CHANGES WELL JUNE
SOCIAL CHANCE EXPERIMENTATION
CONTINUE EBOOKS QUESTIONS MULTIPLE
PLAN EFFORTS LOCAL **LIBRARY**
AREAS
YEARS CAMAS PROVIDING BOARD
AVAILABLE NEW KNOW
ADMINISTRATION INCLUDE
DATABASES
EXPAND
FOUNDATION
WANT REQUIRE
VARIETY **OBJECTIVE** HELP
STAFF GO
CONTENT HELD TECHNOLOGY
DESCRIPTIONS PLACE SPECIFIC
PLANNING INVESTIGATE OPPORTUNITIES COMMUNITY CPL WAY
CATALOG IDEAS
CLEAR COLLABORATION NEEDS MAKE DIRECTION
SURVEYS TIMES CITY ACCESS
SECOND NEED STRATEGIC PATRONS ALWAYS
ALLOW CONTINUE EXPERIMENT
BOOKS PROVIDE TRAINING MEMBERS
GET SERVICES USERS PROCESS
MEET POSSIBLE NUMBER
CHILDHOOD MANY
MUST COLLECTIONS
GAME MAY PAST
IDENTITY PLAN PUBLIC ROLE
EXPAND FUTURE BROADBAND
WORLD GROUPS
BECOME LIBRARY'S FRIENDS
PROGRAMMING INFORMATION
OFFERINGS MATERIALS EARLY
COLLECTION STAFF
KNOWLEDGE LIBRARIES
EVENTS PHYSICAL
SYSTEM PUBLIC
TIME
INTEREST BEGIN FIND ONLINE
TECHNOLOGY ONE ADDITIONAL SET
GRANTS
JANUARY INITIATIVES
YEAR PEOPLE
BETTER NETWORK OFTEN EBOOK
FUNDING TRUSTEES
TAKE ISD BUDGET
EQUIPMENT MEDIA
STAFFING LIBRARY
JULY DIVISION SERVICE
PROGRAM USE REORGANIZATION
STORY INCREASE
LEARNING WAYS
COMMON FFCL JOB EASIER
PROGRAMS

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"A Strategy for Uncertain Times" by Ron Gompertz, Library Trustee

Preface

The public library is at a crucial and game-changing point in its evolution.

Library staff and the Board of Trustees have spent a year reading, talking, listening, investigating -- all to find some clear direction, a travel guide to the future where the library is a vital, vibrant contributor to the life of the community and not a cobwebbed relic of "the Olden times."

Alas, what we have found is that there is no guide. There is no clear vision. There are no clear cut "do this, not that" answers to the questions. The Camas Public Library is like every other aspiring public library, feeling our way, vulnerable, tentative, and yet hopeful and excited.

What we know is that there are clear negative implications for library service as demand continues to increase and funding is static or irregular. The library has seen a decrease in the number of employees from the high of 17 FTE authorized in 2007. There has been a sizeable decline in the materials budget.

We know that we are not in the library business, but the Camas business. We are the community.

We know the future will happen with the library or without it. No one will ask the library for its permission for the world to change.

Clearly, sitting still is not an option. The library must change if it is to survive. It is not wise to believe "books will never go away" or if we continue to smile the customers will continue to come. The library must be agile, must make foundational changes, must be as ready as it can to re-position itself and deliver as the place the community comes to seek free unbiased answers to its questions, to help fulfill the need for personal growth, to remain in touch with other human beings. To be the community's heart.

For sure we will make some false starts, stumble or hit a few walls along the way to the future, but we will learn, adapt, and thrive.

This plan is the next step in the evolution of the Camas Public Library.

Ron Gompertz, Library Trustee, attended some of the workshops and webinars and read many publications about public libraries. After reading a draft of this document he drafted his response and thoughts. "A Strategy for Uncertain Times" is appended to this plan.

The Camas Public Library Board of Trustees adopted this plan on February 2, 2012.

