



"I WOULD HAVE COME BUT I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT IT"

Jasmine Vidler describes how Orange City Council Library has tackled the challenge of keeping Council employees informed.

Each week, staff members at Orange City Council receive a surprise in their email inbox. It varies from a book review to the latest Central West Libraries (CWL) service or next library event. The project started two years ago as a *This Week At Your Library* email, in response to anecdotal feedback such as "I would've come along but I didn't know about it".

Feedback from staff also indicated that Council staff were not aware of a particular service such as reserving books or being able to use the catalogue via the internet. Previous emails sent out about events and activities had also been irregular. So a strategic plan was put in place to reach out to the 300 staff employed at Orange City Council, as well as their family and friends, and help spread the word about library services and events through regular Monday morning emails. The Monday email is followed up by an interview with Community Radio on Tuesday mornings, where the same information is presented to the community.

The weekly emails have evolved into quite a talking point, with Council staff commenting that they are now more aware of the range of services the library provides - from Home Library, Bus Services, Inter-Library Loans, Baby Rhyme and Read, Music for Little Ears, and Storytime to

Classics Book Club, Pageturners Books Discussion Group, Writers' Drop-in Days, author visits and other events.

CWL's objective for this innovative project was to place the library top-of-mind in the target audience each week and increase positive perceptions of the library. This proactive public relations project raises awareness about the library and has established a routine of regular communication and a mechanism for immediate feedback.

The strategy has enabled us to introduce new and established services and collections to this audience and it also allows us to match potential clients with services, while engaging and empowering our library staff to prepare interesting and lively messages about their individual responsibilities. We provide a personal contact for the service or activity promoted in that week's email and encourage library staff to actively participate in marketing our services. CWL only has to create the content once but we can distribute it many times, which minimises marketing costs and provides potential for roll-out to other CWL Council email networks.

A recent evaluation was conducted by electronic survey. Every respondent surveyed recalled receiving the emails, 71% read the emails and 35% kept the emails for future reference. There were also positive suggestions on how the weekly emails could be improved, from varying the days sent out (because Mondays mornings were often a busy time), to featuring the latest library purchases, and varying the format with PDFs, images and links. We also found out recipients of the service "like to hear what others are reading", "read the interesting ones, delete the rest!", and like best "the ones that are short and on one topic of the service", while others "often pass them on to friends".

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PUTTING READERS FIRST

Frontline is an online course in the theory and practice of reader-centred work in the public lending library. It is designed to challenge library staff to rethink their jobs and change the way that they work by putting readers first, rather than books. Melbourne Library Service has just completed their three-year Frontline training program. Shirley Bateman reports.

Frontline was designed by Opening the Book, an independent company in the UK, and grew out of their experience of delivering extensive programs of face-to-face training in reader development for library staff.

Frontline has been used in the UK since 2005. During that time, 86% of English public library services have used the course, as have public libraries in Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Currently just over

“Frontline has opened up a whole new realm of understanding of how our borrowers operate and what strategies we can employ to give them (and therefore us!) much greater value.”
– Frontline trainee

9,000 people have taken – or are taking - the course. A Frontline certificate is now an industry standard within UK libraries.

Melbourne Library Service piloted the Frontline training program in Australia, with a three-year contract that began in September 2008. Around two thirds of the Melbourne Library Service team completed the program, with trainees commenting Frontline reminded them why they decided to work in libraries in the first place.

The biggest challenge for trainees was finding the time to complete the course. Each module contains a lot of information, the learning is substantial and the practical tasks take time – but when staff did find the time, they were always richly rewarded.

There has also been a big improvement in the way our library spaces look since we undertook Frontline. We are much more aware of the need to offer people opportunities to broaden their reading choices and cater more comprehensively to our browsers and five-minute borrowers. For example, we have now installed 'quick choice' stands in prominent areas of the library and we have a strong emphasis on face-out display. Now, many of our library users say they love visiting us because they find it easy to choose great books to read.

One of the main aims of libraries is to get books off the shelves and into people's homes. In the 2010-11 financial year, we recorded over 1.3 million loans (excluding e-loans). This is the highest we have recorded since our establishment in 2007. This figure is all the more remarkable when it is taken into account that our collection is very small in comparison with other libraries — less than 160,000 very hard working items. Our Library Services Coordinator, Barry McGuren, attributes some of this success to the Frontline program.

In libraries across Australia, we are moving away from transaction-based interactions. With the increased take-up of RFID technologies, library staff are now free from many of the mundane tasks that burdened them previously. It's a huge change and some staff, understandably, feel more than a little lost.

At Melbourne Library Service, we see Frontline as a way of equipping staff with new ways of working in the self-service environment, creating new ways to interact with readers, to create attractive, eye-catching book promotions, to reconnect with their passion for books. Our staff have a new-found confidence.

Following the successful pilot of Frontline at Melbourne Library Service, a three-year roll out of the program is underway across the state of Victoria. The Public Libraries Victoria Network and the State Library of Victoria have made the course available to all public libraries in the state at an affordable cost.

Shirley Bateman

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CWL library professionals take it in turns to write the emails, preparing them in an appealing style, including images where possible and keeping the emails short. Originally the emails used “This Week At Your Library” in the subject line, but now this space is an opportunity to tease the reader and grab attention. Every email includes CWL branding and email signatures. An email template with the slogan “read, inspire, inform and enjoy” has been designed specifically for this project. The weekly emails are planned with a schedule of topics allocated to staff and discussions of upcoming topics at weekly meetings. Staff have also learnt to display and be creative with emails, about preparing and delay-sending and how to participate in radio interviews.

Manager Central West Libraries Jan Richards, said she was pleased with how well the emails had been received and the project's effectiveness in promoting the library's services and getting it into the minds of the community.

Jasmine Vidler

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For more information about Frontline, visit:
www.openingthebook.com

To view the video, Frontline at Melbourne Library Service, go to: www.youtube.com/watch?v=NFOGgDTGzEw