Internet is the key marketing opportunity

John Stanley

Getting new customers into your library is always a challenge and in today's society the real challenge is getting youth and Generation X to venture through the front door.

Many marketing campaigns around the globe have concentrated on the book being the main commodity to entice the potential consumer. Recent work by the Centre for Community Networking Research (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 April 2003, *inCite*, May p20) suggests this may not be the best approach.

The survey focused on the concern, within the library system, about the use of the internet in the library. Of those surveyed in Victoria, half of them had only started using the library in the last twelve months, approximately another third had only been using libraries for two years. What was more interesting was that fifty per cent of internet users were planning to keep using the library for their internet access.

This suggests that promoting the library as the local 'internet café' may be an excellent opportunity to grow your customer base. Once these internet users feel comfortable in your library, you then have the opportunity to move them to using library books as well.

This research also suggests that the positioning of the public internet area is also critical to the overall success of the library. If it is a destination category, it should be located further into the library to encourage consumers to pass at least some books on their journey to and from the computers.

A leisure area, with magazines and seating, often works near to the internet points. This encourages users to 'linger longer' in the library.

With the Victorian Public Library Network last year providing more than a million hours of public internet access, it seems that the internet could be a major carrot to get new users into the library, especially as sixty per cent of those surveyed mentioned it was their only way of getting online.

Some librarians that I have talked to, have suggested that the internet user is a short-term library user, who once they have gained confidence will purchase their own computer and will then not return to the library.

The research carried out in Victoria shows the exact opposite could be the case. Only just over twenty per cent of library internet users were claiming they would only use the library as a stop-gap measure.

The internet is an integral part of any marketing campaign. The opportunities are there to grow the market.

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