Christchurch City Libraries
Te Whare Pukapuka Aa Iwi Otautahi

CREATING SMART LIBRARIES – SMART STRATEGIES FOR KEEPING AHEAD

Text of a paper given by Sue Sutherland at the Queensland Public Library Association Conference, Gold Coast, Queensland, 27-29 May 2002

I want you to think of a time when you have NOT been able to achieve something you would have liked to. You had an idea for a new service development, you wanted to get extra PCs for you library, or you needed a new building, or an extension, or some other work related initiative that you wanted to achieve.   And it didn't come about.

Now in your mind what was the single biggest reason that your idea was not achieved? What prevented that idea coming to fruition?

How many people would say it was a **lack of money** that was the main reason?   You couldn't find the funds, you didn't get the additional money in your budget?

How many people would say it was a **lack of time** that the project didn't come off. No one had the time to do it and you couldn't get extra people?

How many people say it was a **lack of political support** that was the main reason. The politicians (or the corporate people) would not support the new initiative – didn't see it had benefit against other things that they wanted to support?

How many people have another reason?   What are they?

Well lack of money, time, political support are all reasons which can stop us achieving what we want – but I believe that they are not root causes – but symptoms of something else which I want to talk about this morning.

Before I do that, however, I wanted to say how delighted I am to be here this morning. When I was contacted by your organisers to stand in for Rob Froud who couldn't be here for personal reasons, they said that they had decided to ask me because Christchurch City Libraries had been at the forefront of public libraries in New Zealand for a long time. They wanted to know what our recipe for success was – and how we had maintained our reputation over time. Very flattering indeed to be so well regarded!   And a reputation which I am proud that my team and I go on building into the 21st century.

For Christchurch City Libraries (formerly Canterbury Public Library) has been at the forefront of developments for the last forty years. As early as the late 1950's the Library was purchasing its first mechanical issue system. A fearsome machine which sorted punch cards with a combination of knitting needle type rods. Other automation systems followed until in 1986 we installed Data Research Associates system – just slightly behind Manukau libraries who went live a few days before us. Other firsts for the library since that time have included:

- First public library in Australasia to have a website

And first public library in NZ to:
- have their catalogue on the web
- provide free internet access to the NZ domain and a wide range of international sites
- have a significant suite of electronic databases available to customers external to the library
- buy in cataloguing and processing services along with resource supply from an external supplier
- have a professional phone, email and fax service along call centre lines
- Build a library at the shore end of a pier offering play stations, Sky TV and other infotainment media to attract a youth market which didn't use libraries.

But being first to do things is not the only measure of success. Of course you would expect the second largest public library system in New Zealand to be doing things before some others. And others have done some things before us – so I am not claiming we are the only ones innovating!

However, what other measures of success can we point to? Well since local government amalgamation in 1989 Christchurch City Libraries has increased in size, volume of business and budget. At amalgamation we had a Central Library, 9 community libraries and two mobile libraries. We now have an additional three libraries and five of the 9 have either been completely rebuilt or extended in that time. By the time we have completed the two further libraries on the building programme in December 2005, the city will have spent somewhere between $35 and $40 million on its buildings..

Since 1991 the loans from the library system have increased by over 40% to around 5.5 million loans per year in 2001. This is just over 17 items per head of population. The number of visits to libraries in 2000/01 was 3.34 million which is in excess of 10 visits per head of population. 77% of the population were registered library members, and there were 1.931 million page views downloaded from our website and 2.221 million visits to the catalogue from external sources (ie doesn't include from inside libraries). All of this for a population of approximately 325,000. The city has been growing steadily but nowhere at the rate of growth of the library system.

All of this requires money to achieve and since 1991 the library's budget has increased by nearly 50% to a total operational spend of around $21 million in 2001/2002. The capital budget (largely spent on resources) is an additional $3.8 million. The library is well funded in comparison with similar size systems and certainly its resources vote would be one of the best, if not the best, in the country.

So how has all this been achieved? Why is it that we have been able to keep going forward at a time in New Zealand's public library history where others have had to struggle for resources, to provide new services or to keep what resources they have had? What is the mix that makes for success – and how do you go on sustaining that over time?

