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IMPROVING INFORMATION ACCESSIBILITY AND LITERACY IN AUSTRALIA

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Information Literacy is being strongly impacted by new technologies that are making information available in the format of choice of a reader, making the information easier to read, understand or remember for that particular reader. This new technology is making materials accessible to those who want to access information in non-standard formats – including many different eBook formats, large print (of any size and font), Braille, DAISY, dyslexia formats, Audio books, and the potential for personalised formats.

These changes will mean greatly increased information literacy for a wide range of people who previously had difficulty accessing the full range of information available in libraries. This includes people who are aging, people with visual impairments, people with learning difficulties & dyslexia, people who come from a non-English speaking background, as well as people who prefer to access information digitally.

These changes are being made possible by XML based work flows, multiple format generation software that can interact directly with users, local Print on Demand digital printing, and increasing digital book content. It is also made possible by the over twenty Australian publishers (including Random House, UQP, Fremantle, Hachette, and Simon & Schuster) who are currently working with and supporting this technology.

Libraries stand to benefit from this technology, which has been researched and developed in Australia, and is now coming into full commercial operation in the both United States and Australia. This paper discusses impacts of this technology for Australian libraries and how libraries can best use the technology to improve service to their users.