

## **Harnessing the future : the National Library's new and redeveloped services**

### **Introduction**

There are two really important principles that guide the National Library into the future. The first is that in order to provide useful and relevant services we need to collaborate with other organisations including organisations outside the library sector. The second is that we need to provide services in such a way that a person does not even need to know that they are using a library service at all. We want to reach beyond the typical library staff clientele to the end user. We are developing services that make it easier for the end user to discover and obtain the information they require. Wherever possible we would like to provide free services.

### **Collaboration**

Together with the state libraries we offer a shared online interactive reference service – AskNow<sup>1</sup>. We have developed shared guides to collections, for example GovPubs<sup>2</sup> which is a guide to state and federal government publications. There are plans to develop this collaboration further with shared development of guides to Internet resources.

The Library is a partner in a number of projects funded by the Academic Research Council and the Department of Education, Science and Training. The Library works closely with the university sector in projects to improve national infrastructure to support access to research resources and the use of technology to improve access to information resources online.

There are huge benefits in collaborating with other cultural agencies especially where we can provide exposure to our collections. The Library has worked with state libraries, galleries, archives and museums to develop several services that offer a single search interface to the collections of a range of institutions. These institutions often have similar user communities, and there is a commonality in the user expectations. For

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<sup>1</sup> [www.asknow.gov.au](http://www.asknow.gov.au)

<sup>2</sup> [www.nla.gov.au/govpubs](http://www.nla.gov.au/govpubs)

national agencies the Internet means that we can offer national services in ways never before possible through the development of national online services.

### **Online content**

The National Library has been offering online services for over 25 years. However, the collection has become much more visible and accessible since we began creating and providing access to online content. Digitisation of items in the Library's collection started nearly 10 years ago when the Library started routinely digitising new pictorial acquisitions and converting oral history recordings from analog to digital formats. In July 2001 the Library instigated a major digitisation program as a concerted strategy to provide greater access to the Australian heritage collections.

The Library has now digitised nearly 90,000 items from the collection including pictures, paintings and photographs (75,300 items); manuscripts (2,300 items); rare maps (2,800 items); sheet music (7,300 items); and a small component of books, broadsides and pamphlets (400 items).

Digitisation has moved from being a project activity to a routine part of library operations. The real challenge is to make the online content more accessible, to create control rather than add to the chaos.

Digitised material is accessible through the Library's catalogue. It is also part of our strategy to ensure that items in the digital collections are indexed by search engines such as Google. But more importantly, the Library has worked with other agencies to develop services and means of accessing the digital collections beyond the catalogue.

### **PictureAustralia**

One of the Library's earliest efforts in this area was PictureAustralia<sup>3</sup>. This service provides a single search interface to digitised images relating to Australia from nearly 40 contributing organisations. A search on

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<sup>3</sup> [www.pictureaustralia.org](http://www.pictureaustralia.org)

PictureAustralia for images of Glenelg will retrieve images from the collections of CSIRO, Australian War Memorial, National Archives, National Library Australia, State Library of Victoria, State Library of South Australia etc. One of the strengths of this service is that it makes content visible and attracts users to image collections that would not have been used to the same extent if there was not an overarching service.

PictureAustralia contains images of all kinds including objects, buildings, the environment and so on. There is a convict suit, Mrs Macquarie's earrings made from the first gold found in the colony of NSW, even a lock of Burke's hair. There are plates and plaques, medals and coins. The service provides access not only to lots of historical material but also to contemporary images.

There are a range of trails such as Australian authors, wildflowers of Australia, fashion or bushrangers. These are a great way to explore the richness of the contributors' collections. Many of the trails have been suggested by the contributing libraries and users of the service and we are open to suggestions for new trails that would suit you and users of your libraries.

There are now 38 contributors large and small, from Australia and overseas in city and regional locations. There are libraries, museums, galleries, universities and organisations like the CSIRO. Part of the role of the PictureAustralia administrator is to expand the number of contributors and breadth of coverage. Should your organisation be contributing too? Last year around 100,000 new images were added and there are now over one million images available.