Before I outline what I believe are the most significant factors, it is important to note the context within which Christchurch City Libraries has operated in the past ten years. At a time when Central Government, and most local authorities in New Zealand, were reducing the scope and size of the public sector, and selling off assets, the Christchurch City Council pursued a different agenda. It retained its trading enterprises and continued to pursue a role for itself in improving the social lot of its people, earning itself the name from the Business Round Table of "the People's republic of Christchurch". The strategy has resulted in Christchurch having one of the lowest rate per capita in the country and a broad range of social, cultural and educational services, as well as the usual roads, parks and water services.

There is no one recipe for success but there are some factors which I believe can make a significant difference no matter what sort of business you are in.

Let's go back to the first question I asked you and turn that on its head.   When you think about a time when you HAVE achieved something – a new library, a new service, a changed way of doing things – what was the single most important thing in the success of that project?   To ensuring that the idea was turned into reality? How many think its was **having the money?**

How many think it was **having the political buy-in?**

How many think it was because you had **the time to achieve it?** Well it might be all of these things – but who was behind ensuring that you got the money, the political buy- in and the time to do it?   The **RIGHT PERSON**.

To me this is the first fundamental of all – we need the right people who can achieve the things we want to achieve. Whenever you hear of incredible achievements in the world of politics, of business, of sport – it has always been achieved by a person who has had commitment, drive, energy, skill, passion and the sheer will to succeed – or in some cases survive - until they could succeed in bringing about their dream. Nelson Mandela, who survived years in captivity, only to bring about the first integrated South African government in his old age. Bill Gates, Walt Disney – whatever you think about their business enterprises – they have been achieved by people with vision, energy and skill.

Libraries are no different – we need people who have energy, enthusiasm, skills, dreams – people with a "can do" attitude.   People who are prepared to go the extra mile to get things done. And we need to foster and encourage those people who do have that spark so that they can achieve great things for us.   For example, the only reason that Christchurch City Libraries had a website in 1995, was down to the fact that we had a keen reference librarian on the staff who had made it his business to find out all about this new communication medium - entirely self taught and self

motivated He got a site up and running and began to populate it with information useful to our customers. He was enabled by another key appointment, the Manager of Information and Technology (an engineer turned teacher), who was able to put in place the infrastructure and systems to grow this work.   These people are our entrepreneurs. If you are lucky enough to get such people you need to value them and to give them room to move and grow. They will return value to the organisation in double measure.

The Right people might mean opening your libraries up to people other than librarians. I believe that public libraries are too important a civic institution to be the sole prerogative of librarians. We need people with skills and knowledge from other disciplines – IT, Marketing, Human Resources as well as the best that the library profession can offer. We need people with excellent customer service as well as people who know about the best reads, or who can find information on the most esoteric subject.

Recently, we set up the Library's equivalent of a call centre. Internally we have called this "The Fingertip Library" – ie your library at your fingertips. People can access our services, including having reference questions answered, by phoning, email or faxing us. At this stage the majority of questions come in by phone. In the very near future they will also be able to contact us in real time using the internet. We wanted this service to be the basis for our virtual library delivering services to the customer where they were – at home, at work, or at school. We wanted the phone in customer to have the best of our service – not just what was left over from the walk-in service. A lot of planning went into this service and the project group identified early on that the right person to run the centre would be crucial. We wanted to make use of the technology available for running call centres which gives good management information and we wanted the service from this centre to be top class – managed hand ons, on-selling of services, calling out as well taking inward calls. We needed someone who knew about running call centres – and that is what we got! A red headed Scotsman with a heap of experience in running a call centre for the Hong Kong Bank. But hold on a minute – didn't I say that the Fingertip Library would be providing answers to reference questions? Shouldn't we really have appointed a high quality reference librarian to the job of the Fingertip Library Team Leader? Well no – we appointed her to the Information Specialist role. We have a team leader who is experienced in managing the business and providing the customer service, ably supported by an Information specialist who is responsible for ensuring that the library staff answering the phones (and email etc) can find the information quickly and competently.

Having the right people is only one part of the equation – the other is having the **STRATEGIC VISION** so that we know what the people and the organisation needs to achieve.   "How do you know you have arrived if you don't know where you are going?"   So time spent on future gazing, on thinking about what is happening now and what might happen in the future is a very important part of being successful.

There are many good publications on strategic planning generally – and within libraries.   Kay Poustie from Western Australia wrote a very good paper on the subject for the International Network of Public Libraries, inaugurated by the Bertelsmann Foundation. The main components of such a planning methodology can be followed

through – customer research, environmental scanning, industry and competitor analysis, scenario planning, community consultation, etc etc. The important component I believe in all of this is not necessarily the document that you get out the other end of the process but the **quality of the thinking** that goes on along the way.

