

A RESTAURANT MEAL ON A MCDONALD'S BUDGET OR HOW TO HOW TO PROVIDE QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY ON A SHOESTRING. DREAM OR REALITY?

Andrea McKey

Manager, Peter Spillett Library, Museum & Art Gallery of the Northern Territory
Conacher Street, Bullocky Point, Fannie Bay Darwin NT 0820

andrea.mckey@nt.gov.au

ABSTRACT

Drooling over an a la carte menu while the \$7.95 for a Crispy Chicken Fillet Burger combo with large chips is rattling in your pocket? Libraries everywhere are struggling with limitations and librarians are dreaming of more money, more staff and more space as well as more understanding from those who control the purse strings. How can a library fulfil missions, visions and aspirations without staff collapsing in a puddle (or rather an ocean) of frustration, unrealised dreams, hopes and wishes?

Looking back over 8 years of managing a small Special Library I ask myself:

- Have I successfully balanced dreams and reality?
- What were the lessons learnt and sacrifices made?
- Is this sustainable into the future?

This paper explores the challenges faced, decisions made and strategies used in an endeavour to deliver quality services within the framework of increasing costs and a decreasing budget.

You see things; and you say 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say 'Why not?' George Bernard Shaw (Oxford Dictionary of Modern Quotations).

Introduction

The Macquarie dictionary (1987) has 16 meanings for *dream* including:

- A vision voluntarily indulged in while awake
- A hope, an inspiration, an aim
- To invent, to form or plan an idea in the imagination

To me vision/mission statements have always seemed to be a dream statement (a hope, an inspiration, an aim) and as such are subject to influences, money, time and a variety of other pressures. This usually means we have to change the way we do things in order to still achieve the dream. This paper is not about using fabulous new technologies and expensive online databases. It is about giving the best service we can give with what we have at our disposal and highlighting some examples of how we achieve this.

I will give you a bit of background on the Museum & Art Gallery of the NT (MAGNT) and the Peter Spillett Library and myself to help you understand where we fit into the wider library community.

I originally started this job on a 6 months contract in 2000 and I am still here 8 years later. What keeps me here? The library is very small, we have lost ½ a technician position over the years and about 40% of our buying power due to a reduced budget and increased prices. I must admit that since starting to write this paper I have spoken to a couple of Special Library managers whose budget is smaller than mine. So I am working on a football boot type shoestring.

I enjoy my work. I am very lucky that I earn a wage to pay my mortgage but can go to work every day knowing that I contribute to and add value to the museum program. MAGNT staff is incredibly supportive and appreciative and we know that the library has contributed in some way to every report written and every exhibition opened. I have been asked many times over the years why I don't move on and up and actually do the duties of the professional library manager. If I was 20 years younger I might think about it but then again I might not. Being a small Special Library means I do everything from end processing, to cataloguing to writing business cases. At times it raises some eyebrows as it is looked upon as de-professionalising the profession. My answer is clear – if my Director wishes to borrow a book I will not say “Sorry Anna but you will have to wait for Toni (the Library Technician) to cover and spine label it as that's not my job”. But it is my job to fulfil the library vision, that's what I get paid to do.

The Peter Spillett Library comprises about 10,000 monograph titles with the odd CD, DVD, video and slide set thrown in and has been part of MAGNT since opening day at (the) delete? Bullocky Point in September 1985 but there has been a Museum library for many years prior to that in a variety of locations. The library collection covers the areas of Aboriginal art, rock art and anthropology; Australian archaeology and prehistory; Australian visual art and craft; Asian and Oceanic art, material culture and history of northern Australia and Southeast Asia; maritime archaeology and history; Northern Territory history; palaeontology and geology; vertebrate and invertebrate taxonomy and systematics; museology; collections management and materials conservation.

Over the years the museum has belonged to a few different government departments and the library has had several name changes. MAGNT currently sits in the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts (NRETA) – Museums, Galleries and Biological Parks. The library has been called Museum Library, Arts & Culture Library (part of the Government & Library Information Service) and in 2004 the name was changed to Peter Spillett Library in honour of Peter Spillett who retired after more than 20 years of continuous voluntary research and work at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory.

