

Internet training

A role for the public librarian

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The Mirrabooka public library in Western Australia which houses the new Internet training centre



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One of the major challenges currently facing library and information professionals is to help clients become and remain 'information literate'. Library and information professionals are responsible for navigating clients through constantly developing technology and rapidly burgeoning information availability to help them find what they need to know. And, they are increasingly taking on the challenge of teaching clients how to perform some of these tasks themselves. Kay explains how the Mirrabooka Public Library has risen to the occasion.

The new Mirrabooka Public Library in Western Australia was planned to reflect the view that the public library is the 'social hub of the community'. The City of Stirling Council approved the concept and work began with the architect, Banham and Associates of Perth, to make the concept a reality.

Making the public library a 'social hub' involved the construction of a centre that comprised a public library, an Information Technology Centre and a City Council customer service centre as part of the floorplan, while community offices, meeting rooms and a coffee shop lead off the shared foyer.

The library was opened in July 1997 and the concept is certainly working in this suburb of Perth with a high multicultural and low socio-economic population comprising a large part of the clientele. The community offices are now tenanted by a diverse range of community groups including a multicultural women's health service, a youth assist-

ance service, a graffiti control taskforce and children's service. The meeting rooms are in high demand, The Council Customer Service Centre will open in early February 1998 and the Information Technology Centre is proving a great drawcard.

The information technology centre

The Internet Training Centre is a specially designed area of the library that houses twelve PCs, two printers and a small servery area with sink, hot water, fridge and cupboard space. Whiteboard and pin-board areas are provided to facilitate teaching and advertising. The centre is separated from the library by glass doors, enabling privacy for the class attendees, but allowing the public to view activities. There is also a small communications centre adjacent to the Internet Training room for telecommunications and equipment housing.

The concept for the Internet Training Centre came from discussions with the Internet Training Institute and their concept that Internet and other communications training are rightly a role for the public library. The City of Stirling has entered into an agreement with the Internet Training Institute and the Mirrabooka Library is an Internet Training Institute Training Centre.

Is it working?

An Internet trainer was appointed in late September and the first training sessions started in October. The first session was a 'Train the trainer' class for City of Stirling library staff and the appointed trainer and the library then took over the training of the city's staff in the use of Internet.

These classes have been popular with city staff from all departments, and the Centre has charged the city as any outside contractor would.

In the first month of operation we have trained forty-nine staff and are now ready to take on the public. There is a list of more than 150 people who have put their names down for Internet training when it becomes available and we are now ready to undertake our first lot of advertising.

A feature article will go into the local newspaper and brochures will be sent to local businesses and schools in the city. There has also been interest in the community in hiring the facility as a training room for organisations who bring their own trainer as there are few such facilities nearby.

There is a prime role for public libraries in Internet training, and it sits well with the role of the public library as a provider of information in all formats. The operation of the centre as a business has also been useful in the defence of the city's provision of free Internet access to the public after councillors questioned the provision of this facility at no charge.

The report, *2020 vision*, stated that:

'Libraries will need to establish, consolidate and enhance their position by recognising their roles as providers, navigators and brokers for the knowledge economy'.

The Internet Training Centre is one way in which public libraries can establish their position as vital links in the knowledge economy. ■