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The State Library of NSW

A Guide to Best Practice



Maximising the Use of State-wide Databases in NSW

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A Guide to Best Practice

Maximising the Use of State-wide Databases in NSW

Background

NSW.net provides all NSW public libraries with access to a number of full text online databases for use by staff and patrons from within the library and from home. Training for public library staff on how to search the databases is also provided by NSW.net.

Once these databases are made available to public libraries, each library is responsible for setting up access to these databases on their own local web sites.

Database statistics collected by NSW.net indicate that the use of these databases is greater where public libraries have placed links and information on these databases strategically within their web sites, as opposed to those where access was complicated or links were not provided. Through login and search statistics collected over the last year, we noticed that the number of logins and searches performed on the databases has declined. After looking at a large selection of public library web sites, the probable cause appears to be the inconsistency with which public libraries have approached setting up access to these databases. Also, during database training sessions, participants remarked on the difficulty of locating links to the databases on their own web sites.

As these databases are a valuable resource for all public libraries and the only online resource available to some public libraries, it is critical for NSW.net to help public libraries maximise the use of the state-wide databases by producing a best practice guide for reference when setting up access to these databases.

Methodology

NSW.net commissioned University of Technology Training and Development Services to explore the views and experiences of public library staff in relation to online database usage.

The scope of the work was to develop a guide to best practice for maximising the use of the state-wide online databases in NSW for public libraries to use when setting up access to online databases on public library web sites. The guidelines would address:

- Number of clicks (positioning of links) to database information on public library web sites;
- Standardised naming;
- Web site/page layout for online database access;
- Product (database) descriptions and/or subject categories;
- In-library and remote/home access (directly through vendor and NSW.net eResources web page links);
- Options for small, medium and large public library web sites.

Research was conducted during June and July, 2008. Two separate phases were involved:

- **Focus groups** – two focus groups were held in June. Each session ran for a full day and involved 24 librarians from metropolitan and regional public libraries in NSW;
- **Online questionnaire** – invitations to complete an online questionnaire were sent to the 97 public library services in NSW. The questionnaire was designed around the themes and issues identified in the focus groups and attracted a high response rate.

Findings

The research shows that public library staff are united in the view that these online resources should be more visible to library clients and that searching them should be as simple and straightforward as possible. Greater attention to marketing and training also received strong and consistent responses. While public library staff believe that using the terms 'full text online databases' should be avoided, they are less united when it comes to finding alternatives.

The project has produced rich insights into the specific topic we were investigating as well as the broader issues facing public libraries in NSW. Even though some of these insights and issues were beyond the scope of the project, we've included additional comments and suggestions with a view to making a positive contribution to an ongoing discussion about the ways in which public libraries can improve, share resources and meet the changing needs of their clients.

Structure of the report

The Best Practice Guide for Maximising the Use of State-wide Databases in NSW, which includes 13 guidelines developed as a result of the focus groups and online survey, heads the report.

The remaining structure of the report is based on the broad topic areas generated by focus group participants and subsequently developed into the five sections of the online survey questionnaire. They are:

- Visibility and ease of access
- Marketing – getting the message out
- Training
- Raising awareness and sharing resources
- Roles and responsibilities

At the end of each section, a number of best practice guidelines are given relating to the section theme previously discussed. The guidelines represent a composite picture of the issues, suggestions and examples given in the focus groups, combined with those questions in the online survey which attracted the strongest and most consistent responses. Appendix One at the end of the report contains additional quotations made in the focus groups and the comments sections of the online survey, for those readers interested in seeing a broader selection of responses.

Conclusion

I want to thank all of the public library staff who participated in this process. The focus group sessions were animated and informative; the online questionnaire attracted unprecedented response rates.

Public library staff care deeply about this issue, and about the role public libraries play in our society generally. In the words of one focus group participant:

"This is a resource worth fighting for!"

The Best Practice Guide will be distributed electronically to all public library services throughout NSW and is also available on the NSW.net web site at <http://www.nswnet.net/databases/bestpracticeguide>. It is hoped that it will be used to guide those individuals in your organisation who are responsible for setting up access to the state-wide and consortia online databases, provide a standard environment for clients to locate and access the online information they require. For assistance, I can be contacted on (02) 9273 1524 or via email at jazzopardi@sl.nsw.gov.au

I look forward to your ongoing feedback.

