

Mobile libraries use satellite technology to enhance services to regional Australia

Across two states, a progressive library service is now using satellite technology to provide much improved services and internet access to regional customers throughout the rural areas of the Upper Murray Valley region.

The region encompasses the cities of Albury and Wodonga and the shires of Corowa, Holbrook, Hume, Indigo, Towong, Tumbarumba and Urana.

The Upper Murray Regional Library (UMRL) provides two mobile libraries to service its patrons who are not in the vicinity of one of its thirteen fixed branches. However, because the 28 000 square kilometre region includes both Victoria's High Country and the Valleys of the Snowy River, it is a difficult environment for mobile communications, allowing until recently for the provision of only the very basic of library services.

Aspiring to provide a library service that is as equitable and accessible as possible, UMRL approached Xantic, the satellite solution provider for an answer. What Xantic came up with was a satellite-delivered mobile Global Area Network (GAN) service, made possible through their partnership with Inmarsat Ltd, a world leader in satellite networks. Based in Sydney, Xantic is one of Inmarsat's key distributors.

'For the Upper Murray Regional Library Service it has meant greater connectivity for the mobile libraries, with online services and live access to the central library,' said Dale Cousens,

UMRL information systems manager.

The package provides for full mobile ISDN service at 64kbps, a mobile packet data service (MPDS) and the GAN mobile voice service. The MPDS is a breakthrough and allows for continuous and low-cost online connections. Costs are minimised because users are only charged for the packages of data transmitted, rather than for the time that the user is connected or online.

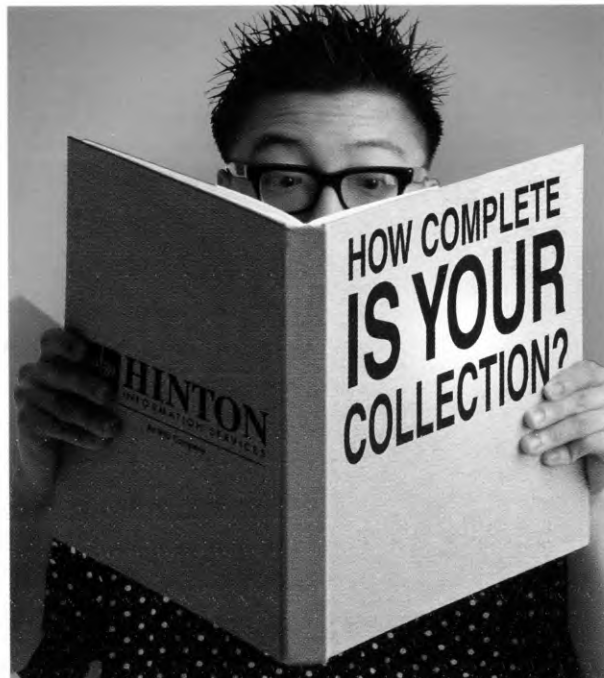
'In practical terms it means that the public using our mobile libraries has access to the internet, whilst staff in mobile centres have access to our LAN and library management system, making searching for titles, availability and customer profiles instantaneous.'

The GAN service means that the two mobile libraries can send large amounts of data, e-mail and even participate in video-conferences. All this is done with a computer and a laptop-sized satellite terminal.

'Our mobile libraries carry a combined stock of nearly 11 000 items and last year they processed 74 000 loans, nearly 6000 reservations and 6800 requests for information.'

'Completely stand-alone and self-contained, we can now offer library services anywhere, regardless of the location or facilities available,' said Ms Cousens.

Funding assistance was provided to the library service through the Federal Government's 'Networking the Nation' and is currently a pilot for library services throughout the country. ■



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