I. Wandering in the Fog

The plight of the Camas Public Library and some possible direction can be illustrated by some thoughts by others:

"But libraries have never been solely about free books. They are about something deeper, about information, about access to knowledge, about providing a public space where citizens can interact with each other, all within the context of an exchange of knowledge. Libraries are at the core of our understanding of civilization, and if we are to keep them healthy, we'll have to make sure that they continue to answer deep needs in our society, rather than provide particular services because they've always done so." -- Hugh McGuire[1]

"But guessing correctly, while important, is not really the key. What matters is responding to customer wants and needs in a timely and efficient manner, even at the expense of letting go of past practices and tools no matter how cherished or successful." – Steven Escar Smith, Carmelita Pickett [2]

"Librarians are either at the table or on the menu." -- George Needham & Joan Frye Williams[3]

"True experimentation is the only way to manage uncertainty…." -- Stefan Thomke[4]

"Libraries must move from defining their professional role in terms of providers of information literacy on to a role as multimodal knowledge centres encompassing information as well as entertainment, retrieval as well as production. Second, librarians need to redefine their role in the physical library as facilitators of multimodal literacy and do so in close cooperation with other partners advancing civic society." -- Kirsten Drotner[5]

"We're in a Dungeons & Dragons, multi-level role-playing game with mysterious, morphing rules, unknown shape shifting players, and who knows what around the next corner." --David Zavortink .

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To determine what was to go into this strategic plan, Library Director David Zavortink and Assistant Directory Sandy Glover devised a process that would engage the public, the staff, the Board of Trustees and get them to share their opinions, ideas and concerns about the future of the Camas Public Library. The intent was to enter into a discussion of what is possible and what people want from a "library."

CPL sought direction from its users. A series of public sessions was held to gather input on a variety of questions. Various interest groups such as the Friends & Foundation of the Camas Library (FFCL), the Second Story Gallery, the Craft-o-Rama group, and the No 2 Readers book discussion group were invited to participate. A blog was created to spur people's interest in the library of the future; it included many provocative ideas and statements (http://camas.typepad.com/future_camas_library/). Three surveys were conducted: an online survey to validate what we heard in the public sessions, and an IMPACT survey to find out about the use and desire for public computers.

There were informal surveys to find out what people used, what they wanted, what was on their minds. These various surveys had limited success.

Staff transmitted comments made by library users.

A forum on "the Future of Public Libraries" with three local library leaders was held to get their thoughts and a sense of the direction they are taking.

The CPL staff thought and talked about what the future holds and where the library can make changes to better position itself.

Staff and trustees have read and listened to podcasts and webinars about THE future library.

The Public Library Association's strategic roles (see Appendix) were reviewed . It was striking to the staff how quickly these roles have been outdated or rendered mute.

The Board of Trustees, with the future in mind, reviewed the library's mission. It was felt the mission remains valid. *The Camas Public Library exists to enrich lives, encourage self-education and promote an enlightened citizenry by providing free access to diverse and expansive collections.*

Out of all of these efforts, there was little in the way of specific targets to be found. The public is at a loss – they want books, they want all things digital, they want 16mm films and a card catalog. They want the past and the future. Their desires seem to be "all over the map." Other libraries are trying to find their way. No one knows a specific path or what specific dangers await us.

Camas Library staff is in a similar quandary. Feelings range from "there will always be books" to "we need to do this now!"

The Board of Trustees recognizes the need for change and well knows the obstacles. They look to the library administration to set the course.

The library will, as others will, grope through the dark, experiment, and search for the best ways to serve the future community.

II. A Plan.

From our various efforts, however, some decisions have been made and a form for the "strategic plan" has been chosen.

The strategic plan cannot be the typical multi-year strategic plan the library has had in the past. Instead, it will be more of a loose set of directions in certain identified areas, with one year of specific initiatives or experiments and one year of subsequent possible directions. The plan's ideas will be revisited annually and a new two-year plan established. The planning process will become central to the library's operation. It won't be limited to a small set of service responses.

To coincide with the budgeting process, the annual review should take place in June or July. With the American Library's Association conference in late June or early July it will be an ideal time to incorporate

some new services and technology unveiled at the conference. In several ways, the library has already begun to implement this plan, so working from a July to June calendar is not unreasonable.

