

ACT Public Library Online Information Services

Margaret Hyland, manager, ACT Public Library

The ACT Public Library, like many other Australian and international public library services, has in recent years been investing heavily in a range of online information services.

One of the many major triggers for the developments in public library online services has been the adoption of the current generation of library management systems, that are targeted at electronic service delivery. Online catalogues can be integrated with the web, e-mail notification services are becoming standard, remote patron authentication enables management of access issues to online databases and sources, and increased levels of customer self-service are a reality.



What's New
The library forms are currently unavailable. To contact the library please phone 0205 9000 or email library.customers@act.gov.au

- Have your say on the ACT Public Library Collections - Please click here to participate in our online survey
- New Exhibitions - Canberra Treasures
- Children's Choice Awards - NOMINATE NOW
- NEW - Live Homework Help - Free homework help for school students from real tutors
- Try SuperSearch - the easy way to search
- NEW - Learning@act Online Computer Training
- Mobile Library Timetable

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ph: 02 6205 9000
Last updated on: 14 February 2006
URL: <http://www.library.act.gov.au>

The underpinning philosophy of online services at the ACT Public Library is that online customers should be able to do anything that can be done by a customer in a library branch. The exception is borrowing a physical library item – a customer must use a branch library to do that!

Public Library access is based on three service delivery channels: at a branch (across a customer service desk or face-to-face with library staff); the Customer Information Centre (or call centre); and online, over the web. ACT public library customers can access information online about library locations, services and programs, join the library, manage their account (check and update personal details, make loan renewals, request items or interlibrary loans), search the catalogue or a range of databases, and access online learning. From a branch library, the Australian Bureau of Statistics online resources can be accessed, and LibrariesAustralia will be available very soon.

Future provision

A major driver of current and future provision of ACT public library services is the Canberra Plan (<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/canberraplan/>) comprising of *Building our Community: the Canberra Social Plan*, *The Canberra Spatial Plan* and *The Economic White Paper*. *Building our Community* in particular provides a comprehensive agenda for building social inclusiveness and equity for all sectors of the ACT community.

One of the many roles of public libraries is social inclusiveness to achieve the building of social capital, so the services and programs we already offer are completely in accord with the Canberra Social Plan. For example, lifelong learning for the ACT community is a major platform of this Plan, so in the current redesign of the ACT Public Library's website, a learning pathway will be provided. In 2006 we will be trialling, with appropriate partners in the ACT education sector, a relatively new online service called Live Homework Help. Live Homework Help is an online real-time tutoring service. Tutors will be available in areas such as mathematics, science, and English.

Reducing the digital divide, addressing disabilities and the needs of the multicultural and indigenous communities are all major drivers of online services both remotely and within the

branch libraries. An area for future ACT Public Library planning is digital literacy training.

Customer demand drives planning for future provision. Currently, library customers can receive library overdue or holding notices by e-mail. Many have requested pre-notification emails alerting them to impending overdue library materials, so that facility is currently being investigated. Customer demand combines with developments in information and communication technology as a major driver. When the ACT Public Library renews the leases on its public internet access PCs later this year, customers will be able to download and upload using discs, USB ports, CDs and DVDs. We have to plan for the coming explosion in the use of handheld devices such as MP3 players and IPODs, particularly in developing e-book services to the community. Customers are already demanding wireless connections for their laptops in library branches.

Online service: effects on planning and service delivery

Online service delivery has significantly altered staff workloads. The request system provided by our library management system has meant significant growth in the numbers of customers now requesting library materials to be delivered to the branch of their choice, compared to the previous manual reservation system. Customers can check online where their requests are in the queue, and whether the items are returned to the library on time. The transparency of circulation procedures to library customers, the easy 'suggested purchase' procedures and the powerful searching available through the online catalogue have increased the use of the online and Customer Information Centre channels, significantly raising workloads in those areas. The much larger number of purchase suggestions received electronically has required re-evaluation of collection building directions. The increased number of library customers regularly using the online catalogue has focused staff attention on the inconsistencies and barriers to access that can accumulate over time. Regular database cleanup activities have become vital, and electronic resources (both those purchased and those available through the web) have caused us to reconsider what the online catalogue should provide for customers.

Outsourcing library processing, particularly in technical services areas, can free staff to undertake new and different duties related to shifts in service delivery; partnership and consortia arrangements can to some extent alleviate resourcing issues in service shifts; and online library systems have streamlined much of the manual work previously associated with maintaining catalogues and circulation services. The ACT Public Library has not discontinued other services and programs to resource expanding delivery of online services. The movement of customers away from in-person service at a branch to online and telephone services has allowed some cost-shifting. However, the number of customers visiting the ACT Public Library has steadily increased during the past 2-3 years, so face-to-face branch services will continue to



New laws prohibit the promotion of suicide

Susan Magnay, ALIA manager, planning policy

In early January, Double Bay Library in Sydney's eastern suburbs was the site of a protest about new laws dealing with the use of telecommunications carriage services to promote suicide or provide information about methods of suicide. (See reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 and 7 January 2006)

The *Criminal code amendment (suicide related material offences) act, No 92, 2005* came into force in early January 2006 and makes it an offence to use carriage services, that is, the internet, e-mail, telephone, fax, radio or TV, for the purposes of counselling or inciting suicide, of promoting or providing instruction on a particular method of suicide.

