User-centric Public Library Services in Singapore

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Purpose

Key strategies adopted to enhance user services in the public library network in Singapore

Staff

Guided Professional Capability Development Programme to develop a small team of professional librarians to perform in the required specialist library functions as envisaged by the public libraries

Services

Re-position the public library advisory and enquiry handling service (ASK!)

Use of new media/technologies to engage our readers and deliver services and content to targeted user groups
Bringing Libraries closer to the People : 3-Tier Public Library System

New Bishan Community Library opened on 1 Sep 2006
Quick Facts (FY05)

Singapore Population  4.24 m

Loans : 27.95 m

Members : 1.95 m

Visitorship : 30.9 m

Enquiries : 2.66 m

Programmes : 7704 (699,103 participants)
  ie 91 participants per programme
People we reach out to

- People in the neighbourhood
- Babies, toddlers and pre-school children from age 0 to 6
- School-going children and young people from age 7 to 19
- General working population from age 20 to 59
- Senior adults aged 60 and more
- Low income families, people with disabilities and children with special needs
Children’s Services

Our team of Children’s Librarians partner parents, care-givers and educators to provide guidance to the selection and provision of quality information sources and reading materials to match the child’s reading interests and school project needs.

Young People’s Services

Our team of Young People’s Librarians work with schools, youth groups and also the teens themselves to give our young customers the space and resources for them to grow creatively and learn.
Adult’s Services

- The library’s services for adults caters to their reading and informational needs.

- This is particularly in the areas for personal growth and development, skills upgrading, mental stimulation and social engagement.
Professional Capability Development

Objective: to increase staff capabilities in their chosen field of specialisation (eg library services to seniors, young people, children, disadvantaged/people with disabilities, reader’s advisory services)

Methodology
- Self-assessment & Online Competency Test
- Learning-Immersion-Practice framework to guide development of individual learning roadmap for each librarian
- Professional Mentoring Scheme

Ongoing plans – to develop a similar generic learning roadmap for the rest of the public librarians; identify next batch of librarians to go on a similar guided programme
Learning-Immersion-Practice

- **Learning** – formal courses such as Children’s Literature; Reader’s Advisory Techniques & Tools

- **Immersion** – attachment stints or short overseas study trips or presentations at overseas conferences

- **Practice** – projects that are related to librarians’ area of specialisation
  - Eg development of Teen Fiction Reading Kit; Learning Resource Kit for Seniors, Fiction Collection to support Fiction Advisory Service, Library Instructional Programme for school-age children aged 7 - 12
Poster Session

Study Trip to Hong Kong Public Libraries

International Conference on Information Literacy, W Malaysia

Conference Papers & Presentations

Library Visits

National Library of Korea
Nowan Children’s Library
National Library of Malaysia
Hong Kong Central Library

IFLA 2006 Seoul
PLA Conference & Visits to Boston & New York PL

Rolling Meadows PL

ALA Conference & Visits to Morton Grove PL, Rolling Meadows PL (Illinois); Phoenix Central PL (Arizona)

Morton Grove PL
Professional Mentoring Programme

“Mentoring is the deliberate pairing of a more senior and experienced person with a less experienced one, to help the latter grow and develop specific competencies” – Margo Murray (1991), Beyond the myth and magic of mentoring

• Enhance librarians’ subject knowledge and skills in their respective fields of specialization in terms of the literature, trends and developments & information needs of the user groups in the field, research skills and expanded network of contacts in the field

► Methodology
  ▶ Face-to-face meetings; email communications; teleconference/Skype
  ▶ Learning journals; evaluation forms

► Mentors
  ▶ Local experts in relevant subject fields eg university professors specialising in Children’s Literature; Reading Specialist; Lecturer cum Practitioner in the Chinese media and entertainment industry; Singapore Literature professor; local writer cum professor with the university arts centre; senior practitioner working in agency for elderly
Professional Mentoring Programme

- **Oversea Expert** – **Patrick Jones**, author of Connecting Young Adults and Libraries, as mentor for our librarian intending to specialize in Library Services to Young People

Professional Portfolio

- Documentation of librarian’s best works & organized to showcase different skill sets and how they relate to the librarian’s role as a LIS professional
- Chart professional growth & provide intellectual fuel for reflection
ASK!
An Advisory & Enquiry Service At the Public Library
What is ASK!

Aims to instill a culture of asking questions amongst the young and old alike

Re-branded Reference & Reader’s Advisory Service at the public libraries
Enhancements

- Walk-in at all 3 Regional Libraries
  - Adult Reference Desks
  - Children Advisory Desks

- Email/Phone
  - ask@nlb.gov.sg (Sep 05)
  - +65 6332 3255 (Apr 06)

- ASK! Promotion (Nov 05 – Mar 06)

- ASK! Standees (Jul 05)
Purpose & Uses of ASK! Blog

- Posting of past questions and answers (online resource)
- Publicity & Communications Tool to engage & interact with our users and to promote awareness of the enquiry service

Visit ASK! Blog (June 06)

http://dl.nlb.gov.sg/ask

New Media

Mainly young people

Monthly 850 visits
Purpose & Uses of **ASK! Blog**

- Immediate postings on events of national significance eg
  - Singapore Pioneers – *Lim Kim San*, one of the founding fathers of Singapore
  - Singapore War Heroine – *Elizabeth Choy*

- Introduction to latest e-databases eg *Dance on Demand* – a joint collaboration between NLB and Goethe-Institut, Singapore at library@esplanade

- Quick **e-Resource Guides** – tips on how to access and search NLB databases (eg Factiva)
NLB ASK! via Partners’ portal or blog

Government Youth Portal

National Heritage Board Blog
Programming Partnerships –
live rock bands at the library

ASK! via local newspaper portal
HighbrowseOnline

“Helping You Make Informed Reading Decisions”


- a book blog that features book reviews, librarians’ recommendations, readers’ contributions, and events at public libraries.
Engage & Interact with Users

Who’s Reading What - Readers’ postings on their choice reads

HB Squad Alert – brings the latest happenings on the book scene, local or otherwise

Quirky Themes – interesting theme titles specially selected and featured for the quarter

Fresh Ink – latest titles

Monthly 1000 unique visitors; mostly youth

Podcast/Vodcasts – will be other new media formats to explore for our book blog
Book-related Happenings at the Libraries

READ! Singapore – discussion facilitated by teens volunteers at the V.A.T (Teen Library) on a local title, Mid-Autumn, which included a lantern-making activity (http://dl.nlb.gov.sg/highbrowseonline/2006/07/read_singapore_mid_autumn_shar.html)

Friends of Yesterday.SG discusses “Mid-Autumn” – members of the National Heritage Board’s heritage blog (http://dl.nlb.gov.sg/highbrowseonline/2006/07/friends_of_yesterdaysg_discuss.html)

Online Book Chat transcript of “Tuesdays with Morrie” (http://dl.nlb.gov.sg/highbrowseonline/2006/07/tuesdays_with_morrie_online_bo_1.html)


Issues and Concerns with New Media

- **Time and effort** needed to generate **fresh content** which is key to growing readership

- **Critical success factors**: clarity in objectives of having a blog; spontaneity; making the blog **organic** hence moderation while necessary must be used judiciously; a team of **staff** passionate about their work and library mission & are blog/Internet-savvy

- **Legal issues** such as **deep-linking** because some companies prefer consumers to enter through main pages

- **Vodcast/podcasts** – efforts hampered by bandwidth constraints; lack of soundproof room for podcast recording; limited technical expertise
Thank You