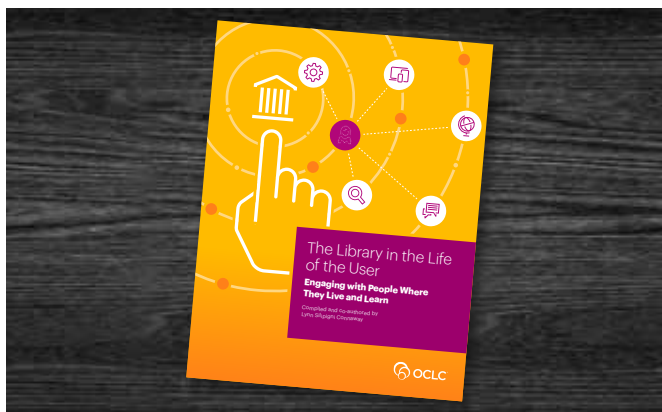


DELIVERING SUCCESSFUL INNOVATION DEPENDS ON CUSTOMER INSIGHTS

The Australian Government is focusing on the development of an innovation culture to achieve economic transformation and future growth. ALIA is likewise emphasising the importance of innovation and associating it with leadership. Everyone can innovate, but not everyone does. How and where do you discover good ideas for creating improved processes and fashioning new products? JANINE SCHMIDT reports.

Some say the best ideas come from customers. The research arm of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) has, over many years, examined customer behaviour and identified trends on which to base new products and services. A recent compilation by Lynn Silipigni Connaway, 'The Library in the Life of the User: Engaging with People Where They Live and Learn' (bit.ly/1M53Dwp), summarises a decade of research that explored library-user behaviour undertaken by OCLC in partnership with others. Beginning with Indian librarian SR Ranganathan's 1931 directive '... to follow the reader from the moment he enters a library to the moment he leaves it ...', the work provides an extremely useful overview of methods and data collection approaches to understanding user behaviour as well as a summary of findings.



The behaviour of 'screenagers', millennials, baby boomers and school and university students is explored. The various studies Lynn cites all make similar findings: libraries are seen to be print- and book-based rather than places that provide online resources and reference services, even though access to wi-fi and the internet are available. Customers are not aware of the full range of services provided by libraries, so it is vital that libraries engage with their customers both to understand their needs and to provide appropriate services. Convenience is the major driver of information use.

Libraries are no longer simply focused on access to information and content. Innovative libraries need to place users at the centre of service delivery and embrace new technologies. Some libraries are personalising



Janine Schmidt offers useful tips on how to innovate.

their services and using social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest and LibraryThing, but there is a long way to go in connecting and engaging with customers. Some examples of innovation include: doorstep libraries; delivery of items on demand directly to users either digitally or in person; links to career preparation; makerspaces; printing of books in libraries; pop-up libraries in airports, convention centres and shopping centres; libraries staffed with volunteers; support programs for entrepreneurs; links to legal advice; use of QR codes; embedded librarians; office spaces for independent workers; Wikimedians; streaming video; ebook recommendations; birthday messages; and digital exhibitions. The possibilities are endless.

Innovation begins with asking questions. Long-time blogger Stephen Abram poses some of the questions on his website (stephensighthouse.com): What pain or gain is your service offering? Have you made the business case for your service? What resources and expertise are needed? Innovation comes to the fore when some of these answers are found and the activities of others explored. For example, follow those who use new techniques, such as the sales tool Sales Funnel. Innovation is realised when each library experiments for itself and takes action.

As Stephen Abrams says, '... come up with a service that really hits the spot with your users, one that they love and use ...' Creative, fearless, imaginative, passionate, visionary and reflective leaders are required to deliver the future destiny of libraries. 🌟

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