If experimentation leads to some specific goals or projects, those can be added to the plan during the annual review.

The PLA's specific 2007 Public Library Service Responses* have been abandoned as the basis for the plan. Absolutely there are elements of many of them in the strategic initiatives that follow. Lifelong Learning is one example. But this plan will not specifically reference the PLA responses.

The library will continue to provide core services, such as access to books and computers, and niche services, such as foreign language materials, foreign language story times, and sleepovers, that are highly-valued by patrons. The initiatives will further identify directions for these core services.

This plan will include lots of experimentation and initiatives. Objectives may have fewer measureable outcomes than found in a previous strategic plan. It will mean going down dead-ends. In the spirit of experimentation, if it isn't working, it will be abandoned; unfruitful or less fruitful efforts may cease abruptly. The reset button may be pressed at any time. Flexibility is key.

The following sections will deal with five areas where the library will concentrate its initial energy and experimentation. The five areas are Library Staff, Community Engagement, Collections, Technology, and Funding. They are in many ways intertwined, as technology impacts the staff and the staff interacts with the community, which in turn influences the library's collections and policies. And, of course, all involve funding.

This plan contains many ideas, initiatives, tasks and objectives. In only one or two years it would be a Herculean undertaking to achieve all the tasks, solve all the puzzles or expect to find all the answers the library needs to survive to the next decade.

Perhaps this Plan will result in some glimpses of what the future public library looks like. To reach that library will require a mindset shift from slow and deliberately implemented plan to one of more rapid experimentation, constant change, and innovation. It will require an allegiance to letting go of the past. It will be fun and exhilarating; the unexpected will surprise everyone. It will require the staff, the Board of Trustees, and the city administration to remain flexible, positive, and hopeful.

III. Library Staff

Not only does the staff keep the collection relevant, plan and run events, and maintain the myriad of day-to-day physical and technological operations, the library staff defines the library to the public. The one-on-one interaction between the staff and public is a powerful and crucial nexus. It is imperative that the library build on and strengthen this connection in multiple ways.

In 2011 the library had its first retirement in many years. In 2012 and beyond there are likely to be additional staff vacancies. Thus, now is the time to begin looking at staffing and reorganization for the future and making changes and adjustments as necessary.

Time and time again the words "flexibility," "change," and "collaboration" are seen in discussions of library staffing. These need to be woven into all training.

There is a definite need to devote more time to training as well as thinking, planning, and producing. The entire staff will be involved. There will be a focus on developing the skills of the library staff to make them ready for the future. And for staff to be the guides to the technologies our customers crave.

The initiatives for 2012 are:

1. Establish a staff tool (Wiki? Intranet?) to facilitate training and education and to improve internal communication. OBJECTIVE: In place by July 1.
2. Determine staffing needs and consider revising library hours to achieve efficient use of staff and resources. OBJECTIVE: Preliminary report by January 20, 2012 in preparation for City Council Planning Conference. OBJECTIVE: Analyze library use patterns by February 15.
3. Investigate revised, changed job descriptions to meet future needs and reorganize staff. Answer the question "what qualifications do we need on staff?" With Human Resources Department, begin the process of writing the descriptions and doing comparables. OBJECTIVE: Complete one investigation by May 1. OBJECTIVE: Begin to phase in new job descriptions and reorganization as opportunities arise.
4. Begin a systematic staff training program to emphasize customer service, technology, and collaboration with library members. The program may include multiple "Staff Training days" throughout the year where the library is closed to the public. OBJECTIVE: Begin in January 2012. Develop the technology skills of staff so they can provide better assistance to patrons. OBJECTIVE: The list of staff competencies will be revised by April 1.
5. Identify areas of greatest need for training. OBJECTIVE: By January 15.
6. Pursue new funding for staff training.
7. Explore low-cost means of providing staff with meaningful training and professional development opportunities
8. Create more opportunities for staff training.
9. Expand jobs/tasks for volunteers. How can volunteers be used to meet the mission.

