

From the cork board to the cam cord

Re-inventing the community notice board

At the beginning of 2003, the manager of the Salisbury Library Service, Bernie McSwain, had discussions with the architects who were designing the newest library in the Salisbury Library Service at Mawson Lakes. During these discussions, it became clear that there was not going to be any wall space for a traditional community notice board. Thus, if we wanted to promote community events then we would really need to think of an alternative way of doing so.

Around this time the library service was also audited by marketing and retail consultant John Stanley who suggested that we look at promoting community events in another format as the traditional notice board was a bit of an eye-sore and in sometimes out-of-date.

Challenge and solution

We thought the best way to deal with this challenge would be through an electronic form of delivery, but we were unsure as to how to go about it. In order to thoroughly explore this challenge, I organised a forum with the national ALIA group — Community Information Australia Networkers (CIAN). This collective group of community informa-

tion providers has a wealth of experience, knowledge and skills and one of the providers at the forum, Shirley Patyi, from Port Adelaide Visitor Information Centre, remembered using an electronic system a number years ago. This system was Multiscreen. This turned out to be a most fortuitous referral.

A Multiscreen representative visited us to describe the many uses of the system. At that time, there were no equivalent systems in libraries and so there were no reference points on which to draw on. However it became clear that this system had a much broader application than just promoting community events, it could be used to promote library and council events and services, as well as alerting patrons to a range of activities and the closing of the library. Despite wanting to appear aloof and hard to get, we were very excited, and it showed.

Introducing the virtual notice board

A system was purchased and installed by August 2003 and is maintained by the community information co-ordinator from a computer in the library's information service room; this is networked to two screens within the library. The traditional notice board was kept for approximately four weeks after

the installation of the electronic system. Patrons were informed of the approaching change and when the board was removed there was only one minor complaint made. However this person was soon placated when their jazz club's pending event had jazz music playing when the advert was displayed.

The screens have been placed in key positions in the library to capitalise on the large volume of people accessing the service: an estimated 6500 patrons visit the library in any given week. If only ten per cent were to look at the screens this would amount to 650 people a week viewing the notice boards.

Why it works

The notice board is extremely effective in promoting community events, and library

and council events. It has proven to be far more effective than the traditional community notice boards because:

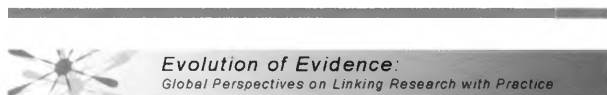
- There are a greater number of notices which can be promoted in more creative and attention-captivating ways.
- DVDs can now be played on this system which provides an interesting promotional format.
- Slides can contain sound files or verbal messages.
- Services can be promoted in languages other than English (for example Vietnamese, Spanish, Greek, Polish, and Serbian).
- There is greater control over what is placed on the notice board and it is much easier to maintain. The electronic notice board are never out-of-date as an end date is programmed onto each notice.
- The system enables the scheduling of notices, streamlining the programming of regular events, such as story time, school holiday activities, and closing time.
- The presentation of promotional material is in keeping with current retail concepts, which provides for a far more appealing presentation than a crowded community notice board.
- There are a number of community organisations who have regularly requested to place notices on the board. This has been seen by the public as a beneficial service to the community.
- The system encourages team work as many of the staff have participated in placing notices and messages on the notice board.

Who uses the system

On any given day there are about 100 slides showing on the notice board covering a wide range of activities — arts and crafts, general community announcements, council announcements, dance and music events, gardening, health, holiday events, education, seniors, special days/weeks, sport, theatre, youth, and of course, library events and activities.

What next?

The goal for us at the Salisbury Library Service is to have a Multiscreen system installed in all of our five library branches over the next few years. Libraries both in this state, interstate and in the United Kingdom are also introducing these systems, and as more libraries come on board no doubt we can share ideas about how to get the most out of this innovative system. ■



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