When the library was incorporated into the Government Library & Information Service in 1998 the library holdings were transferred to the new integrated library management system (Virtua) which is a catalogue used by all the public and high school libraries and some Government Libraries in the NT. This greatly contributed to opening the library to the public. Only MAGNT staff and other libraries or organisations are able to borrow from the library but everyone is welcome to use the library space and resources. This of course has increased the work load but has opened up a great resource to the general public. Our library is small but has a heart of gold, as one member of the public, who regularly does research in the library, has often told me.

In the last 6-8 years budgets across many departments have been cut and this impact has also been felt in the Peter Spillett Library. I must add that I have actually had a slight increase in my budget last and this financial year. MAGNT receives its budget from the department and then the money is divided into the different areas of MAGNT. Money is tight but luckily the director and MAGNT staff considers the library to be an integral and important part of the museum so we get a fair share. The library pays for all resources from this budget – serial subscriptions, books and a small amount of audiovisual resources, Inter Library Loans, stationery and end processing materials, seminar, workshop and conference costs, original cataloguing fees and other assorted expenses.

The library is staffed by a full time Library Manager (myself) and a part time (20 hours per week) Library Technician (Toni) and is open from 8am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

So how have we managed to provide great service delivery on a small budget not only to our primary clientele (MAGNT staff) but also the wider community? This paper has given me the perfect opportunity to look back over the years and evaluate what we have been doing and if the return on investment has been worthwhile. We have utilised many services free of charge but they have involved investment in time on our part and of course wages in the part of the department.

The issue of evaluating return on investment is complex and I have not attempted to do so beyond a very basic level. Costs are easy to calculate but benefits are difficult to measure in monetary terms. How far do we go to measure end value? Is it value to the researcher, agency, government, community, country or the world? My wage and Toni's wages are a drop in the ocean when measured against research support we provide to the curators and other staff to enable them to ensure there is an accurate and permanent record of the Territory's biological wealth and natural heritage as well as the history and culture of the Northern Territory and adjacent areas.

The Museum & Art Gallery of the NT is currently part of the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and The Arts and works under the departmental vision

Enable Territory communities to flourish in healthy and productive environments and be inspired through understandings of natural systems, our culture and history.

On our website (<http://www.nt.gov.au/nreta/museums/spillett/index.html>) we state that:

The Peter Spillett Library provides research and reference services to support the research, display, education and exhibition activities of the Museums and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory.

This is not just a vision or mission statement but an action statement. This is what we deliver to our clientele to enable them to fulfil their commitments.

Service delivery in any industry can be a challenge with dwindling budgets and rising costs, changing requirements and clientele. The following pages describe some of the ways in which the Peter Spillett Library fulfils its vision of quality service delivery within a limited budget.

Exchange agreements

Our exchange agreements with other libraries and organisations in Australia and overseas has been of exceptional value to the library and consequently to MAGNT and the wider community. Exchange agreements were put in place before my time as the library manager. We are lucky in that MAGNT publishes an annual scientific, peer reviewed journal “The Beagle: Records of the Museum and Art Galleries of the Northern Territory”. Since 2006 we have also published irregular supplements. These publications give us the ideal opportunity to exchange publications with other institutions. So what is the return on investment for this exchange? In 2006 I wrote a short report for the Beagle editor and my director who were looking at the value of the exchange agreement system.

It is difficult to estimate the real value (other than pure dollar amounts) of such a system for a variety of reasons:

- Some of the publications are not available as a subscription (irregular, locality, payment issues).
- Postage costs vary and keeping track of this is virtually impossible as charges for all Museum postage are costed to Directorate.
- Beagle publication costs vary each year (staff time, printing costs etc)
- Difficulty of costing staff time spent sending exchange journals to our exchange partners. This may include issues needing to be resent to replace missing or damaged issues as well as putting new agreements in place or severing old agreements.
- How many Inter Library Loans do we not pay for due to having the journal per exchange?
- How many Inter Library Loans do we provide (and get paid for) due to having the journal on exchange?
- How do you estimate the value of sharing and spreading the knowledge contained in such publications especially to the more remote areas of the world?
- We are often the only holder of very obscure journals either in the NT or even Australia so this also provides ongoing value to other libraries and individuals.