For 2013 the initiatives are:

1. Build on the staff training; revise as necessary.
2. Continue evaluating and implementing job descriptions and assignments.
3. Complete staff reorganization
4. Get staff training dollars back into the city budget.
5. Continue to reorganize for effective use of staff time.
6. Utilize additional volunteer help.

IV. Community Engagement

If there was anything learned from the public fora that the library held on the topic of the library's future, it was that we need to hear more from the public we serve. More and more often. The library needs to have an ongoing dialog with the community. We need to push to hear more.

Likewise, the library needs to tell its story more often and in different ways. Marketing the library to the greater community is in the best interests of the library.

The library needs to make a commitment to strengthen the bond the Library has with the Greater Camas community in order to provide staff with invaluable experience and insight.

The library has been on a small forefront with social networking, having Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr accounts. The library needs to engage its users in these new areas even more than it has.   The library needs to be where its users are. Additionally, the library needs to provide a place for community dialogs to take place.

A new e-mail calendar and newsletter was launched in November 2011. The library distributed a new brochure in 2011; while beautiful, it needs to be more widely disseminated. The word about the library needs to reach more people and more often.   This should include traditional media as well as the new.

As a city department, the library's web page—and the library's technology-- is controlled by the Information Services Division. This results in a less than rapid response to the fast changing nature of the library world.

The library received a "Transforming Life After 50" grant to provide at least two programs during the first half of 2012. This will provide the library with an opportunity to add some new types of programs and make new connections. The library will build on what it learns from this experiment.

Statistics show that the percentage of Camas residents with library cards has declined as the population has risen. The library needs to discover or create ways to connect with new residents and encourage library use.

The library needs to sell itself to the community in more ways. There are a number of areas of endeavor included in this broad topic: marketing, outreach, programs. There is much for the library to do in each of these areas.

The 2012 initiatives are:

1. More civic engagement. Staff will be assigned to various civic groups with which to interact and market the library. This will include attending meetings and working with the organizations to find areas of commonality.
2. Continue to use social media to reach our members. Turn up the volume on online efforts—enliven, embolden them. OBJECTIVE: Specifically, add six YouTube videos and six podcasts in 2012. OBJECTIVE: increase frequency of postings by 20 percent and respond to all comments. OBJECTIVE: Monitor other sites and comment to market the library.
3. Expand adult programming offerings. OBJECTIVE: beginning in January at minimum, one monthly program will be added to the schedule. These will be in a variety of areas: informational; brain stimulation; community conversations (topics of local interest); technology; health; twenty-something interests. OBJECTIVE: Work with Friends and Foundation and Second Story Gallery Society to increase the number of programs.
4. Join the Early Learning Public Library Partnership. OBJECTIVE: First quarter 2012.
5. Enhance and expand Early Childhood offerings. This is to include programs (such as evening or Saturday story times), materials, furnishings (manipulatives), etc. to reach young families.
6. Add additional after hours programming.
7. Create and utilize a volunteer registry for programming. OBJECTIVE: As part of TLA50, by June 30.
8. Try a monthly "new resident" mixer at the library or find other ways to reach people new to the community.
9. The library will conduct quarterly surveys during the year to define areas for collaboration with our users and discover what we need to know to serve them better. This will affect staff training.

10. Begin the process of finding new measurements for the library's success in the community. Go beyond circulation.
11. Make the adult summer reading program more active.
12. More "virtual library" offerings online.
13. Begin coordinated, planned word-of-mouth advertising. OBJECTIVE: Consider building a network of folks that would push general library use as well as specific programs. OBJECTIVE: Include Trustees, FFCL, Second Story Gallery.
14. The Board of Trustees will continue and expand its advocacy opportunities.
15. Evaluate and monitor the use of library services and programs; enhance those that are well-received; eliminate those that are under-utilized . OBJECTIVE: Staff create list for review by Board of Trustees by April 15.
16. Market the library's meeting spaces to increase utilization and library awareness, and also contribute to providing a wider variety of events for public consumption.
17. Begin planning for 2013 library 90th birthday celebration in April and 10th anniversary of "new" library. OBJECTIVE: Form planning committee no later than June 2012.