This is a very interesting time in the history of libraries. For centuries we have had largely had the field of information supply to ourselves – Items were printed and published, we collected them and we made them available to people who came inside our buildings – even letting them take them away (once we cut the chains to the desk).But the electronic world has changed all that – the boundaries between publishing, storing and information supply have been blurred and broken down and with a computer and some communications equipment anyone can now supply information to anyone else in the globe.   These changes require us to be thinking about the business we are in. Is it the lending business? Is it the information business? Is it the social deprivation business – serving the have-nots – and not worrying about the have-gots. We ALL need to be thinking about these things so that we can shape our library business to meet the needs of customers and of the communities we live in.

Christine MacKenzie, of Brisbane City Libraries, spoke yesterday of libraries being in the local authority business. I think we can take that one step further and say that we are in the "Quality of Life" business – for that is what I believe a local authority is in the business of doing.

One of my team recently said to me "It is not enough to just work in this business, we have to work **on** the business as well". This means we need to be thinking about the best ways to do things, identifying the most important things to do and prioritising the use of our resources. This might mean stopping doing something we have always done so that we can afford to do the new things.

To give you an example of this from our own experience. A couple of years ago we implemented some major changes in our selection, cataloguing and acquisition of materials. We centralised selection (previously just about everyone in the network had a little book budget to spend!) dramatically reduced our suppliers by going into partnership with three key suppliers for main stream materials, NZ materials and serials and purchased in from the major of those, cataloguing and processing. Stock now arrives shelf ready direct to the library it is destined for. Brisbane City Libraries has a similar system with the same supplier, Peter Pal.   This was a major change management project for us with about 8 positions being reduced and resulting savings of around $400-500,000 (the majority of which was realisable).

These changes were not brought about easily. They required hard work by teams of staff to develop new processes and specify what we wanted from our partners. It required people to accept changes in the way they worked and a different approach to things they held dear. People needed to be supported to change – to train for new roles in the library elsewhere – and in the case of a couple of people, supported to leave the organisation. The process we went through was a very interesting one – and I believe a model for good practice – but that is the subject of a different paper! However the important thing to note here is that the motivation for doing this at all was the need to release resources so that we could implement new projects such as the Fingertip

Library, **from within existing resources**. And a secondary motivation was the ongoing wish to continually improve business practices to remain at the forefront of developments.

We were fortunate in that the resulting savings could be retained and applied to new projects. But this was not just good luck. It was part of the strategy to retain control over the library's future. And this strategy was born out of the need to find ways to implement the ten year Strategic directions plan we had developed in 1997.

So Strategic Vision is vital (some might call it having the dreams! – others are calling it strategic positioning) – but knowing where you are going, what you want to achieve and working out ways to get there is essential. Prioritising resources, and finding new ways to fund and make things happen.   And having the right people to create that vision and then make it happen – these are probably the two key components of success. They are important when things are going well, and even more essential when your business is under pressure. As Geoff Johnson from the Gartner Group said at his session yesterday "during tough times strategising and executive leadership are more important than ever".

However, there are three other things I briefly want to cover as well. The first of these is **ACHIEVEMENT.** There is nothing like building a climate for success as success!   The first time you have a success – whatever that success is – you need to celebrate it – with your colleagues and teams, with the wider organisation, and with the politicians and customers. This is not for reasons of self aggrandisement – but a good marketing ploy to embed in the minds of your key stakeholders that your library is successful.   Then build on that success – look for the next achievement – increase in your circulation business, new programmes delivered for children – and make sure that those with influence know about it.   This is a long term strategy – and one that bears fruit over time.

I am convinced that one of the reasons that Christchurch City Libraries has been successful in securing funding for buildings and other projects over a long period of time is partly due to the reputation the library has built up in the minds of its customers and politicians. The city is proud of its libraries, it sees the value in learning, in the free availability of information and the tools needed to access it, in creative recreation and the encouragement of reading.   This value is embedded in accretion of **achievements** over time. This reputation needs to be nurtured and protected. It is your investment capital for the times when innovation, creativity and energy dries up, when complacency sets in and you need to give yourselves a much needed kick to get going again, or when the tough times comes.

For example, the value that Christchurch people place on their library service resulted in a significant, successful lobbying of the Council when it proposed to put a charge on all books in 1990.

