

Creating collections – a reactive or proactive approach?

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Abstract

In normal circumstances planning the collection for a new library starts at least two years prior to when the library opens.

Over the past three years we have opened the new Aranui library; closed and relocated parts of two libraries to six temporary locations; closed three libraries temporarily while these buildings were used by others; and closed two other libraries as they no longer complied with building code requirements.

Providing access to and storage for these collections became a logistical nightmare. We increased the number of collections which floated. We became experts in packing stock into boxes and storing these in containers, garages and a warehouse.

At the same time, changing patterns in collection use were surfacing. These included an increase in the use of digital resources, and a shift to reading more fiction, lighter nonfiction, and more magazines – perhaps to escape the harsh reality of living in a post-earthquake environment.

Holding the responsibilities of Kaitiakitanga and Manaakitanga for collections we have had many questions while we strive to be flexible and creative in order to meet customer demand at locations throughout the city, both now and in the future.

Introduction

As at 31 August 2010, Christchurch City Libraries comprised of 20 libraries, and held 1.1 million items. 14 % of all transactions were electronic. A programme of RFID tagging all items in the network's collection was underway; and several areas of the general, young adult and children's collections floated between libraries - DVDs, talking books, and new fiction.

On 4 September a 7.1 magnitude earthquake struck. Buildings were closed. Over the next few weeks buildings were checked before reopening for business as usual. For residents there seemed to be a tendency towards shorter attention spans, a need to escape reality, and an increased awareness of what was available electronically. This created changes in how the various library collections were being used, particularly in the fiction, biographies, magazines, and audiovisual areas. Use of electronic resources increased as these were available 24/7.

On 22 February 2011 a 6.3 magnitude earthquake struck. Lives were lost, a large number of buildings throughout the central city and eastern suburbs were destroyed, and a civil emergency was declared. Chaos continued with a large number of aftershocks. All libraries were closed. Rigorous building checks were required before decisions could be made as to whether the library could reopen. Some opened and some remained closed. For many residents having access to these libraries provided some hope that life would return to some sort of normality. Three large libraries were taken over by Council colleagues. 'Open' buildings were then subjected to an even more detailed engineer's report (DEE-assessment) which resulted in some buildings being closed for further repair work to ensure compliance was met. Finding adequate storage for stock being returned from 'closed' libraries became a huge challenge logistically.

At 31 August 2013, we had 19 libraries open, and held 1.25 million items. 15.3 % of all our transactions were electronic. A brand new library was open at Aranui. Three libraries are in temporary premises, 3 libraries are still closed or demolished, an extra warehouse is being used for storage, and 2 new Mobile library vans were providing library services at numerous stops. Most items are RFID tagged; and twelve libraries are now operating with RFID technology. All collections with the exception of some smaller specialised collections float throughout the library network.

Aranui Library

For over a decade, a new library had been proposed for Aranui, a low socio-economic suburb with a high Maori and Pacific Island population. After extensive consultation, it was proposed a new 500sqm library would open in August 2011. It would have a strong focus on engaging with the community. Feedback from the consultation in 2009-2010 showed books were important to the community. The library was also seen as a place for meeting, engaging and experimentation so the collection was to support this concept rather than dominate the space. The collection was to be small - 16,000 items, and would be supported by a range of electronic resources. Unlike previous collections created for new libraries within our network, the Aranui library collection would be 11-12000 items when the library opened, with the collection turnover being anticipated as 30%-35%. In the following six months the collection would continue to increase to its full size. It was envisaged this would enable further engagement with the community around their collection needs and enable selectors to assess usage patterns and align the collection accordingly.

In March 2010 a very comprehensive collection profile had been developed based on census data, information gained through community consultation, and the budget available over the ensuing two years. This 13 page profile broke the collection down into areas, percentage of the total collection, number of items, and budget fund allocations to cover both years. Areas were Maori, and Pasifika; General collection – nonfiction, fiction and large print; Children's; Young adult; General audiovisual and electronic; Bestsellers; Serials/Magazines; and Newspapers. The collection profile included comment on how success factors relating to the collection could be measured, and what further consultation could be gathered in order to tweak the collection once the library opened.