Joyce Azzopardi

Manager, NSW.net Services

Best Practice Guide for Maximising the Use of State-wide Databases in NSW

Dedicated public library web sites, minimal number of clicks, and multiple access points

Many large public libraries in NSW have their own web site; and many others are in the process of designing and developing them. The best public library sites have a prominent button on the home page called 'digital library' or 'online library'. Whatever the name chosen, this button represents the first port of call for a library client in search of full text articles and journals.

The next step usually involves entering a barcode from a library card if accessing remotely, which allows the client to enter the database world and proceed with their search.

Whether accessing remotely or visiting a public library, searching online databases should be as simple as using Google. Research participants said: any more than two clicks to gain access to this world, is a click too many.

In addition, there should be multiple access points available so that no matter where you are in the web site you can find your way to the online library.

The next best thing – greater visibility and access to library resources on the Council homepage

While the ideal is a standalone library web site, this may not be a feasible short-term option for medium to small public libraries. Greater visibility for the library and its online resources requires more prominent placement on the Council web site. A graphic button saying 'click here for your online library' would be easy to design and place. NSW.net can provide technical advice on how to do this. The 'two clicks' principle should also apply to this option.

The need for greater visibility on the Council homepage was overwhelmingly supported by participants in this research project.

How to display the range of database options

Greater visibility for online resources on library or Council web sites, combined with the 'two clicks' principle, will make it a lot easier for a library client to know about and gain access to online resources. The next step in helping clients with their search relates to what choices they are presented with once they do reach their destination.

While experienced database users may be familiar with database product descriptors like ANZ Reference Centre, eLibrary Australasia, or the Australian Dictionary of Biography; these product names can be mystifying for a beginner.

The top ten public libraries in NSW, where database use is high, give their clients the option of browsing by subject or database titles. When a library client reaches the online library screen they see a list of subject categories from which to choose: animals, art, biography, business, newspapers & journals, philosophy, science etc.

Sitting underneath this subject list is another alphabetical list of database product names. The advantage of displaying subject categories is that it presents the client with language they are already familiar with and builds confidence in being able to use online databases without having to know what each specific database contains.

Examples of subject/product displays can be seen on the State Library and Hornsby Library web sites:

<http://www2.sl.nsw.gov.au/databases/>

<http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au/library/index.cfm?NavigationID=2091>

Ongoing updates and content management

The public library staff who participated in this research were confident that most librarians would have the basic skills to update and manage a web site. Focus group participants in particular were keen to develop these capabilities so that the library could be more responsive to its clients. Web savvy library clients are going elsewhere, they said, to find the information they need when they don't know about or can't easily access online resources via their local library.

Piggybacking off other initiatives

Using existing opportunities to market the library and its online resources is a good place to start promoting state-wide databases. Seniors' Week, Youth Week, whatever is happening in the local environment – it's important to piggyback off these events and let people know about their online library resources. From school kids to pensioners, research participants told us that most people are pretty amazed when they realise they can get access to these resources for free.

Postcards, brochures, clearly visible signage within the library and prominence on the library or Council web sites, were approaches recommended throughout the research. Research participants perceive the library and its resources as a 'good news' story, as 'giving something valuable to our ratepayers'.

Simple language

Some public libraries in NSW are currently advertising the availability of online databases via their web sites using terms such as 'online library' and 'digital library'. The highest scoring term in the online survey was 'e-library'. Participants said they wanted common terminology that could be used across all public libraries. A name that everyone can embrace may need to be canvassed further. People in the focus groups and the online survey were clear about one thing – the term 'database' should be avoided.

Using Web 2.0

These tools are cheap and generally easy to use; where people have used them the response has been positive.

However, a number of participants noted that no matter how enthusiastic public libraries are in embracing these new tools, the broader Council IT environment could act as an inhibitor to experimentation. Others mentioned the time and resources needed to learn and use these tools effectively may not be available within small to medium sized libraries.

