

From small beginnings...

The Mobil Oil Australia's Engineering library

From small beginnings do big things flow, and in the case of Mobil Oil Australia's Engineering Library it would be hard to find a more appropriate sentiment.

The library opened in 1992, with one staff member and the grand total of one book. Eight years later the library, now known as the Mobil Information Centre, boasts about 35 000 items.

Just visit the centre on the sixth floor of 417 St Kilda Road or browse its latest innovation, the InfoCentre Website, and you will realise just how information-rich it has become.

Of course it would never have happened without the drive of its manager, Marny Elton, and her team, Louise Lindquist and Debbie Dodd, bringing together a combination of skills and expertise.

Louise had worked in a range of systems and technical services roles before joining the team in late 1993. Since then she has further expanded her experience by turning her hand to a range of projects and activities covering all facets of information management.

Debbie Dodd came to Mobil with a background in government and private specialist libraries. She contributes research and cataloguing skills to the Information Centre. Her main claim to fame is the weekly bulletin 'Libnews' which is distributed throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

According to Marny, managing a library is like managing any business: 'You need to be part entrepreneur, marketer, mentor, sales person, lobbyist and fund raiser.'

The promotion of the centre's aims and highlighting of its achievements have played a large part in its growth.

There is a sense of tenacity and enthusiasm that helps explain how Mobil Oil Australia's Information Centre has become an integral part of the company at a time when so many other special libraries are either shrinking, closing or being outsourced.

'From being just a place to store stuff, we've become a respected re-

source. One that's time- and cost-efficient,' says Marny.

'We are pro-active, we look for work and we love a challenge.'

'Thinking outside the box' as Marny calls it is also a key to the centre's growth and that's where that old real-estate adage — location, location, location — enters the picture.

'When Mobil moved to St Kilda Road we needed the right location,' says Marny. 'Where was the greatest exposure to traffic and possible customers? Right between two of the staples in life, food, the canteen, and money, the credit union!' she laughs.

Marny also went out and asked what it was that the people in Mobil, the customers, wanted and then set out to provide it and more. Her early findings shocked her: 'What I found was that groups within the company tended to jealously hoard their information feeling reluctant to trust anyone else to store it safely.'

'Our aim, our goal, was to make it available... to let those who needed to know, know it was available... through us,' says Marny. 'I think I joined more committees than anyone and at every opportunity listened to people's ideas while also shamelessly promoting the library,' she says.

'I'd grab people in the corridors and invite them into the library to eat their lunch and have a coffee. We had a captive audience, people would go to the credit union and then into the canteen, passing us both ways. The reading table became a picnic area and at lunch-times the library resembled a drop in centre, it still does!'

'Now everyone knows where we are and what resources we have on offer: including books, videos, on-line facilities, periodicals, reports and a treasured company historical archive.'

Over the years it is that welcoming atmosphere that has helped make the Information Centre a central part of Mobil Oil Australia.

Never one for being shy, Marny invited every company director independently to visit the centre to help raise their awareness of it as a resource. Even former chairman PC Tan

got an invitation to tour the library within two days of his arrival.

However, it hasn't all been plain sailing.

'For a while I suspect managers and directors looked on us as the new kid on the block,' Marny says.

'At that stage they didn't seem convinced of our ability to do serious research. But we had carved something of a reputation for being able to find anything from anywhere and people started turning to us to do their research.

'Everything seemed to develop from there. We convinced Corporate Affairs that its historical collection needed cataloguing and Human Resources was successfully lobbied to store their induction packs with us.' According to Marny that was a crucial aspect of the Centre's growth, the packs gave company inductees immediate contact with the Information Centre and built awareness of the services offered.

And as chair of the Environmental Health and Safety Committee, Marny also ensured that the library was responsible for handling all the displays of the safety campaigns run by the company each year, further promoting the Information Centre's profile.

It seems there is no stopping the Centre now, the latest innovation, its website, is seeing to that. The story behind the website's development is worthy of a full report in its own right, but briefly it is a tribute to the work of team member, Louise Lindquist. Louise had never set up a website before and had no formal training in web technology when she took on the challenge. Armed with a book on web development and \$3000 funding Louise turned out a site which has prompted other units within Mobil to demand that the centre develop their web pages, something that would cost anything upwards of \$12 000 if outsourced.

Marny understands the company, knows its history and its information needs. There is not a 'this is what you get' approach but a 'what do you want and how may we help you get it' attitude. It is a philosophy inculcated in the team working with her. As they say, from acorns oak trees grow. ■