Purchasing for the collection commenced and was spread across two financial years. New items received were stored in standard size cartons according to collection area. Cartons were marked accordingly so that it would make it easier for shelving once the internal layout had been finalised prior to opening. Magazine subscriptions were placed in anticipation of the August 2011 opening. All very much a planned and proactive approach which never quite happened thanks to what took place on 22 February 2011. Plans were put on hold until the building design was reviewed to ensure it met 100% of the new building code, and Council approval was granted for the project to continue. Opening was delayed for 12 months. This impacted on the collection budgets. It was agreed that buying for Aranui would continue until we met the total size of the collection as we were unable to hold funds back for the following financial year. Once open we would then assess usage to see if we had got it right, and move stock from elsewhere in the network if changes were needed.

As orders were received, stock was catalogued, given a status of 'available' and then shadowed. Regular breakdowns of stock received were provided using data from Director's Station, a Symphony product (Library Management System). This was matched to the profile to gauge progress. A final check of what had been received compared to what had been defined in the collection profile was done prior to opening. This provided us with valuable information on where we were too generous, and where we could have found more. This data was analysed to confirm the shelving layout. Once the shelving was erected, stock was then moved from storage and shelved, and catalogue information was updated. Some excess stock remained in the building to fill gaps as they arose.

To the delight of a very grateful local community, and a positive move for the city at a time where there was so much destruction, Aranui Library finally opened in August 2012 with a great deal of celebration and pride. The library quickly became a focus for the community, a place to meet, a place to engage, and a place to feel safe. To date a formal review of the collection has not been completed. Instead changes in what stock floats and what stock stays permanently at the library has enabled customers and staff at Aranui to easily support changes to the collection. By simply discharging an item and putting it on the shelf, or floating it on to another library if not required, the collection is constantly refreshed, is more likely to meet expectations, and remains at a manageable level.

Impact of libraries opening and closing

In response to the large amount of stock being returned while libraries were closed, global changes were made on the library system to make more areas of the collection float. A temporary distribution centre was set up in the garage used to house the Mobile Library. Computer access was installed and a team was put together to discharge stock on the same location used for ordering new material for the network. This made it easier to manage holds, process stock being returned

from bins outside closed libraries, and start a proactive programme of making sure all items were tagged. Collection areas were defined for storing stock, and items were packed in standard sized cartons, marked accordingly, and stacked on pallets. As the small number of open libraries ran out of stock, cartons were identified to fill the gaps. The rest of this stock remained in the garage.

The next phase saw some stock needing to be removed from several buildings so that the library space could be used to deliver other Council services, repairs could be completed, or the building could be demolished. In some instances this removal was more organised than others as it depended heavily on the timeframes available and the amount of stock which had fallen onto the floor. Again this stock was packed in standard sized cartons, marked accordingly and delivered to the garage. A team logged on as the relevant library, discharged (where appropriate), tagged untagged stock, and reboxed in like areas – the level of detail depending on the size of the collection for that library. Boxes were clearly marked with name of library, collection area, and ‘tagged’; and stored in general collection areas on pallets allocated to that library. For two libraries a small skeleton staff was available on site to process returns, tag existing stock, and store items in boxes in a container outside the library, or in piles or on shelving if space was still available. As these libraries reopened, smart technology was installed, and the collection was returned to the shelves according to a detailed shelving layout and the right boxes being placed in the right areas.

South City Library

At the same time planning began for a new ‘pop-up’ library in South City – a mall on the edge of the city centre. The size of the empty shop determined the size of the collection – 7000 items. A very brief collection profile was developed focusing on the need to provide very popular lending material for a cross section of adults, young adult and children. The emphasis was on newer material – stock added in the past couple of years, with no magazines, CDs, newspapers, or reference material. The collection was to be an ‘adapt as we go’ operation as we did not know what to expect. Potential turnover of the collection was set at 40%.

