

Technology

Award-winning technology: MyLanguage

Winner: 2008 Community Relations Commissions National Multicultural Marketing Awards – Microsoft Technology Award

MyLanguage (<http://www.mylanguage.gov.au>) is a national portal designed to deliver information and complement library services to multicultural Australia using a number of innovative web-development techniques and scripting languages.

Traditional multilingual and multicultural library services struggle to provide adequately for the needs of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) patrons, particularly among new and emerging communities. MyLanguage enables a higher level of service provision to CALD patrons, including those from new and emerging communities.

MyLanguage provides the platform for an efficient and cost effective electronic multicultural library service based on open-source software solutions and the leveraging of data and content available under open-source or open-text initiatives.

The MyLanguage concept was inspired by three key ideas:

1. That the Information Society is dependent on fostering access to and publication of multilingual and multicultural information;
2. That libraries are crucial as gateways to multilingual information resources; and
3. That technology and the internet are necessary components for developing access to information and resources for new and emerging communities.

The partnership

The national MyLanguage Portal is a joint partnership between the State and Territory Libraries of New South Wales, Victoria, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Australian Capital Territory Library and Information Services.

MyLanguage – an innovative multilingual gateway to information

Traditional library services are only available in 49 languages in Australia. The provision of appropriate library services to this large, culturally and linguistically diverse population, including minority language groups and emerging communities, is a key challenge to libraries due to constraints on funding and the availability of traditional resources and materials.

Electronic resources in languages other than English provide an opportunity for libraries to expand their library services to our culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

MyLanguage's vision is to:

- enhance and facilitate the use of the internet by and for culturally and linguistically diverse communities;
- empower newly arrived, emergent, and minority languages communities to use online technologies; and
- enrich Australia's linguistic and cultural cyberspace.

<http://www.mylanguage.gov.au> provides access to over six million information links: search engines, web directories, government web-sites, digital library projects, and syndicated news headlines available in over 60 languages other than English.

The project marketing strategy

The marketing of MyLanguage involved banners, bookmarks, and videos posted on the YouTube website in several languages. The State Library of NSW produced the design and coordinated the distribution of 70000 bookmarks and 40 banners to the participant State/Territory Libraries. Since November 2007, the banners have travelled across public libraries in the country.

The design of the banner and bookmarks has an inclusive diversity in the graphics of the banners, and the bookmarks have scripts from different languages with the subjects of the photographs being employees of the State Library of NSW.

The project

There are two principal background elements to this project: the demographic situation in Australia, and developments in website and content management technology.

1. The demographic situation in Australia

- 21.9% of Australians are born overseas;
- 40.1% of Australians have at least one parent born overseas;
- 15.2% of Australians speak a language other than English at home across 212 languages.

Considering aspects of cultural diversity

In June 2008, on behalf of the partnership, the State Library of NSW began recruiting native speakers of several languages to participate in the filming of video clip under the banner of 'So you want to be a film star – now recruiting!' The video clips were uploaded to the YouTube video sharing web site.

The filming, editing, and uploading was done in partnership with the University of Western Sydney, winter vacation program industry partnership. The videos were filmed at the State Library in July and August 2008.



Considering aspects of linguistic diversity:

In order to address the cultural differences all participants were provided with only basic instructions for their messages.

Greeting

Participants were asked to avoid specific time-of-day greetings like good morning because we didn't know when the user of YouTube would come online.

Each participant had the freedom to address the viewer as appropriate for their cultural background.

Invitation to explore the website

Each participant adjusted the delivery of the invitation to explore the website by using the most appropriate language according to their own culture. Some languages have different levels of formality or use. These sensitive and complex aspects were left to the discretion of the person delivering the message.

The participant could provide a brief or long version of the message according to what is appropriate for the culture. In some cultures brevity can be interpreted as rude or arrogant, while in others too much detail is not the correct approach.

Variety in the language and accent

Similar to English speakers from Canada, Australia, the US, and the UK, Spanish speakers share a common language, however their accents differ. To address this issue, Spanish speakers from



Spain, South, and Central America were recruited. This also included Galego.

The State Library of NSW Multicultural Consultant invited the participation of State Library staff whose first languages included Hindi, Slovak, Serbian, Italian, Arabic, Vietnamese, and French.

Volunteers and Friends of the State Library and members of the community contributed with their language skills in Dutch, German, Kannada, Korean, Portuguese, Swedish, Swahili, Somali, Macedonian, Dinka, Bosnian, and Tatar.

