

Introduction to the *Taking the Lead* Presentations at SWITCH 2011

My name is Cameron Morley, Manager, Public Library Funding and Advisory Services, State Library of NSW

Thank you for having me here today to introduce this session on our collaborative *Taking the Lead* program, which was run this year for the first time.

At the State Library we work with public libraries all over NSW both individually on specific consultancies, and also on bigger picture network-wide activities.

So far this conference we have heard about some challenges we may face in the digital and ebook world. Questions such as “where do we fit” – we being the State and public libraries – in this emerging environment were asked yesterday.

The answers to “where do we fit” and “where do we respond” are very likely to be found in these bigger picture activities that we work on collaboratively. Here are some observations made in this context:

We’ve heard a lot about growth in the online world. What else is growing? *Public library use is growing too* – we’re in the same space.

As Alex Byrne highlighted yesterday, we are in the midst of a sustained boom – public libraries are busier than they were 5 years ago, and the statistics reported to us annually at the State Library bear this out.

The last spectre of doom and gloom that some speculated would spell the end of libraries – the internet a dozen or so years ago – has in fact presented more opportunities for libraries, and made us busier.

Libraries have added internet services, both as content creators and as access points, as an extra channel that we provide to the public. This has largely not been as a replacement of current services – it is an extra service. At the same time the lending of physical collections in NSW has steadily climbed to surpass 50 million loans for the first time in 2010.

Will ebooks be different? Or will they be an additional channel that we add to existing services? We'll count ebook holdings and loans for the first time in the annual NSW Public Library Statistics this year, and this will give us a picture of this emerging channel. By and large, libraries cope well with new formats.

The real question is I suspect something like this – usage stats including physical visits are increasing, councils are building and extending libraries all over NSW to meet demand – *what are the people coming for?*

Perhaps a combination of space, connectivity and collections, and let's not discount leisure as a primary driver of visits – probably more so than pure research or information provision in the public library context.

Taking the Lead

The Library Act tells us to promote, provide and maintain library services for the people of NSW through the State Library in cooperation with local libraries.

Two of the ways we do this is through Research and Professional Development. Other speakers have mentioned the *Enriching Communities* and *Bookends Scenarios* projects – these were research projects done collaboratively with you in the past few years which help us put a value on what libraries do, and keep an eye on emerging futures.

Our Professional Development program consists of seminars and workshops.

In 2010/11 over 1,200 public library staff participated in at least one of these programs, which is a little over half of the Statewide workforce.

In 2010 we began scoping a program aimed at the next generation of library managers / or potential library managers, as succession planning is an issue facing many professions, including libraries.

We looked into a range of courses and trainers, and asked Annie Talve and Associates to work with us on developing a program that would enable

participants to develop skills in working collaboratively to address real issues facing libraries.

The aims of the program were:

- To cultivate fresh thinking
- To enhance self confidence
- To develop a repertoire of leadership skills
- To establish a peer network of energetic learners

We asked for nominations for participants – staff could self nominate by EOI and we also encouraged library managers to nominate potential participants.

19 staff from libraries all over NSW were selected.

The 19 assembled at the State Library and were split into 4 teams. A State Library staff member was assigned to each team to act as a mentor and facilitator. The program included a number of workshops, and they also collaborated with one another via a dedicated interactive online site and teleconference.

Five months hard work for the participants came to a triumphant conclusion on Wednesday 5th October, where the teams presented their results to an audience of public library managers.

The project teams were:

Bridge Builders - Jessie Kane (Coffs Harbour); Kathy Yang (Marrickville); Paula Pfoeffer (Canterbury) and Michelle Birch (Camden)

Missing Link - Christine May (Dubbo); Luise Scherer (Camden); Maria Mutimer (Inverell); Monique Gyamfi (Sutherland) and Shoba Abraham (Ku-ring-gai)

Tech Tasters - Heidi Colquhoun (Blue Mountains); Isha Kariavasam (Canada Bay); Melanie Morgan (Dubbo); Nicole Shearer (Gosford), Sarah Taylor (Shoalhaven) and Sonja Toussaint (Albury)

Transformers - Barbara Swartz (Blacktown); Barjinder Kaur (Penrith); Carolyn Tweedie (City of Sydney) and Heather Davis (Waverley).

Project work covered topics such as social media for public libraries; making connections with diverse communities (African refugees, young adults, elderly CALD residents etc); providing continuing learning and professional development for staff; and designing and promoting programs for adults. The teams have created a website, a couple of wikis and put together a vast amount of resources and research of benefit to the entire public library network.

Two of the teams were invited here today to present to SWITCH.

Thank you to the trainers, Annie Talve and Chia Moan, and to our participants and their managers, for their commitment and enthusiasm.

The results of the teams' research and reporting will be a portfolio of 'best practice', available to the whole NSW public library network.

Please welcome:

Sarah and Heidi from Techtasters

Barjinder and Heather from Transformers