



NO MORE (FUNDING) NICE GUY

An ex-librarian, I work now in the philanthropy field and so keep a keen eye on how libraries are funded, and how they promote themselves as part of their fundraising efforts. What strikes me is the ineffectual way in which many public libraries go about asserting their value and seeking financial support. The message still comes across in the old 'feel good' way that charities used to talk about themselves a decade ago.

What is lacking, in my view, is a strong and cohesive business case - presenting the statistics (positive and negative), the analysis, the implications and forward projections in an assertive and professional way. Whether writing a council report, letters to patrons or an article for the press, we need to emphasise the gap between community needs and service delivery and identify potential funding solutions, not just push the line about how good we are.

Yes, public libraries do achieve fantastic outcomes on a shoestring, but that's not the line we should take. It's just

"...libraries need to be more assertive...."

too easy for councillors to say, "Okay, if they can achieve these fabulous results with this much money, they don't really need any more".

My view is that libraries need to be far more assertive and forceful in their promotions. I think that sometimes we are our own worst enemy. Surely this stems from the historical perspective of 'women's work' - undervalued and under-resourced. We are too timid and almost apologetic in our assertions, wanting people to like us and value us for our wonderful work, but not asserting our value in the triple bottom line language that has currency in the funder's world.

In my experience, if you keep delivering despite depleted resources, quietly battling on and making do,

your funders will rub their hands in glee and ignore you. We should be loudly declaiming our abhorrence of the inequality in library services in the light of the government's agenda, unveiling the embarrassing lack of a national framework compared to other OECD countries, and demanding the government take responsibility and resource us properly.

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Talking fundraising effectively

- Make examples of best practice initiatives and their social impacts to inspire support.
- Contrast this with the shocking reality of struggling, under-resourced libraries in disadvantaged areas to illustrate the urgency and extent of the problem.
- Explain why this divergence occurs – for example, lack of government recognition for the value of public libraries, lack of a national framework or standards, constantly increasing expectations for libraries to provide community services, inadequate funding.
- Highlight the potential benefits of proper resourcing - link back to the government and relevant organisational social inclusion and education agendas.
- Make recommendations on how to achieve this potential - spell out what we need now, the priorities, the costs, and who the losers will be if we fail to act.

LIBRARY PROFESSIONALS ARE ROLE MODELS FOR LITERACY

I believe library professionals are role models for literacy. So what gets my goat is the 'dumbing down' of research, and the associated obsession with information technology.

Yes, librarianship is about online information, digitization, networking, and so on but I fear that the whole principle of libraries may be lost because of this focus.

Consider the small libraries of worn books that are currently so successful on the streets of Australian cities for the homeless. We still have toy libraries. But will the physical survive, or will even toys be an online experience in the next decade for toddlers who will go on to high school to spend their time downloading all their research from whatever they find on the internet, without knowing how to consult primary sources?

The real danger is of course that some higher authority will start to decide what can be downloaded to the point that access to information is politically controlled to a greater degree than was ever dreamt of by the old censors who banned *Lady Chatterley's Lover*.

At high school, my political consciousness was raised by roneoed 'underground newspapers'. Will the next generation have the same freedom? And, will they know what to do if they need to rely on hard copy? I fear a return to the days of Dickens, when the illiterate citizens had no power. In the future, the illiterate citizen will be one who cannot get to a library to use a computer or the person who is too poor to buy one (God help any future hippies!).

And hey presto - we will have created an underclass who have no access to communication, who cannot apply for a job because they are illiterate, just as there was in Victorian times. Do we have to reinvent this situation because we are mesmerised by the glamour of technology? Can't we really consider access 'for all' before we destroy it?

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