For 2013 the initiatives are:

1. Continue to expand Early Childhood Learning offerings.
2. Continue to refine the adult programs offered, building on the successful.
3. More collaboration and partnerships with outside groups.
4. Add two social media channels based on what members or potential members are using.
5. Seek needed funding for additional programming.

V. Collections

The ground is shifting. In 2011, library staff felt a strong earthquake of interest in electronic books. The use of the library's e-books rapidly eclipsed the use of downloadable audio books. More and more inquiries about how to download free e-book content grew throughout the year. The structure the library has in place is not adequate to meet the demand. More questions from trustees and staff arose about the potential impact to the library. If there was ever a clear sign of the change to come, this was it. Then, in December 2011 the number of e-readers and tablets owned *doubled*.

Likewise, on the vendor side there were major changes occurring. There is more digital content available from a greater array of sources and vendors. Digital offers the promise of "no waiting" and "always on" and available. It promises convenience and infinite choice. It will be a challenge to make this a reality in the library.

Of course, the library's materials budget remains at 60% of what it was in 2003. It does not allow the library to pour large amounts into buying new formats or new online services unless there are cuts elsewhere, or large spending by the Friends and Foundation (FFCL) or through grants. The physical collection needs to grow at the same time we expand our virtual collection.

For 2012, the initiatives are:

1. Seek vendors that will provide a new model for e-books to allow simultaneous downloads
2. Continue to evaluate e-book vendors. **OBJECTIVE:** Triple the number of e-books available by year's end. **OBJECTIVE:** Make e-books available through the library's catalog.

3. Continue to evaluate the materials expenditures, reducing or expanding the budget allocations where necessary.
4. Make e-books easier to find and use. **OBJECTIVE:** Get bibliographic records for all library-purchased e-books available into the library's online catalog. **OBJECTIVE:** By March 15, update all e-book user guides and get them online.
5. Conduct a survey to discover what e-book devices our patrons are using and to measure the demand for e-book content.
6. Continue to expand Early Childhood Learning materials to the collections. OBJECTIVE: Identify and add 100Early Childhood Learning materials to the collections, including discovery kits.
7. Monitor statistics of use for databases and magazines. **OBJECTIVE:** By August 1, make decisions on renewals.
8. Continue to lobby for and seek more funding for materials. This includes applying for grants through the FFCL and Washington State Library. **OBJECTIVE:** Increase materials expenditures by 15% in 2013.
9. Market the library's databases more aggressively through a variety of methods. These will include promoting them at appropriate programs (e.g. Novelist marketed to the book discussion groups; highlight specific products in newsletters; mention specific databases and uses in public outreach opportunities).
10. Begin to look for a new model for a collection development policy/plan that includes e content.
11. Continue to evaluate the library's existing print collections. OBJECTIVE: Decrease the library's inventory of books by 10% through a regular systematic weeding of the collections.
12. Investigate new evolving technologies to exploit for access to library collections.

VI. Technology

The pace of technological change doesn't allow the library the luxury of sitting back and contemplating if it should do this or do that or to wait. It has to happen and it has to happen now. With a tech-savvy clientele, the library cannot dally; it needs to be responsive to the demands of its members.

Library users are not unlike other people: they want self service and the library needs to provide more ways for such people to fully use the library and its resources without relying on staff intervention.

Technology is creating the future. Video teleconferencing for program events and training will be common place. Providing technology for library users to collaborate and produce content will be common place. Using technology to connect people to information will become not only easier, but truly ubiquitous. The world will become more connected and the library will be an important and vital hub in that network.

If the library doesn't offer the latest and greatest, if the library falls behind what other local agencies or libraries or services provide, the Camas Public Library will be lost. The library staff realizes that we are in a competition with all the other demands on peoples' lives and if the library isn't there, the library loses.

The Camas Public Library has some big challenges in utilizing technology. The first is that the library "contracts" with Fort Vancouver Regional Library for use of their integrated library system; thus, CPL is at the mercy of what FVRL does or does not do with the system. Because FVRL does not have mobile access to the catalog, Camas Public does not have this mobile service. It seems everyone has a smart phone and yet the library has little in the way of mobile services.

