

Alice Springs Library exploring outdoor service with **Mobile Max**

Over the summer, the Alice Springs Public Library, Northern Territory, undertook an unusual experiment by providing access to an information hub outside the library. They did this by installing Mobile Max – a touchscreen kiosk designed for harsh outdoor conditions – just outside the main doors of the library.

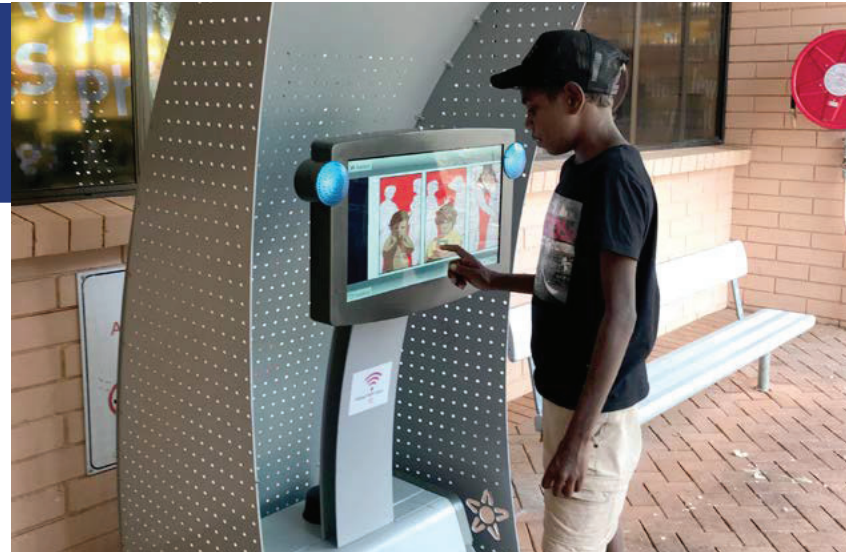
Mobile Max is the brainchild of Hitnet, a company that specializes in providing community information solutions for some of Australia's harder-to-reach communities. Mobile Max is a first-generation community information hub and his presence at the library was part of a six-month trial between the Alice Springs Public Library and Hitnet. Drawing on both a library staff survey and usage data generated from Mobile Max, Julie Gibson, Hitnet CEO, presented initial findings from the trial at ALIA Information Online 2019 in Sydney in February 2019.

Mobile Max evolved from community feedback that access to information was needed outside of the usual sites – clinics, hospitals, libraries, community centres – and preferably outdoors where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people congregate.

Hitnet has installed similar information hubs across Australia in some of the country's most remote communities, including islands in the Torres Strait. Mobile Max runs off a 12-hour battery, has a Wi-Fi hotspot, mobile phone recharge ports, and an easy-to-use touchscreen that displays interactive cultural and social information. The Alice Springs installation includes photo collections from the library's digital archives, news bulletins from the local Yirara College, and other cultural stories (many in language) from local Indigenous content producers.

Despite hotter than average temperatures, usage of Mobile Max continued to trend upwards through the summer and usage by adult males was significantly higher than expected based on studies of public library users.

The Alice Springs Public Library staff have a very positive attitude to Mobile Max and feel that it provides an opportunity for the library to engage with local Indigenous youth. They also note that having local community-based content, as well as health and legal content presented on a versatile platform was a valuable addition to library services.



The additional free Wi-Fi was seen as supplementing the library offering and providing a back-up service for library users – useful in peak periods and outages.

From the trial, Hitnet have obtained valuable information to help consider improvements that will allow Mobile Max to be more easily managed. Library staff have indicated that they are keen to see improvements that link existing library data services to the kiosk as an additional content platform for their library services.

Throughout the trial, the most viewed trials were Yirara TV, Desert Pea Media and Indigenous Music Week. Yirara TV produces a weekly news bulletin with the students presenting and Desert Pea Media has 12 music videos co-created with young people from community. Popular Yolngu rapper Baker Boy was the ICTV Indigenous Music week favourite along with The Lurra Collective, Desert Sevenz, and The B Town Warriors.

Working with the library sector, Mobile Max provides a vital connection to the digital world and to culture through easy access to locally produced content, the digital library, and unique cultural archives.

Based on the trial with Alice Springs Public Library there is clearly a role for Mobile Max in regional and remote libraries where there are local staff, content, and accessibility challenges – in particular in the parts of Australia where there are so few libraries across the many remote Aboriginal communities.

The concept could also support mobile library services in more built up regional and urban centres and this is certainly worth exploring. 🚫

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