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**Thinking about Capacity Building and Sustainability of Information Literacy Programmes: Re-engineering Experiences by the National Library Board, Singapore**

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**Abstract**

*As information literacy (IL) programmes begin to 'mature', the need to think beyond the horizon in terms of capacity building and sustainability is warranted. Librarians and information workers continue to work in steady state and offer regular IL programmes meeting current needs and demands of participants. However they should also revisit and re-engineer in terms of resources and programme development so as to take IL to the next 's-curve'. Today ICT applications are becoming more pervasive and turning the digital divide into digital dividends becomes more challenging. The National Library Board, Singapore (NLB) has made significant inroads in the design, development and delivery of IL programmes to the general public, students and corporate clients over the last eight years. Recently efforts were made to reflect, review and reengineer their IL programmes. In this paper, the presenter will share significant projects in the 5-year IL strategic plan put forth by the NLB Academy. These projects hope to build internal capacity and sustain IL programmes for Singaporeans. The first project highlights the development of an IL curriculum to train and certify NLB librarians in the area of research, resource, critique and publishing literacies. The second project, the trainer development programme focuses on professional development. Staff with the passion of becoming IL trainers is required to attend the programme to be equipped with new skill sets such as instructional design and train-the-trainer's skills. Participants will learn about*

*NLB's eIL programmes as a solution to address the problems of trainer fatigue, lack of trainers and reaching out to the masses. Finally, the presenter will get participants to start thinking about their own IL programmes. Issues such as their value-add, determining the bottom line, closing the gap between the 'gamer' and 'boomer' generations, strategic planning, helicopter thinking and the 'yellow pages' approach will be deliberated upon using vignettes from NLB experiences.*

## 1 Introduction

The National Library Board, Singapore (NLB) is a statutory agency that manages a network of 38 libraries comprising a National Reference Library, public and children's community libraries and selected educational institutions and government libraries. In FY04, NLB welcomed an annual visitorship of over 29 million and loaned out over 35 million items. [1]. Programming forms an integral part of NLB's promotion and outreach activities reaching out to the masses. The information literacy programme (ILP) is one of its key programmes where the objective is to equip Singaporeans with lifelong learning skills in information search, retrieval and use. In 1998, NLB set up an information literacy (IL) project team to design, develop and deliver IL programmes for library users. NLB's ILP is unique in some ways in that being a national library and the different types of libraries under its management, there was a need to reach out and promote IL to the diverse users of the library. The IL project team saw this as an opportunity to prototype IL programmes for the general public, schools, and corporate clients. The IL programmes developed have been categorised as 'public good' and 'value-added' ones. The latter programmes incur a nominal charge intended for cost-recovery purposes, mainly for corporate clients and schools. The 'public good' programmes for the public are generally free and support the social good function of the library. The NLB Academy (NLBA), which is the training arm of the NLB, presently administers the IL programmes. In this presentation, the speaker will reflect, review and share how the NLBA has re-engineered its IL programmes to make them more relevant and timely.

## 2 Reflecting on IL Progress: Snapshots of Achievements and Outputs

### 2.1. Delivery of IL through In-house Programmes

The early years of IL development focused on project management and programme development. The main focus was on infocomms literacy and introducing the general public to use the emerging digital library and its resources. Three programmes were developed to support this objective:

*2.1.1. Programme 1: Library User Education Programmes:* This programme introduces the general public to library services and facilities.

*2.1.2. Programme 2: Basic IL Skills:* Two main courses support this programme. They are: Be InfoSmart and the Internet as a Research Tool, targeted primarily at students. This is a value-added programme where students are charged a nominal amount.

For the general public selected thematic IL programmes were developed on 'hot topics' such as Business Information Resources. These are offered as a social good programme, introducing them to the library and its resources.

*2.1.3. Programme 3: InfoPaths:* This is a customised programme targeted at corporate clients. The main focus of this programme is to teach participants how to use the Internet more effectively when doing research.

### 2.2. Courseware Development for the National IT Literacy Programme (NITLP)

2.2.1. The IL team collaborated with the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) to develop courseware for the National IT Literacy Programme (NITLP). Three modules on areas such as emailing, information search and retrieval, and online chat were produced and incorporated into the curriculum. To reach out to

the masses, training centers were set up in three libraries with private sector partnership. External trainers conducted the courses.

The success of these programmes can be seen from the numbers where, a total of over 152,000 people benefited from these programmes. Feedback and response to these programmes have been positive.

### **2.3. eLearning Courses Developed**

2.3.1. The NLB has embraced e-learning as a means to reach out to the masses and leverage on its digital library infrastructure to deliver content and programmes. A CBT-CD-ROM on Internet Search Strategies was produced in 1999, to meet the demand of IL training and address the issue of manpower constraints. Subsequently, two web-based e-learning courses on Effective Internet Searching and Mastering Project Work were developed in 2000. These courses were hosted on the digital library and made accessible to corporate clients. For schools, the e-learning courses were marketed as blended learning combining face-to-face instruction with e-learning.

### **2.4. Marketing and Advocacy**

2.4.1. NLB has been active in advocating and promoting IL both locally and internationally. At the local level, NLB worked with other government ministries and statutory boards by offering IL programmes and participating in national programmes such as the Great Singapore Surf, the Singapore Learning Festival, and the NITLP where the main objective was to bridge the digital divide and the promotion of infocomms literacy. Presentations and participations were made at international conferences and workshops in countries such as the US, Australia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and Europe. A branding exercise, including the production of collaterals and promotional materials, changed mindsets on the importance on IL.