A culture of achievement is important for our people too.   It is embedded in the values we hold – we expect more from our people than just turning up to work and putting in the time. We expect people to make a difference – to produce results and the organisation will support them to do that.

To get the best impact from your achievements they need to be **TIMELY.** I started this paper with a list of some of the "firsts" for Christchurch City Libraries. Being first is not necessarily the goal here – what is important is being responsive to changing needs and the opportunities provided by new developments in technology so that your customers get the benefit as early as possible. The result of this is that you are often first to do things, to innovate and to try new things. Successful businesses are those that get their product to market ahead of the pack – timing is of the essence. Whilst we are not necessarily in the competitive market – in fact collaborative effort is one of the hallmarks of libraries – we do need to be focusing on the timing for delivering new services if we want to build a reputation for success. There can be some tension between the desire to innovate and the desire to collaborate! We all work in bureaucratic organisations – some more so, some less so. The bigger the organisation the more at risk it is of being slowed down by bureaucratic process. When you are then trying to innovate across a group of libraries – either by sector or by geography the problem is compounded and you get bogged down! I don't have any easy solutions for this!

However, one of the solutions internally to overcoming bureaucratic inertia that we have found is to adopt a project way of working. The advantage of this is that any new initiative has a defined beginning and end. The smallest project team to achieve the task is appointed – this may be a project team of one. A brief is prepared which outlines the scope of the project, the resources needed, the expected outcomes and issues to be resolved. This way of working has replaced a culture of "standing committees" which were often large in number because they needed to be representative of all teams and which dealt with issues as they arose. Even if there was no substantive business the committee would met. I am sure none of you are doing this! But the point here is that if we are to get new initiatives off the ground we need processes which enable rather than disable – we need to try pilot projects, test runs, prototypes and not try to achieve perfection from day one.

We need to take risks and try things out – be prepared to change if what we do doesn't work the first time round. In 1998 we completed a two year extension and major refurbishment of the Central City Library. Between ourselves and the architects we got the entrance and exit to the library quite wrong! This has meant biting the bullet and changing it some three years later. So you can see we have not always been successful but the important thing is that if you want to innovate you have to be prepared that sometimes things don't work – and then you need to change them.

Finally the last plank in my 5 point plan for being successful is we need to **MONITOR AND MEASURE**. Before you all turn off and think "how dull and ordinary" let me tell you what is behind these rather prosaic words. Monitoring to me is about keeping yourself informed about what is happening in the world, in our industry. It is keeping up to date through reading, surfing the Net, visiting other libraries (if you are lucky) and watching for trends. We need to build our understanding of what is happening in the world. Have you ever noticed how these days a new trends spreads so quickly. A recent example for me was that during our strategic planning review we have begun to focus on the role that libraries play in community development and the building of social capital. Only a couple of days after this discussion I am reading through a pile of library journals from the UK, US and Australia. In two separate journals I found articles on the same theme! In this

way we build on the experience of others and use this to inform our own developments. In turn we can do the same for others.

I also firmly believe we need to be looking at and learning from what others are doing – both their successes and their failures. Other sectors such as retail, museums, supermarkets, banking have aspects of the way they run their enterprises that can be applied in our own industry: museum displays, visual merchandising techniques, automated telephone dial in…to name but a few.
And measurement? Well this is the partner to knowing what is happening in the outside world. We also need to know what is happening in our business. How many of you know what the costs and benefits are of the services and products you provide? Do you use business statistics in evaluating what you are doing – foot traffic, issues per capita, turnover rate of stock, page views to your website, catalogue traffic?

A recent report from our Fingertip Library highlighted the fact that 90% of the reference questions they received were able to be answered predominantly from electronic resources, including the internet. This raises all sorts of questions in my mind about the type of questions being asked, implications for the walk-in service and so on. The important point here is that we need to get underneath the base facts to tease out changes which are happening which might have an impact on service delivery in the future.

In addition to using data for your own management purposes it is also vital for demonstrating sound financial and organisational management with your funders.

Well that's it folks – my 5 point plan for success, and for keeping on being successful.

RIGHT PEOPLE
STRATEGIC VISION
ACHIEVEMENT
TIMING
MONITOR AND MEASURE

As all good presenters know it is helpful for the audience if they can go away with an acronym.   This isn't very helpful. A hah! The crossword puzzlers amongst you though will see an anagram here …..

STRATEGIC VISION
MONITOR AND MEASURE
ACHIEVEMENT
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TIMING

And there you have it - SMART strategies for success.