The second is that the library's technology is controlled by the Information Services Division (ISD). ISD does not have the staff to cover all technology needs of the city, let alone the library. With everything from providing public WiFi, to connecting to the ILS, to managing public PCs and printers, to the public accessing databases, to the need to constantly update web content, the library has no equal in the city when it comes to the wide variety of technology needs. The library tries to do as much as it can with technology and it is increasingly difficult to do so when there is not enough technical support due to the demands on the ISD.

The third challenge is the budget. The library will need to explore multiple options to find funding for future technology.

The CPL is fairly contemporary in its use of social media; it has multiple blogs, a Facebook page, and Twitter. These services are some that are not expensive or do not require the intervention of the City of Camas' IS Division.

In 2012 the library's technology-related initiatives are:

1. See the completion of the Broadband connection by July 1.
2. Begin to identify what can be done with broadband. OBJECTIVE: By July 15 identify items for the 2013 budget.
3. File for Erate to cover the costs of putting the public network on the NoaNet broadband network. OBJECTIVE: Completed by January 20.
4. Continue to work with the city administration and ISD to get ISD staff devoted to the library's technology.
5. Upgrade public PCs with Deep Freeze which will allow the use of Windows 7.
6. Replace the staff and public computers that are on the replacement schedule.
7. Continue to investigate Web 2.0 services that can be used by the library.
8. Come up with three ways to use a tablet device in the provision of public library service.
9. Devote one-third of all staff training hours to technology related areas. This is to provide better service to the public as well as to be better able to utilize the tools at their disposal when serving the public.
10. In early 2012, cross-train staff in those technology-related crucial areas behind the scenes.
11. Develop a "Technology Petting Zoo" program series to provide opportunities for the public to try new technologies and devices in a supportive environment
12. Expand the library's offerings for training of the public on equipment to use the services the library provides. OBJECTIVE: Plan courses and costs for 2013 budget process.
13. Establish public photo scanning program, train staff, establish venue to post content (such as a blog or Flickr page)
14. Investigate technology for library users to collaborate and produce content. Tie in with broadband. OBJECTIVE: Survey community about what they want to have available. OBJECTIVE: Place some equipment in 2013 budget or find alternate funding sources.
15. Expand the library's WiFi network so it is operational in more areas of the library. OBJECTIVE: Provide WiFi access through the library's PC management software to get better control over bandwidth issues, etc. OBJECTIVE: Provide Wi-Fi printing capabilities.
16. Identify and experiment with ways to use technology to make it easier for patrons of all ages to use the Library.
17. Implement new Comprise Smart Access Management software on public PC's. OBJECTIVE: By September 1.
18. Put a figure for a new ILS in the 2013 budget.

The following year, the library will have these initiatives:

1. With Fort Vancouver Regional Library, begin the process of procuring a new integrated library system to replace the rapidly aging Sirsi Dynix Symphony system.
2. Seek additional funding for equipment to better utilize the library's broadband connection.
3. More and continued staff training in technology. Cross-train staff.

VII. FUNDING

Through out the staff discussions on these areas, time and again the topic of funding came to the forefront. The city budget has been static for four years and for the majority of the last decade. The current economy is in doldrums. The common wisdom is that it will be several years for a turn around to occur. This will make the library's sea change more difficult.

The library administration, trustees, and city council have had inquiries or sales pitches from the Fort Vancouver Regional Library about joining the district. As lean times continue and local dollars become scarcer, this is an avenue that can be explored during the life of this and subsequent strategic plans. As the larger district is more agile with technology and staffing, and has a funding source which is not subject to competition from other departments as the city library is, it may become harder and harder to compete for the allegiance of library members. Pressure to join FVRL will potentially come from the patron side. Political pressure is also likely.

While the library has had a few grants, federal money, given through the Library Services and Technology Act via the Washington State Library will likely be reduced or eliminated. With cuts to state government, the WSL's maintenance of effort is in danger.