### **MusicAustralia**

The National Library is also venturing into the area of online delivery of music. Following on from the success of the PictureAustralia model the Library has worked with ScreenSound Australia: the National Screen and

Sound Archive to develop MusicAustralia<sup>4</sup>. The first stage is due for release in early 2005. There is a rich musical heritage buried in the collections of many institutions that can be uncovered through MusicAustralia. For example, to search for the *Aussie Rose*<sup>5</sup> from the 1920s on MusicAustralia will retrieve not only a bibliographic record which provides publication details but also a digitised copy of the sheet music from the National Library's collection and a recording from the collection of ScreenSound. The production service will have around 120,000 music resources and about 10% will be available online. It will provide integrated access to materials in the collections of the National and state libraries, ScreenSound, the Australian Music Centre and Australian Music Online.

The online delivery of sound recordings has proved to be far more complex than still images from PictureAustralia. However in both cases the service would not have been possible to develop if dedicated and inspired staff had not catalogued the collection resources in the first place. All of these front-end services are glued together by the metadata created by cataloguers.

### **NLA website**

The Library's website<sup>6</sup> plays a pivotal role in the provision of services to our users. Websites need to keep evolving, to be shaped to meet changing user needs and expectations. In the major redevelopment in 2003 one of the changes was to bring together the catalogue search facility and the sitesearch facility. The usability review that had been conducted prior to the redevelopment showed that there was a high degree of confusion as to where to search for what - people would try to search the catalogue when looking for services or pages on the website and others would use the sitesearch facility when looking for materials in the Library's collection. By introducing a single search box the user does not need to think about where on the website they need to go in order to find the information they need.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.musicaustralia.org](http://www.musicaustralia.org)

<sup>5</sup> Lumsdaine, Jack. *Aussie rose*. Sydney : J. Albert & Son, 1924

<sup>6</sup> [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)

A search on "Cinderella", brings back a structured result set from which the user can make an informed choice about the type of resource they want to see. They might select books from the catalogue or something on the website, perhaps a finding aid to one of the manuscript collections or an item from the online shop. Items from the digital collections are displayed prominently at the top of the results display. The redeveloped website tries to expose the Library's services better and to make the choices easier.

### **CopiesDirect**

To improve access to the collection also means improving the process of requesting copies of items in the collection. CopiesDirect<sup>7</sup> is a one-stop shop service for users to request copies of any item in the collection. There is one web-based form to be used whether the request is for a journal article, a picture, sheet music, oral history transcript etc. Copies Direct also appears as an option in the Library's catalogue.

### **LibrariesAustralia**

LibrariesAustralia<sup>8</sup> is part of the redevelopment of Kinetica and is due for release early in December 2004. All of the experience gained in developing online services has fed into the development of LibrariesAustralia. The best lessons have come from user feedback, focus groups and usability testing.

Focus groups with academics and researchers have often come up with the suggestion that it would be a really good idea if there was a central database that showed which libraries hold which books. The national bibliographic database, Kinetica (and its predecessor ABN), has performed that role for many years. But it has been somewhat impenetrable to the end user. Libraries Australia will *unlock* the potential of this resource by being easy to use, to have helpful pathways that lead beyond just finding the bibliographic record. There will be options for people to obtain items from their library or from other libraries, or to purchase an item from an online book supplier.

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<sup>7</sup> [www.nla.gov.au/copiesdirect](http://www.nla.gov.au/copiesdirect)

<sup>8</sup> [librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au](http://librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au)

## Conclusion

In this paper I have only touched the surface of the many and varied services offered by the National Library and I would invite you to visit the National Library's website<sup>9</sup> to find out more.

The importance of collaboration in the development and provision of online services cannot be overemphasised. Collaboration enables partner organisations to share expertise and costs, and importantly, means that the users of the service are exposed to the rich and diverse collections of a range of organisations.

Changes in the information environment along with changing expectations of users and partner organisations mean that the Library will need to continue to refine its existing online services. The Library has an ongoing program of evaluations of online services and in 2005 a survey of National Library website users will be undertaken which will provide valuable insight into how the Library can improve the online experience for users.

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<sup>9</sup> [www.nla.gov.au](http://www.nla.gov.au)