Simple and visual is good

Using highly visual and step-by-step online training modules will facilitate better search skills for librarians and library clients alike, according to many of the people who participated in this research.

Interactive and fun were words used often. Training materials available at service points for clients to take home and share with friends was also suggested.

Face-to-face training is still important

Public library staff value and enjoy the training they receive from the State Library and other sources. Many library clients prefer face-to-face training in the first instance, as they can ask questions and try things out in a supportive environment. Some of the visual tools mentioned above can also be used in the context of face-to-face training; both mediums can be used simultaneously.

Cultivating a training culture

Research participants noted that the specific culture of a public library is a strong determinant in how training is perceived. Finding the time and having the resources to conduct ongoing training and experiment with new approaches can be difficult particularly in regional libraries. It was therefore important, they said, that library managers budget for training activities and actively encourage them.

Keeping statistics

Focus group participants pointed out that although circulation statistics are kept and used in public libraries, online usage is not. 96% of survey respondents strongly agreed/agreed that keeping statistics for online usage was important. What to keep and how to keep it (hits vs downloads) were questions left unanswered by research participants.

Sharing results

Comments made in focus groups and in the online survey indicate that public library staff don't know why sharing statistics between libraries is not more widely practised. They believe that knowing why a particular public library has a high response rate for online database usage would help them improve their own services.

Working with vendors

Working with vendors to get more accurate information about usage patterns would assist with the above. A number of research participants recommended that standardised questions be developed to use when evaluating databases. These generic questions should include some basic requirements vendors need to meet, such as access to usage statistics.

Visibility and ease of access

"At the moment it's like a hidden treasure, only the determined will find it!"

"If you don't see it, you won't use it."

There are a number of inter-related issues that contribute to a library client's knowledge of and ability to access online databases via their local library:

- They need to know the online resources exist;
- They need to be able to access these resources easily;
- They need to be able to find what they're looking for without having to learn new terminology or pass through a series of different interfaces.

As one research participant said: "People just want to get the information and get out."

The public library staff who participated in this research – as focus group participants or online survey respondents – think online full text databases are a valuable resource for library clients. They also think these resources are under-utilised. Questions around visibility and ease of access were energetically discussed in the two focus groups and comprised the core themes of the survey.

What people said in the online survey

One or two clicks and you're there – 74.5% strongly agree and 25.5% agree that people should be able to access online databases with a minimal number of clicks.

Multiple access points – 47.5% strongly agree and 43.6% agree that there should be a number of access points for online searching available on library web sites.

The more like Google the better – 59.8% strongly agree and 31.4% agree that searching these databases should be as simple as using Google.

Seamless searching – 52.3% strongly agree and 28.7% agree that there should be a tool that allows clients to search the library's catalogue as well as online databases in the one search.

Better graphic interfaces – 34.0% strongly agree and 50.0% agree that better graphic interfaces would contribute to improved accessibility and higher usage rates.

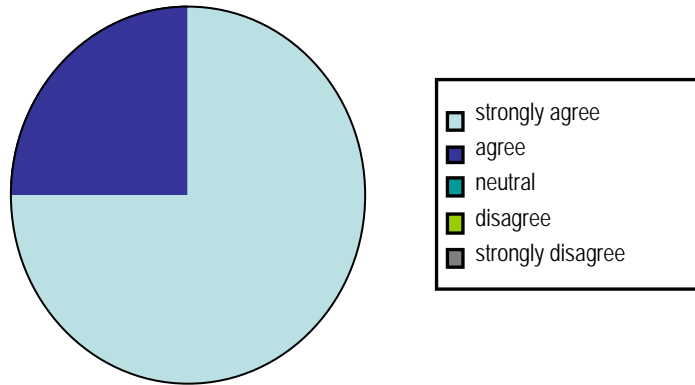
One or two clicks and you're there:

"One button access on library homepage."

"Prominent placement on library web pages, visibility, and minimum number of clicks."

"Keep it as simple as possible, the more steps there are, the more likely it is that mistakes will be made and results flawed."

Research participants strongly agree that online database usage is likely to increase if a user can gain access to these resources quickly and simply. A button that is clearly visible on the library or Council homepage, combined with a minimal number of 'clicks' to access the databases, were steps recommended by focus group participants and echoed in the online survey.