- Due to having links with these organisations we can also call on them for other information and assistance.

There are many more factors impacting on this issue. The Peter Spillett Library is generally getting the thick end of the wedge in these agreements as we publish one issue only per year and perhaps one supplement. Occasionally there may be an exhibition catalogue to send to Art Gallery exchange partners. We receive many more journals and books in return from most of the organisations. Due to the financial climate a few organisations have had to pull out of the exchange agreements as it had become too costly for them to maintain. So far this has not impacted greatly on us.

The figures for 2006 were:

115 exchange partners including	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smithsonian Institute, USA • Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, France • American Museum of Natural History • Bishop Museum, USA (History, Culture and Natural Science) • Auckland War Memorial Museum • Australian and New Zealand Museums • Institute Oceanographique, France • Art Gallery of NSW, SA, VIC, TAS
40 History and Culture journal titles received in exchange As well as Museum and Art Gallery publications Including	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • British Museum- Anthropological Institute. We get bibliographical lists and can choose any publications FOC (Especially pertinent to our Aboriginal and Asia collections). • Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology • Signals (Maritime) • LaTrobe Journal • TePapa monographs • Records of the various Australian, New Zealand and some Overseas Museums (Carnegie, American Museum of Natural History etc) • Exhibition books many of which are worth \$50+
About 100 Natural History journal titles received in exchange	Journals which are very relevant to our research and unavailable elsewhere or too costly to purchase with our limited budget. Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phuket Marine Biological Centre. Special Publication • Various Malacological Bulletins • Cybium, Zoological catalogue of Australia • We can have any Supervising Scientist Reports we want FOC
Rough costs of purchasing all the received journals	\$15,000+

This only looks at the costs we have saved by not having to purchase these journals but does not look at the value we have received or given due to having these journals.

The cost of producing the journal is not carried by the library but library staff nurtures the exchange agreements by organising the mail outs of *The Beagle* and other MAGNT publications. For 2 or 3 weeks every January library staff is known to be *Beagling*, a MAGNT terminology which sees us adhere labels, stamp and stuff envelopes and fill the courier bags to overflowing. It is a busy time as we still have to fulfil the normal library duties but the benefits to MAGNT and the research community far outweighs the extra work this entails.

British Library Inside Web subscription service

We have used this system since 2001 when it was still subsidised by Kinetica. It provides easy access to information from over 20,000 journal titles and over 100,000 conference proceedings. Back then we subscribed for less than \$500 per year allowing 100 passwords. We used it mainly to alert clients on what was newly published in their field. This service is meant to be used to order articles electronically from the British Library using a credit system. We don't use it in this fashion because:

- Often the article is from a journal we subscribe to
- The article is available from a reciprocal library in Australia and therefore free of charge
- The article is available at a lesser cost from an Australian library via LADD

We help clients set up specific search strings and alerts are sent to their email on a regular basis.

In about 2002 this service was no longer subsidised and the rates increased to about \$1800 and later that cost would only cover one password. We needed to make the decision on whether this was a worthwhile subscription. A survey of staff showed an overwhelming support for the value of this service. We could not afford more than one password so how would we overcome this difficulty? We transferred all the individual search strings to a single account and the alerts were sent to the library email on a weekly basis. To make life easier for us and make sure that the process of forwarding these emails would take the least amount of time possible we named the search strings after the clients.

On a Tuesday morning we check the library inbox and there are the results from the alerts all filed under client names, which are then easily forwarded to the client via email. Our clients still get the service they need and we have not been pushed too far in regard to our time. The cost of British Library Inside Web subscription has increased by about 5% each year. At the moment it is still a viable and valuable service. We can also use the service to log in and search the database at any other time. The procedures and passwords required for this are on the library Intranet site. So far the issue of there being only one user log in at a time has not been a problem. If there is a need for a few searches to be done urgently the library staff will do them for the clients.