A shelving layout was completed, and collection areas defined. Numbers of shelves were counted, and then numbers of items required were identified using an average number for what would fit on the shelf for that particular collection. A ‘shopping list’ was then used to pull stock from the garage, discharge onto the new location added to Symphony, and shelf. Each week data from Symphony’s Director’s Station was used to gauge progress. Six weeks after the first collection planning meeting the library opened in July 2011. As the library gained popularity, gaps in the collection appeared, and more stock was sent through from the garage or from other open libraries who had excess to requirements.

Central Library

Central Library building sustained some damage in the February earthquake; and was surrounded by other buildings which were unsafe and destined for demolition. It was also situated in an area earmarked for the new Convention Centre. Once detailed assessments of the building had been completed after each significant earthquake or aftershock, CERA approved access to the building under very strict guidelines.

A comprehensive plan was put in place to remove the collections from the building, prioritising according to value, popularity, position in building, what shelving it was on,

completing one collection at a time, providing a mix of 'heavy and lighter weight' areas, the time needed to change location on items, and storage space available.

The Archives and rare material from the Research room were removed and sent to Recall. Here the contents were listed and stored – being available to customers some time later by appointment only. Contractors then moved on to the lending collections where they loaded trolleys and bins, or boxed items depending on their destination. Each day, a truckload of trolleys and bins would leave the Central Library and be taken to a new temporary Warehouse leased in Sydenham. Here shelving had been erected, so stock was able to be discharged on a new 'Store' location, checked for damage, tagged and then shelved in Dewey sequence. This stock then became available for holds, and parts of it fed into two more temporary libraries – Central Peterborough which opened in December 2011, and Central Tuam which replaced the South City Mall Library in July 2012. The successful removal of stock from Central depended on having good planning and processes in place, as well as excellent communication between all parties involved.

Central Peterborough Library

Putting together a collection for the new temporary Central Peterborough Library (65,000 items) followed a similar pattern to the South City model. The size of the area dictated the size of the collection, with the shelving layout and number of shelves dictating the number of items required within each area. A brief collection profile was written – the collection mirroring more of what was available in a large community library. A desire for a high collection turnover made us focus on providing more popular items, rather than a larger number of 'in depth' or older items often found on the shelves in Central Library. Most of the resources from Family History, the Pounamu, and the magazine collection were also included, along with some world language material, a part of the music CD collection, New Zealand newspapers, and both Children's and Young adult collections. Again we produced our shopping list, and the Distribution team worked through the stock available to fill requirements. Data from Symphony was provided on a weekly basis to show progress. Once the shelving was in place, stock was moved to the building and shelved. Upon opening we still had a large number of unopened boxes. What we had not taken into account was a lower collection turnover than expected over the first few weeks of opening; customers arriving with stock from other libraries which then got shelved (impact of floating); and large numbers of duplicate copies (particularly fiction) which surfaced as boxes were unpacked.

Central Tuam Library

Creating a collection for this library (65,000 items) provided a different set of challenges. Central Tuam was to replace Central South City when its lease ran out. Much of the profile for Central Tuam was developed in response to customer feedback – a need to access more of the Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZC) collection (the Library's Heritage collection), more depth from the Central lending collection, the large motor manual collection, and more world language material. The size and layout of the building meant about 25% of the Central collection could be housed at this library. As stock from Central was being processed and checked for damage one in every four items was put aside for Central Tuam, and the remainder was shelved at the Warehouse. Prior to opening in July 2012, this stock was moved in boxes to Central Tuam and shelved alongside what had remained at Central South City Library after it closed. This stock provided the collection with greater currency. After opening a small team reviewed the selection of ANZC material, and exchanged some items with higher interest titles which were available from our warehouse. A small collection of magazines was added – these were copies of titles redirected from

libraries which were closed. World language material was split between Central Peterborough and Central Tuam, with all the Asian languages being available at one location, and the remaining languages available at the other. Since this library has opened, one of the tasks for collection managers has been to assess the collection, and withdraw stock based on deselection guidelines while thinking about what the collection for the new Central Library will look like when it opens early 2017.