Library users should be able to access online databases in one or two clicks from the library council home page

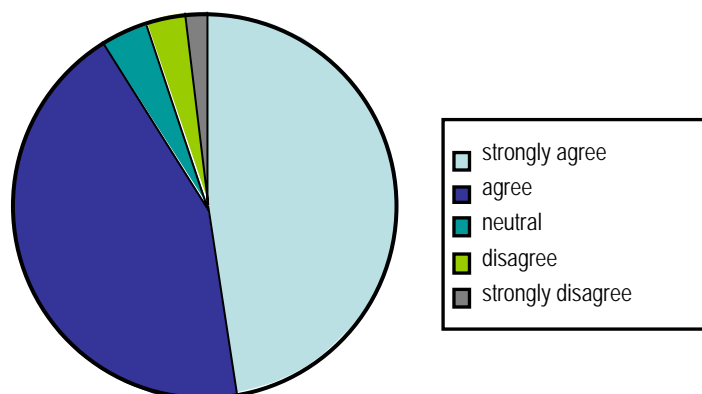
Multiple access points

"What we've learnt from having our own library web site is that we can create several access points for users."

"There needs to be an integrated approach – multiple access points, ability to link with other resources."

According to some respondents, a key advantage of having a standalone public library web site is that it enables multiple access points to online resources to be built into the web design.

Some public library web sites already provide access to the databases via direct links to the databases as well as a link to the NSW.net e-Resources web page from where they access these resources. This allows greater visibility, access to and use of the databases.



Multiple access points are important

The more like Google the better

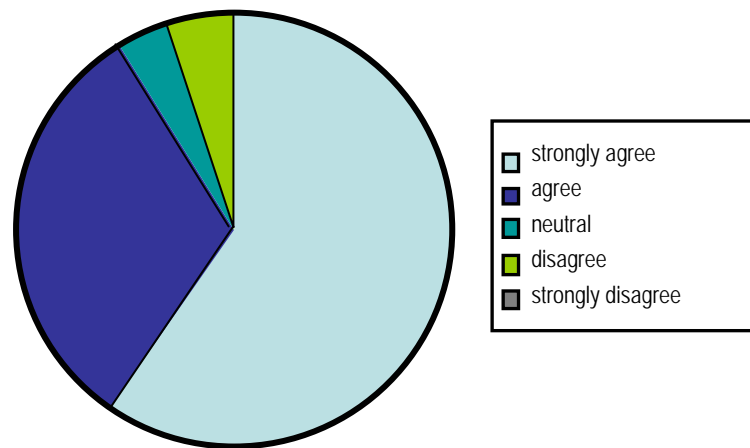
"Google like searching – simple and intuitive."

"Clients use Google first and databases second."

"Make it simple. If it's not as good as Google it won't be used."

The simplicity of Google has become the standard against which all search interfaces are compared.

Engineering a 'Google-like' interface and search facility is not as simple as it sounds. Public library staff are acutely aware of the various factors that need to be aligned for this to happen – the cost of enabling software, the support of database vendors, and the priority placed on accessibility issues by their respective Council stakeholders.



Searching these databases should be as simple as using Google

Seamless searching

"We have to make it easy for people to search our catalogue by providing different web channels/portals for different types of users and different ways of searching, we all have a catalogue so it's easy to use this as a central point, people would just end up there".

"Best practice would be: Subject/title searching then authenticate."

"Library users have got to be able to access from home; federated search on home page AND catalogue (one stop shop)."

"Federated searching is an ideal."

Focus group participants discussed the merits of software that can search across a number of databases and the library's own collection in the one search. This is known as 'federated searching'. Librarians believe that federated searching presents the client with a Google-like interface, making the search process more familiar. While this discussion went beyond the scope of the project, it demonstrated the commitment public library staff have to finding holistic solutions to the accessibility dilemma and a question relating to it was subsequently included in the online survey.

Better graphic interfaces

"We need to use more graphics, especially on the front page. We've got to move away from text, make things a lot more visual."

"Simplified searching, for example, buttons and not wordy descriptions."

