



WHERE'S THE STRATEGY?

Executive Director Sue Hutley fronted the CSIRO Broadband Summit late last year to put the concerns of the LIS sector on the table with government and industry, with a particular focus on public libraries. This is an excerpted version of her presentation.

You may not visit a library daily but did you know Australian public libraries are actually attended more frequently and by more people than any other cultural and sporting venue? Libraries are everywhere. And their online presence is significant, including hundreds of Australian databases, repositories, picture libraries, genealogy information, digitised newspapers and more. Libraries are producing the quality Australian content that will be needed for the National Broadband Network (NBN).

Libraries and library staff are also at the forefront of web developments – we have been first users and subsequently trainers for the public on how to use the earliest forms of the internet and later social media and 2.0 tools. Digitisation and electronic access have facilitated a much wider access to knowledge through libraries. Culturally iconic pieces such as *Captain Cook's Diary* are part of the treasures in Australian libraries. And it is through digitisation projects that these are all coming to life wherever you may be online.

Libraries are still the repositories of knowledge and society's culture. You may not know the National Library of Australia harvests and stores the Australian .au domain, so that you can go back to look at websites from the past that are no longer available because they have been taken down, changed or aborted. The NLA's *Pandora Archive*, as it is known, aims to collect and provide long-term access to selected online publications and websites that are about Australia or are by an Australian author on a subject of social, political, cultural, religious, scientific or economic significance and relevance to Australia. This website and repository enables the saving of our dot.com before it is dot.gone. As the NBN blossoms and Australian content goes up (and comes down) from the internet, we need to ensure that the National Library is appropriately supported to collect, store and enable access to the digital deluge on its way. Our online culture

is worth storing for future generations just as much as our previous heritage.

In the world of the NBN, libraries play a huge role in the access and support for learning in our communities. Libraries provide access to the technology including PCs and other equipment that many in our society can't afford.

For those of us here today, and who work in a capital city in a technological work environment where the tools are provided for us, it may be hard to believe that some people in our Australian community aren't connected in some form to an internet-based machine or hand-held device. But take a moment to think about the last time you took a walk down the street. Passing you by could be someone who is unemployed or on a pension, someone who is homeless, a single-parent or a person with a terminal illness. These are the people and families already struggling just to get by. And these are the people that should and could benefit from access

"Libraries are producing the quality Australian content that will be needed for the National Broadband Strategy..."

to the internet. They will get that in the library but more importantly they will also get the ongoing training and skills development to ensure that they are not left behind as a digital citizen. Libraries play a key role in social inclusion, community culture and a sense of safe public space.

The potential benefits of digital technology will only be achieved in full if all of the people of our country have the skills, confidence and opportunity to use such technology. When you see some the 'wicked' and awesome uses of the NBN during this Summit (csirobroadband.com) think about those that aren't at a lucky, well-funded school, who may not be in full-time work with access to a computer on a regular basis, or who cannot afford more than a basic mobile phone deal that only gives them access to voice and SMS.

The digital divide or digital underclass is potentially happening as we speak. It's not about whether we have filled out the form to get NBN into our houses so we can get the pipe to the door. We need to get on with the things that will truly make the NBN worth its \$43 billion price tag.

Broadband use is often lowest amongst lower income earners, the older population and those with health difficulties. At present, therefore, many of those who would potentially benefit most from digital technology - whether from the financial savings available from online shopping, access to public services or simply from increased employability and confidence – do not have the inclination or opportunity to use it. This has to change.

So how is the government promoting the benefits and making digital technology more accessible? It is plainly in the Australian Government's interest to complement the infrastructure rollout with the 'soft stuff' – skills, engagement, community learning

and participation.

Libraries are already conducting hundreds of training programs for our community on how to use the internet. We often do it for free – as a community service. But we need your support to continue this work. Australian libraries – public libraries anyway – are government-funded. It is all of you talking to your governments – local state and federal - who will make sure that this access is available to everyone, even if you personally don't use libraries right now.

While the Department of Broadband Communications and the Digital Economy (DBCDE) talks about 'digital confidence' in the sense of e-security, cyber-safety and privacy, there are quite other few steps between the FTTH being installed and knowing what to do.