Central Manchester

Central Tuam will close 1 November 2013, as the building needs to be demolished to make way for the new Justice precinct. A lease has been signed for a slightly smaller space in Manchester Street, and planning has started for a mid January 2014 opening date. In response to customer feedback and a review of the collections available at both Central Peterborough and Central Tuam, some significant changes will be made to what will be offered at Central Peterborough and Central Manchester. Work has commenced on the detail required to achieve these changes and deal with excess collection items. This includes increasing the amount of weeding being done at Central Tuam, and starting a rigorous deselection programme for the remaining Central stock at the Warehouse (100,000 items).

Planning for the future

Planning for a new Central Library is currently underway with a proposed opening date of early 2017. At this stage there is no indication as to what the overall size of the collection will be, or its composition. We do know it will be less than what was taken out of the old Central Library, and every item in this 'new' collection will need to prove its worth, adopting the 'just in time' principle as opposed to 'just in case'. What we do today will impact on what this collection will look like.

With that in mind, assessment of the Central stock continues. The Selection team has nearly completed the task of working through all the books held in the Stack and deciding whether items need to go to our 'permanent' Store, be available on the open shelves, be replaced, or withdrawn. Evaluating a large number of reference books are next – these will either be made lending, kept reference and shelved on the open shelves, or withdrawn if they are no longer current or have been replaced with an electronic equivalent. Some ANZC collections have yet to be relocated and made accessible. These remain in boxes in the Warehouse, Store or in a container.

A new library for Halswell is planned for early 2015. Consultation with the community is underway, and a collection profile is being developed for a collection of 45,000 items – 30,000 items from the existing Halswell Library collection plus an extra 15,000 new items. The development of this collection will follow similar lines to what was used for Aranui, and build on the learning we have gained when developing temporary libraries.

A feasibility study is being done on a new library for the South West, and a smaller temporary library in Bishopdale is due to open 30 September 2013. A new project on looking at network collection storage requirements for the future is also underway.

We continue to increase the size of our digital collections in order to meet customer expectations and demand 24/7. This involves monitoring how these collections are being used, what new resources are available for purchase, working through the challenges of licensing, and the impact this format is having on the use of our physical collections.

Conclusion

Over the past three years, we have learnt the importance of increasing our agility, flexibility and willingness to try something new. We have reinforced the need to look at the collection from a network perspective, and to look critically at how the collections are stored.

By the end of 2011 we had made some major changes to our buying patterns. We worked through a slight reduction in our budget by generally maintaining the pattern of purchasing stock to meet the needs of all our libraries when they are fully operational again. More titles were bought to counteract a reduction in the number of copies bought. Standing orders were reviewed more regularly to take into account of the number of libraries open, customer usage, and availability of information electronically.

Implementing a regular deselection programme throughout the network has been challenging as most libraries continue to operate with full shelves, and staff work through conflicting priorities for their time. The impact of using the collection management tool CollectionHQ is starting to show in some libraries. Plans are in place for a rigorous weed of our Store area before the new Central Library opens, and to work through the remaining stock still in boxes having been out of circulation for nearly three years.

On reflection, some of the decisions made in the thick of it, may have been different after the experience of completing the task or with the benefit of hindsight. In some ways, each of the collections we have created has been different as we have streamlined the various models we have used to fit the situation at the time. Knowing what stock was where has been challenging at times, along with trying to keep the catalogue as accurate as possible. However keeping focused on what customers want and how we can best meet these needs within the spaces and budgets we have, has enabled us to continue to provide customers with access to most of our collections.

We are very aware of the impact today's decisions will have on the collections for the future, and in particular the collection for the new Central Library. Moving to a model of stock being supplied 'just in time' rather than being kept 'just in case' will help us maintain collections which meet the ever-changing needs of our communities.