Making the experience of accessing online databases as appealing as possible was nominated as another important factor in encouraging people to use them. While aware that database vendors control the look, feel and search-ability of their respective databases, using more images and icons on the library's homepage to flag the existence of online resources, would assist in making them more visible.

Best practice

Dedicated public library web sites, minimal number of clicks, and multiple access points

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The next step usually involves entering a barcode from a library card if accessing remotely, which allows the client to enter the database world and proceed with their search.

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Ongoing updates and content management –

The public library staff who participated in this research were confident that most librarians would have the basic skills to update and manage a web site. Focus group participants in particular were keen to develop these capabilities so that the library could be more responsive to its clients. Web savvy library clients are going elsewhere, they said, to find the information they need when they don't know about or can't easily access online resources via their local library.

Getting the message out

"When people finally get what we have here for free – their jaws drop!"

Putting the technical requirements in place to improve visibility and access to state-wide databases will facilitate positive and fruitful search experiences for library clients. But library clients need to know they exist and what kind of information they contain.

What people said in the online survey

Promotion far and wide – 71.4% strongly agree and 27.0% agree that free database searching should be widely promoted.

Terminology should be consistent – 45.9% strongly agree and 39.8% agree that all libraries in NSW should use the same terminology when promoting online databases.

Marketing messages should be integrated with other promotional events – 38.8% strongly agree and 50.0% agree that promotion should be aligned to other events taking place in the library or local community.

Win themes – 74.5% strongly agree and 23.5% agree that the word 'free' should be part of the marketing message.

Market research – 27.8% strongly agree 62.9% agree and that more information is needed about potential and existing users of state-wide databases

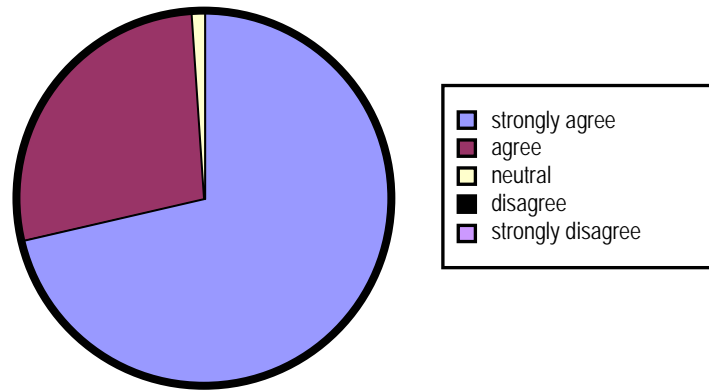
Keeping track of numbers – 51.0% strongly agree and 45.9% agree that public libraries should keep statistics on how many people are using the databases.

Using new communication tools – 20.4% strongly agree 55.1% agree and that public libraries should be using things like YouTube, pod/vod casting, blogs and wikis to communicate with library clients and market online database services.

