

State Library of Queensland issues an online challenge

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In October 2002 the State Library of Queensland launched public access to two online databases. This initiative was an important step in the delivery of the State Library's *Smart libraries build smart communities: future directions of the State Library of Queensland* policy. This policy, which includes the continued development of the Smart Library Network, incorporates principles of web-based models of library and information service delivery.

A committee comprising of state and public library representatives selected two databases, *Health and Wellness Centre* (Thomson Gale) and *Australian and New Zealand Reference Centre* (EBSCO), which were made available with OPAL [Online Public Access in Libraries] state government project funding.

The committee recognised that a successful marketing campaign was required to ensure that library staff and the community were fully-aware of the potential of the databases. Thomson Gale agreed to sponsor the '*Online database challenge*' — an online quiz conducted in February 2003.

Online challenge

The quiz had four separate components:

- *Online challenge* — participants were asked to complete four questions from the online databases for a chance to win an IBM notebook computer
- *Library challenge* — to encourage support from public libraries, the local government library with the most entries per capita was awarded a digital camera



State librarian, Lea Giles-Peters, Minister for the Arts, The Hon Matt Foley and Robert Iannello, manager, Gale Electronic Services at the launch of the Online Challenge

- *Librarian's challenge* — library staff were asked to submit 'their best story' of Thomson Gale's, *Health and Wellness Resource Centre* database. This challenge was to encourage library staff to submit stories which could be used in future marketing activities. The winner was provided with travel, accommodation and registration costs to the Queensland Public Libraries Association conference
- *Staff challenge* — state library staff were not eligible to enter the 'online challenge', but to encourage staff participation and increase knowledge of the database. A staff challenge was also run with a \$50 voucher from the State Library Shop as a prize.

Outcomes

More than 2300 entries were received during the six-week competition, with 1700 entries eligible for the draw. Entries were received from eighty local governments, which demonstrated the effectiveness of the public library network to distribute information. Usage of the databases increased by more than three hundred per cent during the competition period. Three months after the competition, usage continues at more than thirty per cent above the pre-competition period.

Entrants had the option of providing demographic information with their entries, and more than ninety per cent of the participants completed these questions. Usage was higher with females (fifty-three per cent) than male (thirty-nine per cent). This was consistent with public library usage but at odds with computer and internet survey results. The largest age group was those aged between 36 and 45 years.

Feedback was received throughout the competition from entrants and public library staff. Many participants commented on the new service (forty-two per cent), congratulating the library, and admitted that the quiz was their introduction to the State Library website and the online databases.

The following is a sample of the comments received.

- As an 'over-55' I sup-



Axel Dancoisne, winner of the Online Challenge and state librarian Lea Giles-Peters.

port your efforts to open the word of knowledge through the internet and such online databases

- Excellent way to promote the databases. Even without the offer of a prize, the challenge is enticing
- Thanks to the competition, I found important information on a severe medical condition that I have: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Until this competition I wasn't aware that I could access the State Library online. Now that I have discovered the reference materials I will use them, as will my kids. Thank you for bringing it to my attention.

The *Online Challenge* was a successful campaign in raising awareness of the online databases. The library will continue to monitor the usage of the databases to determine if the usage remains high. New marketing strategies under development include the use of 'hot topics' pages and another, more targeted challenge. For a full report detailing the *Online Challenge* outcomes visit the State Library's website at <http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/quiz/index.htm>.

The support and encouragement of Thomson Gale was an important contributor to the success of the *Online Challenge*. ■