In response to members' concerns that the new legislation might have an impact on materials in library collections, ALIA National Office staff, with the assistance of ALIA's Online Content and Regulation Reference Group, has reviewed the legislation, including the explanatory memorandum for the bill and the Parliamentary bill's digest. The paragraphs below provide general information for the benefit of ALIA members and are not intended to be a substitute for legal advice.

In ALIA's view, the Act does not impact on materials in library collections (print or online). The Act relates to the Commonwealth's constitutional power to make laws in relation to electronic communications. The Parliamentary bills digest states 'For example, a person borrowing a book from a library to obtain suicide related material in physical form could not validly be subject to a Commonwealth law.'

Intent is crucial to the offences. The Act is specific in stating that it is not designed to stifle debate on euthanasia. Subsections 474.29A (3)-(4) state that no offence is committed if the person does not intend the material to be used to counsel suicide or to promote a method or provide instruction on a method of committing suicide.

ALIA recommends that libraries be aware of the Association's 'Libraries and privacy guidelines' (<http://alia.org.au/policies/privacy.html>). These guidelines can help libraries develop policies and practices enabling them to comply with privacy codes, principles and related legislation. They cover requests from authorities to disclose personal information and library policy on actions related to law enforcement.

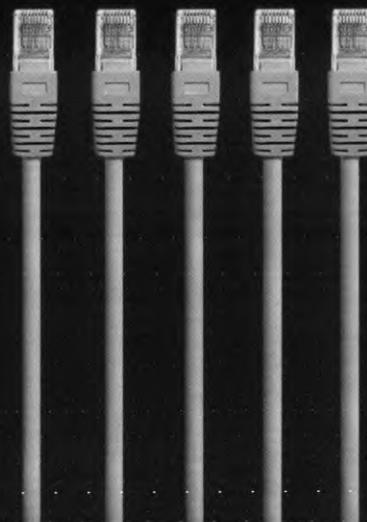
The text of the Act can be found on the Attorney-General's website at <http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/html/comact/12/7006/top.htm>. The Explanatory Memoranda can be found at <http://parlinfoweb.aph.gov.au/piweb/>. For the Explanatory memoranda and Bills digest for the Criminal code amendment (suicide related material offences) bill 2005 follow the links from 'Old bills' at <http://www.aph.gov.au/bills/index.htm>. ■

ACT Public Library Online Information Services continued...

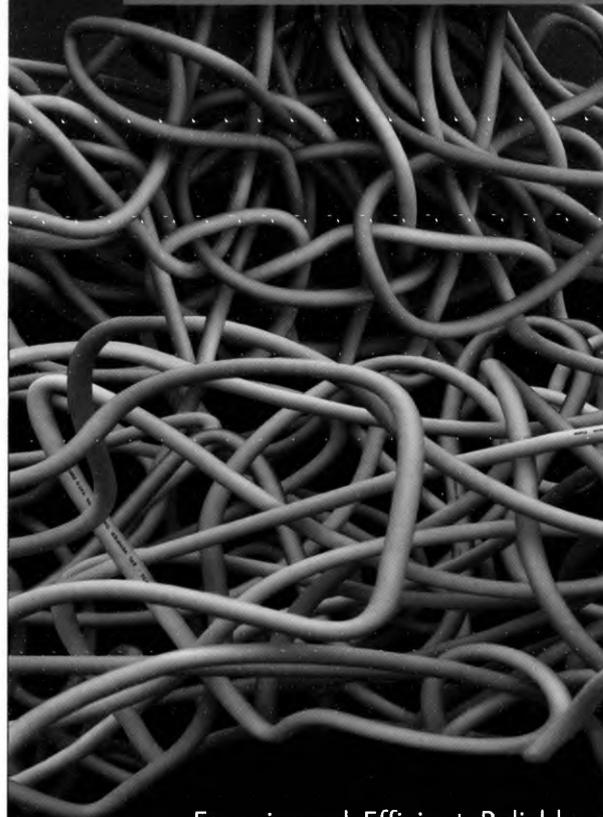
- ▶ be a significant workload. The ACT Public Library has managed the increased workloads that online service delivery has created through the dedication of staff eager to introduce the changes, together with reallocating existing resources.

There is widespread recognition, internationally and in Australia, that public libraries are valued as public spaces that welcome all sectors of the community, regardless of race, colour or creed. Achieving the balance between an attractive and well-maintained physical space, with up-to-date print and physical resources, and the ongoing investment required to keep pace with technological developments is an ongoing issue in the development of the ACT Public Library's service delivery. ■

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