Promotion far and wide

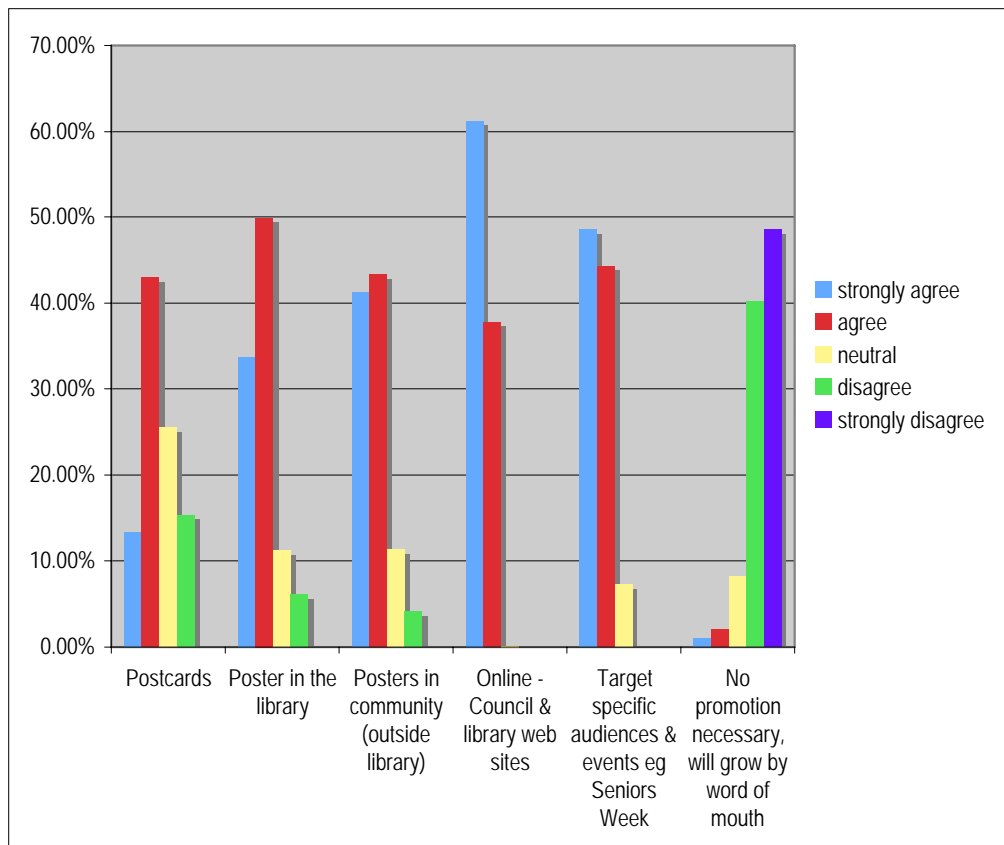
One of the highest 'strongly agree' scores (71.4%) in the online survey was in relation to the question: *Full text free database searching should be widely promoted.*

Participants were then given a range of ways in which the service could be promoted and asked for their responses. While there was some variation in response rates to these suggested promotional methods (particularly 'postcards'), participants were united in the view that leaving promotion to 'word of mouth' was not a valid strategy.



Full text database searching should be widely promoted

Promotion through:



Terminology should be consistent

"Don't use word 'database' – virtual, digital, e-resources, online – recognised by public, got to find multigenerational word."

"We've got to find non-library word."

"No name would be needed if integrated into catalogue."

While the terms 'full text online database' have currency within the library world, research participants believe other terms need to be found when promoting these resources. Some believe even using the word 'library' should be discouraged.

Focus group participants brainstormed alternatives to 'online database'. These alternative descriptions were tested in the online survey. The results can be seen below. It will be hard to find a term that everybody will be happy with, although the term 'e-library' attracted the highest response.

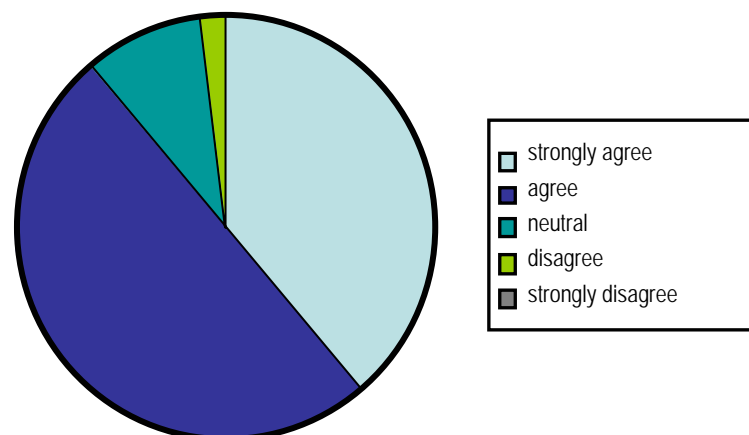
Focus group list	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
e-library	47.9%	31.3%	8.3%	4.2%
mylibrary@home	34.4%	20.0%	16.7%	10.0%
Digital library	29.3%	39.1%	16.3%	5.4%
Cyber-library	10.1%	34.8%	34.8%	19.1%
Cy-brary	3.4%	25.8%	30.3%	39.3%

Marketing messages should be integrated

"We need to link databases to other things happening in library – seniors' week, youth week – targeted messages will make an impact."

"Be concrete, specific e.g. novelist for book groups, incorporate into Internet training for customers."