The Consultant also recruited assistance from the NSW Public Libraries network with Cantonese, Mandarin, Tamil, Polish, Galego, Filipino, Turkish, and Serbian.

2. Developments in website and content management technology

The development of this website is supported by the State Library of Victoria's Vicnet, which has developed and maintained significant expertise in the areas of multilingual web development and has led the technical aspect and the foundation of the project.

Website technology has developed from providing pages of static html to using sophisticated content structures. Many high traffic, content-rich sites are now structured around an internal database and a series of design templates, with the interaction between the two elements controlled by a series of program scripts. This is the structure underlying MyLanguage as it simplifies management and update processes, allowing many of these to be undertaken by library staff as part of their regular duties.

The role of special technical staff can be refocused on higher level technical and content development issues, while the content management technology takes care of the day-to-day management. Other developments in collaborative global content creation such as Wikipedia and the Open Directory Project allow for new opportunities in content resource discovery.

MyLanguage uses harvesting protocols and methods to expand access to online information resources. The use of scripts to harvest external data to populate an internally-held database is a central feature of MyLanguage.

MyLanguage portal structure

The contents of this internal database can be searched and displayed in response to user enquiries. This process is very similar to the way in which search engines use scripts to populate and index an internal database. This method allows the re-use of externally provided information, including government information, and ensures the information is accessed appropriately by language and topic.

More conventional sites offering multicultural content often have intensive editorial and content selection requirements and processes, with a consequently large staff overhead to cover in their budgets. The MyLanguage portal enables current library staff with specific language or other multicultural expertise to be involved in updating, researching, and adding information resources to the site with little requirement for technical knowledge and so are able to do this as part of their regular duties.

The usage

Since Sept 2007 the usage statistics of MyLanguage show that the website has received more than a million visits.

Oriana Acevedo
Multicultural Consultant, Public Library Services
State Library of New South Wales
oacevedo@sl.nsw.gov.au

A better way to read

In a country with a population of such diverse ethnic backgrounds, supplying materials in community languages will always present a challenge to Australian libraries. Whether a phrase book for an international holiday, a language course for an extended stay overseas, or the latest blockbuster in a preferred tongue, libraries have recognised the need for materials in diverse languages within their collections.

Language difficulties present one of the toughest barriers to obtaining information, and factors such as aging, vision impairment, chronic arthritis, or Parkinson's disease place added pressures on homebound services and language collections. Audio materials in languages other than English are more expensive and difficult to obtain than print. Reliance on others to read newspapers or books can result in a loss of independence and recreational enjoyment.

In 2000 an open source software development gave print disability organisations and libraries around the world the ability to exchange titles through a standardised audio format. DAISY (Digital Accessible Information System) provides a digital quality audio file that allows the reader to skip forward or back and remembers the page they last read. DAISY books are self-described as the better way to read and the standard is diverse enough to be adopted in 55 countries internationally.

Vision Australia is working to build partnerships with DAISY libraries overseas in order to develop a high-quality collection of audio materials for print-disabled, community-language readers. Currently we have a direct supply of German and Finnish books provided by Medibus and Celia libraries respectively, with plans to create local collections of Hindi, Japanese, Dutch, and Spanish materials. With an increasing number of audio libraries around the world embracing the DAISY standard, further expansion is just around the corner.

Do you know anyone who is unable to hold, manipulate, or see a regular print book? If so, the Vision Australia Information Library Service can provide increased access to a whole world of print information. For further information, please contact our friendly Reader Services team on 1300 654 656.

Deborah Mould, Vision Australia
deborah.mould@visionaustralia.org
Siobhan Dennis, Vision Australia
siobhan.dennis@visionaustralia.org

UTS student wins ALIA conference scholarship

Natalya Godbold, a liaison librarian with the University of Western Sydney and PhD student at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS), received a \$1500 scholarship for the best paper by an early career researcher or practitioner at the recent Research Applications in Information and Library Studies (RAIS) conference, held at UTS on 23 January 2009. The scholarship was sponsored by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and the recipient chosen by the ALIA Research Committee. Natalya was presented with the award by ALIA President, Derek Whitehead.

Natalya's paper, based on her recently completed UTS Masters project, *User-centred design vs. "good" database design principles: a case study, creating knowledge repositories for indigenous Australians*, describes the challenges involved in creating metadata for a database to store the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal clans involved in Traditional Knowledge Revival Pathways (TKRP).