

For book lovers, borrowers and buyers

Business initiatives at Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation

Whitehorse Manningham Regional Library Corporation (WMRLC) has embarked on initiatives with business to provide new services to library patrons and broaden relationships with two suppliers, Australian Large Print Audio and Video (ALPAV) and Dymocks Booksellers. From November 1998, WMRLC began to act as an agent for ALPAV by accepting orders for their product. At the same time, a link was installed from the library service's web catalogue to the Dymocks home page, providing patrons with the ability to browse the Dymocks catalogue and purchase materials. The ALPAV scheme will be trialed for twelve months, the Dymocks affiliation for six months.

With public libraries being increasingly urged to be entrepreneurial and to generate additional income, the library management team saw these initiatives as opportunities to do both, as well as demonstrate to the Library Board the Library Enterprise Team's [the in-house team which successfully bid for the management of the WMRLC in 1997] willingness to embrace and participate in the information economy.

The ALPAV scheme is being piloted at the Box Hill branch, where the demographic for the target group, that is, those aged fifty-five years and over, is largest and where demand is expected to be highest for large print items. WMRLC will act as an agent for ALPAV by accepting orders for their product, but will not hold, sell or deliver stock.

The Dymocks affiliation consists of a link established from the catalogue search results page on the library's web catalogue interface to the home page of Dymocks Booksellers. The message: *'Did you find what you wanted? You may wish to buy your own copy. If so, browse the Dymocks catalogue and place your online order'* is displayed, inviting library patrons to move to the Dymocks catalogue.

Both projects deliver a small commission to the library corporation on sales generated via the library.

When embarking on the projects, WMRLC's manager of media resources, Libby Sturrock and information tech-

nology and information services manager, Teresa Wright sought to capitalise on the natural convergence of the target markets of libraries and booksellers.

Libby says: 'As a recent survey carried out by a large British book retailer found, those who buy the most, also borrow the most. Clearly then, the user groups of libraries and booksellers are remarkably similar and the advantages of a bookseller being able to reach a large target audience via an un-aggressive and un-threatening environment (the library) should not be underestimated.'

When embarking on the affiliations, WMRLC staff were sensitive to the issue of commercialism, and so took care to select projects which would offer additional services to library patrons from reputable businesses.

Libby Sturrock again: 'ALPAV are a fully Australian owned and operated company focussing on publishing titles in large print format. As suppliers to the library market they have no obvious retail presence in the cities of Whitehorse and Manningham. The proposal therefore offers patrons access to products not available through normal retail outlets, and for which there is an expressed and growing demand.'

In relation to Dymocks, Teresa Wright says: 'Dymocks are a well known bookselling franchise with more than 110 years in the business. The link is from our catalogue search results page, not our home page, so patrons must be actively looking for books before they come across the link. In addition, Dymocks have invested heavily in e-commerce, and in setting up the back-end systems to ensure data confidentiality and security for its customers. By forming an affiliation with a company with all the required infrastructure already firmly in place, the library is spared the expense of purchasing and implementing the sophisticated hardware and software involved.'

The WMRLC Library Enterprise Team believes this type of business partnership is a brave new venture for libraries, demonstrating a willingness to embrace and participate in the information economy.



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