

A new renaissance in library buildings



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There are two reports in this edition of *inCite* about the completion of major refurbishments at the State Library of Victoria and the State Library of South Australia. I think that this is proof that the physical library has not been, and will not be, taken over by the online library, and that really successful libraries manage to provide both high quality physical and online services. All indications are that physical libraries are becoming more important as centres of their communities, whether that be in a school, a university or the general community. Libraries are getting bigger, and they are often now being used as icon buildings for their communities or their institutions.

In Queensland this can be seen in the building of several large new libraries. The Ipswich Campus of the University of Queensland is a fine example of innovative, beautiful and practical library design. This is a quite new campus, and until the library was opened in February, there was not a place for students to gather and form a learning community. But now that there is a heart to the university, more students are staying on campus during the day. The building also reflects another trend of co-locating services within the library, and a number of student services can be accessed in this space.

Another Queensland example is the new Caboolture Library, opening in 2005, which will be a joint use library/campus with Brisbane North Institute of TAFE, QUT and the public library. This will be an iconic building in Caboolture, an impressive 5000 square metres all up that demonstrates where the priorities of the local community lie. It will feature innovative service delivery for students and the community with community learning facilities and extensive ICT resources. There will be various paths for access to learning including bridging courses for years 11 and 12.

In Southport, the Gold Coast City Council has a fabulous 3000 square metre library that is highly visible and very highly used. A feature of this library is the extensive local history collection on the mezzanine floor. At Brisbane City Council we are creating a community hub at Chermside, linking the local services club and swimming pool with the library to encourage usage of all three facilities and create a 'village square' atmosphere.

One of the major implications of these heavily-used and highly-visible physical libraries is the need for ongoing asset management to achieve best benefit from their service delivery potential — and in doing so, manage the related risks and associated life-cycle costs. Asset management will become more of an issue as buildings get older if there are no plans in place to renew, refurbish or retire them. Old, tired, outdated buildings are the worst advertisement for our profession; well-maintained, vibrant, relevant buildings the best.

It is illuminating to go to the great public libraries of the United States and Europe, which are in a different league altogether. A Danish city of 250 000 is planning to replace their 'far too small' 8000 square metre building with one of 20 000 square metres. A different reality and very different values!

The State Library of South Australia and the City of Adelaide are also reflecting an interesting trend of 'boutiquing' libraries, which is beginning to be talked about, and it will be most interesting to see how this is taken by the community. The first example I have seen of this is the library@Orchard in Singapore, which is designed and marketed to appeal to 18- to 30-year olds. It is in the heart of the Orchard Road shopping precinct, and occupies prime real estate. It is also extremely successful in attracting the above-mentioned demographic.

It is wonderful that the State Library of Victoria's domed reading room has been restored to its original magnificence. Having started my career at the State Library, I have very fond memories of the place, working on the enquiry desk in the old catalogue room off the reading room. An attendant sat in the middle of the reading room, overseeing the wide variety of readers that availed themselves of the riches of the collection, as well as those simply seeking shelter from the mean Melbourne weather outside.

I hope that these examples are indicative of a new renaissance in library buildings and indeed recognition of libraries as hubs of the community. In the spirit of celebrating success, let us know here at *inCite* if you are opening a new building or facility so that we can share your achievement. ■

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