Improving access to public library collections

Two more libraries join the Murraylink network

The Wimmera Regional Library Corporation and Goulburn Valley Regional Library Corporation have just significantly increased their internet service by installing permanent connections to the internet and making their catalogues searchable over the internet via the Murraylink network.

A permanent connection to the internet has been in each case made possible only after extensive upgrading of local networks to accommodate the technological requirements. In addition, to effect a secure permanent connection to the internet, both library services have installed a firewall on the library's network.

For each library service, funding permanent internet access will require a commitment to meet an annual cost for the connection, which is equivalent to more than seven per cent of the library materials budget.

Permanent access to the internet not only provides vastly increased availability of the internet for public use, it has made available the catalogues of Goulburn Valley and Wimmera Regional Libraries for searching over the internet through the Murraylink Libraries Inc. network, at http://www.murraylink.vic.gov.au.

Goulburn Valley and Wimmera Regional Libraries are the newest members of the Murraylink network bringing the number of co-operative libraries in the group to eight.

Particularly in rural areas, the ability to search the local library catalogue over the internet provides the community with a dramatic increase in ease of access to local information resources as well as the resources of other libraries when libraries group together to maximise service provision with limited resources.

The Murraylink Libraries Inc network is based on a co-operatively owned and operated webserver, which provides the interface between the internet and the library database servers of each member library.

Launched in 1996, Murraylink Libraries Inc is a co-operative effort with a vision to create a network of Victorian public libraries along the Murray River from Echuca to the South Australian border. With the addition of Goulburn Valley and Wimmera Regional Libraries the network now serves a population of over 203 000 over an area of 46 308 square kilometres.

The Murraylink concept originated with a primary goal to improve access to the collections of the co-operating libraries, particularly through enabling remote access to library catalogues for library customers. Achieving this goal required the upgrading of the system hardware, software and communications networks of each of the four founding member libraries. Initial funding for the project was granted by the Victorian Department of Infrastructure, Office of Local Government. Member libraries plan to cover ongoing costs through the creation of new services and products, which enable an element of self-sufficiency.

A long-standing spirit of co-operation within rural public libraries in Victoria has seen this expansion of membership, and a continuing expansion of the services which member libraries share.

Murraylink Libraries Inc services now include a web presence, a shared multi-media collection, increased inter-library loan traffic, a co-operative buying scheme for new materials, a communications equipment pool, shared cataloguing resources and the sharing of in-house and out-sourced technological expertise.

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