Technology heralds new age of learning

Throughout Australia, training providers, business, and industry are using e-learning as a flexible and cost effective solution for training and retraining, with research showing that 39% of all vocational education and training activity now involves e-learning*.

As we enter the digital age, it is imperative that libraries keep pace with these changes in technologies and learning styles. Below we've profiled three examples of how Australian organisations are exploiting technologies to better connect with traditionally marginalised groups, including at-risk youth and Indigenous communities.

Online gaming engages young learners

Major tyre manufacturer and retailer Bridgestone Australia delivered automotive and tyre fitting training to learners in the juvenile justice system. To help keep the young learners engaged throughout the 'boring' theoretical aspects of the training, Bridgestone used interactive online activities that incorporated a range of digital media, including games and video. Learners were able to self-review their knowledge and formal assessments were created in the Moodle learning management system to track assessment results.

Mobile technologies train on-the-job

In preparation for the arrival of two giant endangered pandas on loan from China, Adelaide Zoo used mobile phones and Bluetooth technology to deliver 'just-in-time' situated learning for employees and volunteers. Hardware access points located in key areas around the zoo were linked to a central server. Staff and volunteers then downloaded software onto their mobile phones and, when they were in the vicinity of an access point, accessed instant information about the animals.

3D animated avatars break down cultural barriers

Traditional Credit Union (TCU) used a 3D animated avatar to present financial compliance information in a way that better engaged and increased understanding among TCU's Indigenous employees. The MARVIN avatar animation system can deliver education and communication campaigns tailored for any culture in the world. By incorporating the images, stories, and 'lingo' of the Indigenous culture and engaging employees on a more human level, MARVIN improved the uptake of information and increased learner participation, recognition, and acceptance. Materials, once created, were easily and quickly reviewed and updated as training needs changed over time.

Library staff can visit **http://flexiblelearning.net.au** to learn more, including access to free services and resources.

*2009 national E-learning Benchmarking Survey, Australian Flexible Learning Framework, **http://flexiblelearning.net. au/e-learningindicators**

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eBooks in Canberra: Blackadder, Rumpole, and romance

The ACT Public Library has offered an eBook collection to the Canberra community for several years. Exploring the reading and listening habits of its users shows some interesting patterns.

The downloadable eBook collection, provided by OverDrive, currently includes 3 702 titles, of which 1604 are eAudio. These books can be downloaded to a member's personal computer or portable devices like smart phones and MP3 players.

The service has proven very popular with a core group of customers and curious explorers, and has seen a 60% increase in the number of unique patrons using it since the format was first offered. From early on, the library also received requests for access from people in other Australian states and as far afield as Europe and South America, all eager to experience the service.

With a range of formats, the eBook collection has had a total of almost 40 000 checkouts since early 2007, and is currently averaging almost 1500 checkouts per month. Over half of the most borrowed titles are eAudio books.

The most popular titles in the library's collection are a racy romance called *Show me*, followed by *Blackadder, Life laundry: How to de-junk your life*, Michael Connelly's *Echo Park*, and *Rumpole and the Primrose Park*. Also popular are *Mao's last dancer* and Tolkien's *The fellowship of the ring*. Some of these correlate with interest in their print format, while others are simply old favourites.

The popularity of eAudio is also demonstrated in the number of reserves placed – over 90% of the total 11 166 to date. The range of titles requested is diverse, with the two most requested titles in December 2009 poles apart in content: *The art of war* by Sun Tzu and *Anne of Green Gables* by L. M. Montgomery.

In an effort to promote the downloadable option, the library has also made an effort to tap into those members browsing the physical shelves for audio books. Signs have been strategically placed to highlight alternatives.

It is probable that growth in use of portable media players, and downloadable music and books being available for purchase online, is contributing to the popularity of this format. If this is truly the case, we expect the interest in this collection to continue to grow.

So if you are searching for something different for your customers to read, or listen to, why not explore the eBook option?

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