Other grants are possible. Given the library's limited staffing, grants are sometimes more work than they are ultimately worth. Thus, few grants are applied for. Grants which have a streamlined application process, give money for materials, and have few reporting requirements are the library's number one choice and will continue to be pursued.

The Friends and Foundation of the Camas Library (FFCL) remain the library's strongest supporter. Their continued success and support will continue to be sought by the library. The library staff will continue to work with FFCL on donations, events, and marketing.

The initiatives for 2012 for funding are:

1. With FFCL, apply for corporate grants for materials. OBJECTIVE: Raise $15,000 for materials in 2012.
2. Trustees and FFCL board continue to advocate for library funding with city officials.
3. Analyze the pros and cons of joining the regional library district.
4. Apply for Erate funding for broadband access.
5. Investigate additional ways of raising revenue.
6. Collaborate with other agencies to cooperate on common endeavors.

In 2013, funding initiatives are:

OBJECTIVES

1. Increase the materials budget by 15 percent.
2. Increase the amount given by FFCL to the library.
3. Include major upgrades in the facility and equipment in the Capital Facilities Plan.

APPENDIX

PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE RESPONSES

From *PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE RESPONSES 2007* By June Garcia and Sandra Nelson (Chicago: Public Library Association, 2007)

- Be an informed Citizen: local, national and world affairs
- Build Successful Enterprises: Business & non-profit support
- Celebrate Diversity: cultural awareness
- Connect to the Online World: public Internet access
- Create Young Readers: Early literacy
- Discover your roots: genealogy and local history
- Express Creativity: create and share content
- Get Facts Fast: Ready reference
- Know Your Community: community resources & services
- Learn to Read and Write: adult, teen & family literacy
- Make Career Choices: Job and career development
- Make Informed Decisions: Health, wealth & other life choices
- Satisfy Curiosity: Lifelong learning
- Stimulate Imagination: reading, viewing & listening for pleasure
- Succeed in School: homework help
- Understand How to Find, Evaluate & Use Information: Info fluency
- Visit a Comfortable Place: Physical & virtual spaces
- Welcome to the United States: New immigrants will have citizenship info

NOTES

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A Strategy for Uncertain Times
Draft 2 - Version 11/4/11
Ron Gompertz

Introduction

A true library is more than a house of books. It's a community.

We are not in the library business, we are in the Camas business.

We are not in the book business. We are in the information business.

Neither are we in the reference business. We are in the collaboration business.

The Camas Library has been called the town's living room and the heart of the community. Along with the schools and the quality of life in our town, the library is one reason that families are attracted to Camas.

Library's help communities. Our library will soon turn 90. Part of our job is to help Camas "tell and maintain its story" across the years.

Libraries have always adapted to shifting funding levels and changing approaches to consuming information. We have never been married to one format or another.

Today, a patron can read a physical book, read an electronic book, watch a dramatization on DVD, listen to an audio version, and find the story on YouTube, Hulu or other online sources.

All of these and future formats are part of the ever evolving notion of a collection. Many of these formats did not exist 10 years ago. Some will not survive into the next decade.

Benjamin Franklin, the founder of the American library system, would be proud to know that people still hold tremendous goodwill toward libraries. Libraries may be loved today, but we must continue to earn that love in the future.

The Future Arrived a Minute Ago

When we surveyed and met with patrons we got many good suggestions.

Not surprisingly, when we asked, "what do you want to see in the future," many people only imagine an extension of what they see today. It's said that if Henry Ford had asked customer what they wanted, he would have created a horse that ate less.

People don't always know what they want. This a common problem for companies who develop products. When Apple first introduced the iPad, it was mocked as a "giant iPhone." Now, tens of millions of iPads later, it's seen as a transformative device.

A good library, like a good company must lead, not follow.

We must offer services and products that, once understood, people can't imagine living without.

Who are our core customers? What can we do to anticipate their needs and delight them?

A casual glance at our stats and usage suggest these core constituencies whose needs do not always overlap.:
- Kids 1-12 years old and the parents they bring in
- Participants in our crafting activities
- People who use our computers and Wi-Fi.
- Middle School Teens
- Seniors

As we invest in and develop new programs, we should always have one of these top constituencies in mind. We need to serve all citizens, but we don't need to be all things to all people.