To buy or not to buy

Keeping good and detailed financial records is essential when the funds are limited. I expend (on paper) everything that needs to be paid for when I first get my budget. This includes serials for the year, memberships, a rough ILL budget and any other non discretionary expenses. Every item I order I already deduct from my balance. At anyone time I know how much I owe and what I still have left to spend. This balance sheet has improved over the years and is probably one of the most important jobs I attend to. Since the advent of corporate credit cards it has been so much easier but in other ways much more time consuming to provide library services. Instant access to articles and buying out of print books is at your finger tips. Unfortunately the downside to this is the incredible amount of paperwork that I need to do to reconcile my corporate credit card. Just another trade off for good service delivery.

So when do we pay for the convenience factor instead of waiting for the freebie? This decision is always easier to make at the beginning of the financial year as the money is still there but I need to consider the research and exhibition cycle at MAGNT which often puts a strain on the library budget in January to May. We keep a small credit account with Infotrieve and the British Library. During most of the year and in normal circumstances we wait for our inter library loans to come through the reciprocal or LADD channels. For really urgent matters we use and pay for articles from Science Direct or Subito as they are instant or very quick and the cost is relatively small at roughly AUS\$12. As we come close to the end of our money we tend to use our credit accounts more although they provide articles at a more expensive rate.

Making the most of the Internet

There are now so many different ways we can utilise the web to provide services to our clients. We still have not taken the opportunity to use some of the new services such as RSS feeds due to time restraints. Some years ago I set up the Peter Spillett Library Intranet site for departmental employees as well as a site for the general public which sits on the Departmental Internet. I use the sites to target specific services (many of which are free), websites and information that clients would find valuable. The Intra and Internet sites require reviewing on a regular basis to ensure they remain viable and up to date. This is quite time consuming but the value to staff is there.

Services we provide links to include the following:

- Journal alerts available on publisher websites
- Journal article databases which provide search facilities
- Databases maintained by institutions such as:
 - Australasian Art Obituaries index - The Australian National Gallery
<http://www.nga.gov.au/Research/Obituaries/Default.cfm>
 - Dictionary of Australian Artists online – University of NSW
<http://www.daa.org.au/>

- Open Access Journals
- A subject gateway which provides websites specific to museum staff topics of interest such as archaeology, rock art, visual art and more
- British Library Inside Web subscription service
 - Museum staff can use our password to enable them to log in, search and change their search strings

Doing things the old fashioned way

Yes we still visually scan journal contents pages, publisher blurbs and other assorted information that finds its way into the library pigeonhole. Have you ever noticed that when the mail sorter doesn't know where to put something it ends up in the library? They seem to know that we will find an owner, that's our job. Not every staff member is able to come into the library to check the new journals and books display shelf every week or even every fortnight. We provide title only information on the library intranet but we also ensure that staff are alerted personally. This is especially important if the information is contained in a more general journal rather than a topic specific one. Doing this is also beneficial to library staff as we continue to increase our knowledge about what is happening in the different research fields.

One of the peculiarities of working in the library of a smallish organisation is that there are no secrets. We know where a particular book may be just by looking at the title and uncollected items in the printer always find a home with the correct owner. Having that sort of information about staff is really helpful when browsing blurbs, bookshops, book reviews, bibliographies and websites. Serendipity is still a valuable service provision tool. There is nothing like being able to say to a curator who requests we urgently purchase a particularly important newly published book "Actually Paul that book has just come in and will be ready for loan shortly".

Negotiation, networking and wheedling

Limited budgets don't allow for many if any online subscriptions. When our Natural Science curators requested a subscription to *Zootaxa: A rapid international journal for animal taxonomy* I had to give them the usual answer. Unfortunately a subscription is expensive and includes many papers which are irrelevant to our curators. After negotiations with Magnolia Press we are now able to purchase the electronic copies of specific papers and with the miracle of electronic payments we just pay for what we want. Every month I check the website <http://www.mapress.com/zootaxa/> for new papers published and email the information to our curators and relevant staff from another division in our department. Our staff can then advise what they wish me to purchase. Staff from the other division receive the information only and organise their own access. The papers are received as a PDF and are relevant, up to date and relatively inexpensive at approximately NZ\$10 each.