And it's not just lower socio-economic groups that are not digitally literate. I was at the CEO Sleepout in June 2010 and most of my fellow CEOs admitted during a conversation that they didn't understand twitter and social networking and weren't using it. They also admitted that they didn't really use their smartphones



or iPhones for many applications other than the basics. We have to improve digital literacy not only for the financially poor, but also the time-poor.

How will government and industry collaborate to promoting the benefits of the digital economy - surely ultimately the determining measure of success for the NBN?

We also call on the Australian Government to release their draft national Australian Digital Strategy as soon as possible. We need to see the Strategy for us all to move further than the current discussion on pipes and fibre, to what will be delivered, used, and created - and the 'why'.

We would like to see the strategy through which the Australian community will be working with all three levels of government, corporates and not-for-profits on actually using the internet and broadband connections to create quality of life.

We ask what statistics our key NBN rollout stakeholders and the Australian government aim to measure the actual percentage and return on investment of the NBN? Uptake or connection rates clearly should not be regarded as 'usage' rates. I was pleased yesterday to hear from the AIIA (www.aiaa.com.au) about their digital economy unit currently working on metrics for the NBN. We want to see people actually

knowing how to connect their computers and use software, applications and websites. We don't just want people to be using Facebook faster.

Internationally we can look to the plans and strategies of others, learn from them and create an even more productive strategy for the nation such as the UK's Race Online 2012 which aims to bring people and organisations together to improve the life chances of the 10 million people who have never

been online in that country.

When will every public library in Australia be connected to the NBN? The return on investment to connect this one public building is obvious. We seek the support from all of you, NBNC Co and the Government to make this happen more swiftly. Then libraries can get on with doing what we are already doing so well, that is supporting our community to access, use, create and enjoy the internet for the wonderful resource that it is and will continue to be.

The *Future Directions* document comments that content is an important aspect of Australians online and particularly in driving broadband adoption and that relevant online content will attract Australians online, particularly students and educators, driving digital media literacy in the process because use of one type of online content can drive adoption of other forms of online content.

The DBCDE notes lower levels of participation in the digital economy because content is a proven drawcard. They also note the risk of the dilution of our cultural identity, particularly if younger Australians mainly view overseas content on the internet.

We call upon the Australian government to ensure that our national cultural entities, such as libraries, archives, galleries and museums, are funded appropriately to deal with the digital deluge and to fund digitisation projects to create that quality content that Australians (and the world) can access.

There's a core competency of a modern society that needs a lot of improvement in Australia right now. Dr Ian Oppermann from CSIRO yesterday morning highlighted that 1% of the Australian population are illiterate - that's about

equivalent to the number of people living here in Hobart.

An even scarier statistic is that nearly half the Australian population struggles without the literacy skills

to meet the most basic demands of everyday life and work. It's called basic prose literacy and 46% of Australians don't have it. They can't read newspapers, follow a recipe, make sense of travel timetables, or understand the instructions on a medicine bottle. Roads and Traffic Authorities and other public services often refer customers to public libraries if they don't have access to a computer to complete online forms because that's where they will find library staff to help.

Australian libraries and library associations are behind a campaign to turn 2012 into the National Year of Reading, linking together all the great things that are already happening around books, reading and literacy and electronic publishing programs and events taking place across the country during 2012. Libraries will be partnering with government, the media, writers, schools, publishers, booksellers, employers, child care providers, health professionals and a whole host of other organisations that share our passion for reading. We hope all of your organisations will join us and get involved because literacy and reading are essential and integral to getting the most out of the NBN and using computers.

To get the most out of the \$43 Billion NBN we need:

- Greater participation (not just the FTTH connection to the home)
- Promotion of the usage options and benefits to convince Australians of the value
- Resources to support community training and skills development (just referring people to a webpage is not 'training')
- Access points - free, with staff support, opening hours that suit, for all Australians
- More Australian content

And so we again ask: where is the Government's Australian Digital Strategy? And where is your individual organisation, community or industry strategy?

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