The Digital Wave is Here

The biggest change we see coming is that books will be as mobile as music. In fact, what happened in the music industry is likely to repeat in publishing.

Digital books are a good thing. People will read more, not less, in the future. They will read snippets of books whenever they have a spare moment, and they will still curl up on the couch for extended reading.

Digital offers the promise of "no waiting" and "always on." It promises convenience and infinite choice.

Demand for digital content will grow and we cannot predict the plethora of devices that will be used to consume content. Nor should we. Our job is not to predict winning devices, it is to provide content in formats that our patrons demand.

We must recognize that the arrival of new digital formats comes with an implicit promise of ease and convenience.

We will need to deliver on that promise.

Books aren't dead

We know that that many of our constituents will continue to want books in traditional forms. We believe this especially true for the very young, the technical "have nots," and many patrons who are "just not into" gadgets and technology.

Thus, books continue to be relevant and core to our services. We need to grow our physical collection at the same time as we expand our virtual collection.

Changing Definitions, Metrics, and Services

We will need to change some of our notions and metrics. What is "a visit" when someone can check out books without ever stepping foot in the library?

How should we help remote patrons who are trying to master their first download? Without providing tech support for everyone's gadgets, shouldn't we know how they work well enough to help people access our services?

Does it make sense for each library district to master new forms of customer service on their own, or should we lobby the state to set up a unified approach with 24/7 phone and online chat customer service?

We measure computer usage, but how do we measure customer Wi-Fi activity? How do we measure collection size in an age of digital access to everything?

Shouldn't we also measure impact?   A DVD has 90 minutes of impact. A novel has many hours of impact. Do our metrics give them the same value?

We will need to develop new ways to deliver our services and measure our effectiveness.

Libraries are catalysts for learning

The extended community of learners we serve includes ourselves.

Our job descriptions may change. Our routines will be disrupted.

Our staff will need to adapt and evolve. New training will need to be procured. All this change is not additive. Some things will have to cease. We'll need to liberate time from old activities to make way for the new.

The Journey has Begun, but our Mission is the Same

We don't know how the future will play out and accelerating trends make it harder than ever to predict, but our core values remain the same.

We will continue to focus on learning, investigation, creativity, and collaboration with our community.

A strategy of successive approximations

Cleary, sitting still isn't an option. Given the current economic times, we should not expect significant funding increases.

Rather than place big bets, we will launch some experiments and learn from them. We'll collaborate and communicate with other libraries, including our friends in the local school district. We may team up with private companies.

We will make some false starts, and hit a few walls, but we will learn, adapt, and thrive.

This, in a nutshell, is the strategy for the next year. Rather than a grand five-year plan that risks plotting the wrong course, we'll explore the terrain and adapt as we go. As the terrain becomes clear, we'll put deeper stakes in the ground.

We'll continue to pursue what's working and forgive ourselves if we try things that don't. We will learn from others. The entire library world is going through this together.

Our community is a key partner in this effort. They, too, are exploring new technologies, information services, and means of communication. The library is their living room and we need to be sure they feel welcome and excited to be part of our adventure.

This is an exciting time to be a library. Uncertain, yes, but that's how most voyages of discovery start.

Appendix A. Random Thoughts

Implications for Staff:

- Nothing replaces or changes the need for world class customer service
- Library staff are life-long learners. We have always embraced technology.
  - That said, we need to step up our investment in training and skill development.
- Not all current practices may not be relevant in a post-book or reduced book world
- Changing paradigms are stressful for customers, too. We'll need to be patient guides.

Implications for Services
- New lending and subscription models may replace our current approach.
- Patrons consider electronic resources to be limitless. Loan periods, holds, restrictions may not be valid concepts in the digital world.

Implications for Materials:
- No one laments the loss of LP records. We'll continue let go of less popular formats and clear the decks for new uses.
- Just as Google has changed the reference desk, digital will change the stacks.
  - Stacks may "thin" as more content goes digital. This space may be put to different use.