling Business Association has included this photo as one of Stirling's iconic sites on their newly developed web page.