### **2.5. IL Competency Development for NLB librarians**

2.5.1. After the IL programmes were prototyped, there was a need to train-the-trainers and rollout the programmes at the branch libraries which were seen as programme delivery nodes in the community. By 2002, a small group of public services librarians were trained on how to use the IL courseware and deliver the programmes. Branch librarians and their staff are presently offering the Basic IL programme as one of their outreach programmes to schools.

## **3 Review: Market Watch and Opportunities for IL Programmes**

The IL project team constantly scans the environment and look for opportunities to develop the programme. As such, push and pull factors are reviewed and analysed.

### **3.1. The Annual Survey on Infocomm usage in Households and by Individuals: Statistics for 2004**

This survey, published by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA) in March 2005, presented useful data to help the IL project team find niche areas in terms of programme development and opportunities. [2]. Data indicated that Singaporeans were using the Internet beyond email applications to performing value-added applications such as information search and retrieval, usage of online libraries, and downloading software. In addition the survey noted that e-learning was on the rise.

Opportunity for IL: *There is a need for Singaporeans to search and use information more efficiently and effectively. Timely delivery of IL programmes on topics such as Internet search skills, information ethics, and the promotion of digital library will equip the general public with skills at a time of need. More e-learning courses on IL related topics can be developed and the content can be packaged for access via NLB's digital library. It is hoped that by adopting e-learning, NLBA will be able to reach out to a larger number of learners, increase its e-learning course repository, and leverage on delivering content via its digital library infrastructure.*

### 3.2. Paradigm Shift in Education

The Ministry of Education, Singapore (MOE), introduced Project Work (PW) for upper primary to junior college level in the mid-1990s. PW moves away from rote learning where the aim is to “provide students with the opportunity to synthesise knowledge from various areas of learning, and critically and creatively apply it to real life situations. This process, which enhances students' knowledge and enables them to acquire skills like collaboration, communication and independent learning, prepares them for lifelong learning and the challenges ahead.” [3]. A key stage in PW is information gathering where the student is required to conduct independent research and locate information and present it in an effective manner.

Opportunity for IL:

*The education sector provides a critical mass for IL programmes as can be seen from the MOE's statistical digest of student intake in 2004 . [4]:*

Type of Institution	No. of Students
Primary Schools	296, 419
Secondary Schools	213,534
Polytechnics	55,753
Institute of Technical Education (post-secondary)	17,941
National Institute of Education (teacher training)	2,953

**Table 1: Student Intake Numbers**

*In a mini-survey conducted in 2005 with a cluster group of principals, it was noted that courses on topics such as effective project work skills, academic integrity, research skills and information resources would help students undertake PW more effectively. The MOE despite having introduced some IL guidelines for schools in 1998 does not have an IL curriculum currently in place for School Media Resource Libraries and the implementation of this is not enforced and monitored. The schools have expressed great interest in NLB's IL programmes especially as it fits in the information gathering stage of the PW process.*

### 3.3. Addressing the Digital Divide

3.3.1. Singapore is transiting into a knowledge-based economy and bridging the digital divide will be a recurring issue for the government and the need for skills upgrading will be high on the agenda. The agency championing this is the Workforce Development Authority (WDA) which is addressing structural unemployment with its job re-creation programme that targets sectors such as Cleaning, Horticulture, Healthcare, Marine, Textile and Education. Other sectors in Retail, Construction, Security, and Community Services are being added too.

*Opportunity for IL: Working with WDA to form a strategic alliance can help NLBA leverage on some of WDA's strengths such as the National Skills Recognition System, the Employment Skills System and other activities such as the Learning Festival that reaches out to those needing reskilling. The thematic IL programmes targeted at the different sectors will help promote ICT literacy and emphasise the need for information for decision-making and personal effectiveness in the information society.*

### **3.4. New Competencies for Librarians**

3.4.1. NLBA's Trainer Management and Development programme will train a pool of librarians in IL who will be able to Learn, Immerse and Practice in the areas of IL. More information about this programme will be elaborate upon later in the paper.

*Opportunities for IL: Librarians are increasingly conducting value-added research such as information packaging and creating information products. To further the Library 2010 strategy of building professional expertise, professional librarians need to actively conduct IL programmes and reskill themselves in training delivery and user education.*

## **4 Re-Engineering for Relevance: The Next 'S'-curve**

### **4.1. Organisational Thrusts**

NLB recently launched Library 2010:Libraries for Life, Knowledge for Success, a strategic plan detailing key thrusts and programmes for the organisation. The report noted that NLB will work with supporter stakeholders to "...establish Singapore's public and national libraries, and we take our own initiatives in promoting language and information literacy, reading, writing and storytelling competencies at the national level." [5, p.16]. This direct reference to IL further reinforces management's support for IL. Libraries are hybrid presently, with parallel resources in print and digital formats. The library is offering interactive learning spaces thus librarians need to be proactive and offer learning programmes to their users who are increasingly becoming more discerning.

The NLB Academy will be championing the IL programme and has set a goal statement of equipping Singaporeans with IL skills that will make them competent to identify, select and evaluate information from a myriad of resources for decision-making purposes and apply it as a life-skill whereby users will become more info-savvy and independent information seekers. This is in line with the definition proposed by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) where "information literacy is knowing when and why you need information, where to find it, and how to evaluate, use and communicate it in an ethical manner." [6].

NLBA will achieve this goal statement through four Ps:

- a) Purpose: NLBA becoming a thought leader for IL in Singapore
- b) Products: Develop quality IL programmes for targeted audiences
- c) People: Recruit and retain a trainer talent pool
- d) Process: Promote, market and deliver IL programmes