Networking is part of every organisation and I believe library staff do this particularly well. We are part of a group of libraries in the Museums and Art Galleries sector which receives and provides inter library loans free of charge to other members of the group. During hectic research times this can reduce our bill substantially. We also use these networks in times when we have come up against a brick wall with citation information or other research queries. We of course nurture these valuable arrangements by repaying in kind.

In the Northern Territory we are lucky to be part of the Libraries in the NT network (linnet). These libraries use the integrated library management system Virtua which makes requesting books a breeze. All libraries within this network agree to provide inter library loans for free to other linnet libraries. Charles Darwin University also participates in this arrangement although they use a different management system and requests are made via Libraries Australia.

We wheedle when we have no other option to attain a particular resource. This usually means contacting an author or an organisation which thanks to the internet is fairly easy these days. Wheedling may or may not be successful but we have found that in about 80% of cases we receive a reply even if it a very long time coming and often we have given up on that particular source. Mostly we have found that authors are more than happy to provide an article which we have been unable to source from anywhere else. Some years ago I emailed a scientist in Siberia asking for a paper which we were unable to source. Goodness knows what he was doing in his office at 2am but he replied within 15 minutes with the paper attached to the email. He also provided me with some references and names of people who may be able to help further. I forwarded this information to the relevant curator who was able to continue to network. Often we have provided a Beagle journal or a relevant research report for an author or organisation that has helped us. I also email the MAGNT URL and invite them to check if there is anything that we could help them with. As with our library networks these relationships also need nurturing and can't be abused.

I have also been lucky enough to have an arrangement with a zoological library in a major university in the US which I call on about once per year to help with an article. The need for this has lessened with the advent of Worldcat which enables us to check other libraries catalogues without having to browse each individual library. Document suppliers such as Subito have also been of enormous benefit to our service delivery. Articles which were previously unavailable from other sources such as Libraries Australia, Infotrieve or the British Library can usually be easily sourced from Subito. There is a cost involved but at 6 Euros (roughly \$10) per article this is a valuable and viable option.

Where have we been and where do we go from here?

I have realised that while writing this paper that with new technologies available free on the web we will need to look how we can use these to provide services which require less library staff time. Of course this will take planning, trial and training of MAGNT

staff. We have just started to keep statistics for the usage of our journals for in-house and ILL to help with getting a clearer picture of the value of our exchange agreements.

What sacrifices have we made by providing quality library services within a limited budget? We have a backlog of work to be done, a stock take is still waiting in the wings and so are retrospective call number changes and numerous other jobs. As these have not yet impacted on service delivery we just keep nibbling away at them.

Have we learnt lessons? Every day. Our lateral thinking skills are improving all the time. We get quicker at finding information, thanks to the internet and our networks. There are still many lessons to be learnt.

Many of the services we provide are very staff time intensive. As we have only 1 ½ staff a lot of this work falls on me as the full time librarian and manager. Is this a good use of my time and the money spent on my wages? Is this sustainable into the future? As I spend my time providing services I do not have any time to spare to do a proper return on investment evaluation. I look back at our vision statement (dream) and I can say that we achieve that every day. In my 8+ years as librarian at the Peter Spillett Library there have only been a couple of occasions when we were unable to source a particular piece of information required by a member of staff. That's pretty good record but of course it doesn't come cheap once staff time and wages are considered.

Museum staff think we are miracle workers. Not a week goes by without some sort of mental and or physical pat on the back. We still get a buzz from seeing our name in the acknowledgements of a thesis. One of the funniest compliments paid to library staff was "If they ever think of closing down the library, I will protest and chain myself naked to the Museum flagpole." I sure hope that never happens because visions of that person naked.....

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BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF PRESENTER

I came to the Northern Territory as a fresh faced and naïve 21 year old teacher way back in 1979. After 16 years of teaching in a variety of bush communities and towns I decided that I need a change. While working full time and raising a family I studied for my librarian qualifications externally through Edith Cowan University. Since 1993 I have worked as a library assistant, doing everything from covering books to copy cataloguing to reference and research work, then as a librarian and since 2000 as a library manager. I still enjoy the work that I do and many a times I have jumped up in my chair shouting 'Eureka' when I have tracked down a particularly elusive piece of information. As the ad says "I am a librarian, it's my job" (apologies to Heinz Baked Beans).