One way to draw attention to the library's online resources is to piggyback off events that are already happening and for which there is already an audience.



Marketing messages should be integrated with other promotional events

Market research is needed

Marketing approaches based on understanding the needs of clients requires more research:

"Our marketing needs to be looking at it from the customer point of view: what they want, how would they normally approach it: needs based. We've got to come from market research. If they don't know it's there, so how could they find it."

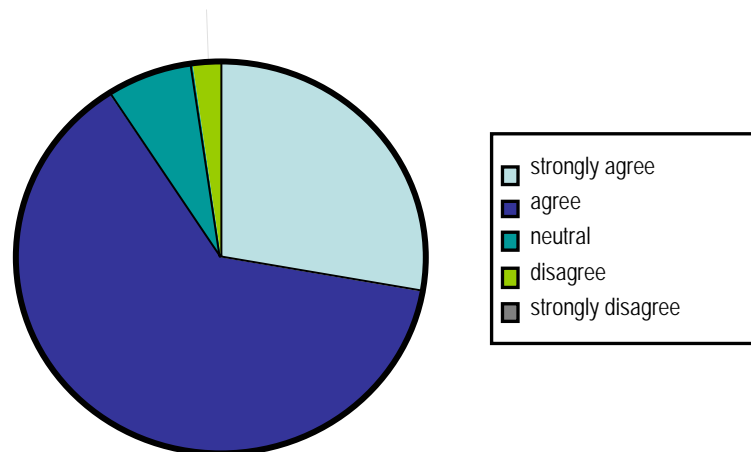
"When found, do they like it? Yes, their jaws drop! Great resource and they've discovered it."

"Who is using the databases? We know their IP address but don't know age, demographics, where they live: rich/poor, city/country?"

A number of focus group and online survey respondents believe that more information is needed about the client base for online databases – who is using state-wide databases, how many people are using them, and whether or not they are finding the information they need. They were aware that public libraries could be making right or wrong assumptions about who will use online databases and how they should be marketed and presented. As one research participant said: *"We need a team whose role is marketing based on user needs and good statistics, not what we think they want."*

Understanding who is using popular library services and leveraging off these to promote online resources, was also mentioned:

"Local history, photograph collections – the concept of target groups and niche marketing is something we need to explore."



We should know more about clients who are potential users of database services – who they are, what their needs are etc.

Tracking numbers

"It would be useful to get access to comparative statistics. Usage patterns, for example."

"Good leverage point for us, we can say this library is the same size but usage is higher, why?"

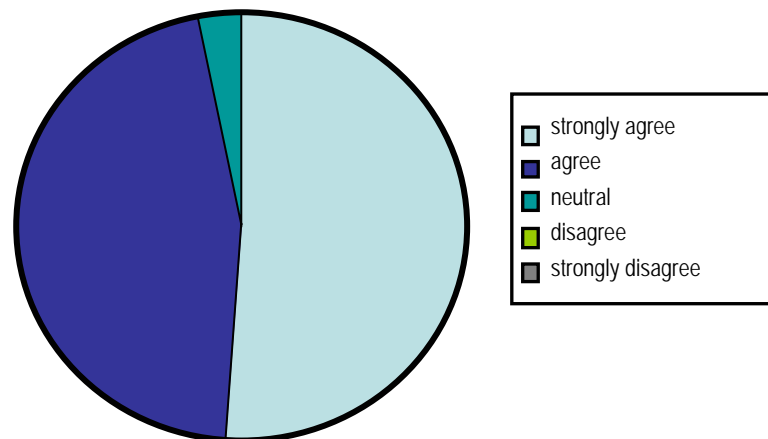
"There's a bit of taboo about sharing information."

"We would need to compare like with like. The actual library could still be unnamed; maybe the information could be based on size?"

"Circulation statistics are kept, why not online usage?"

"We need to know what is used but tracking actual downloads could impose a policing role on libraries – especially given the possible legislation relating to eRegulation by ISP's."

Comparative data showing usage patterns between public libraries and the various initiatives undertaken to increase and improve usage, were also mentioned as desirable. Focus group participants were particularly keen on exploring this issue.

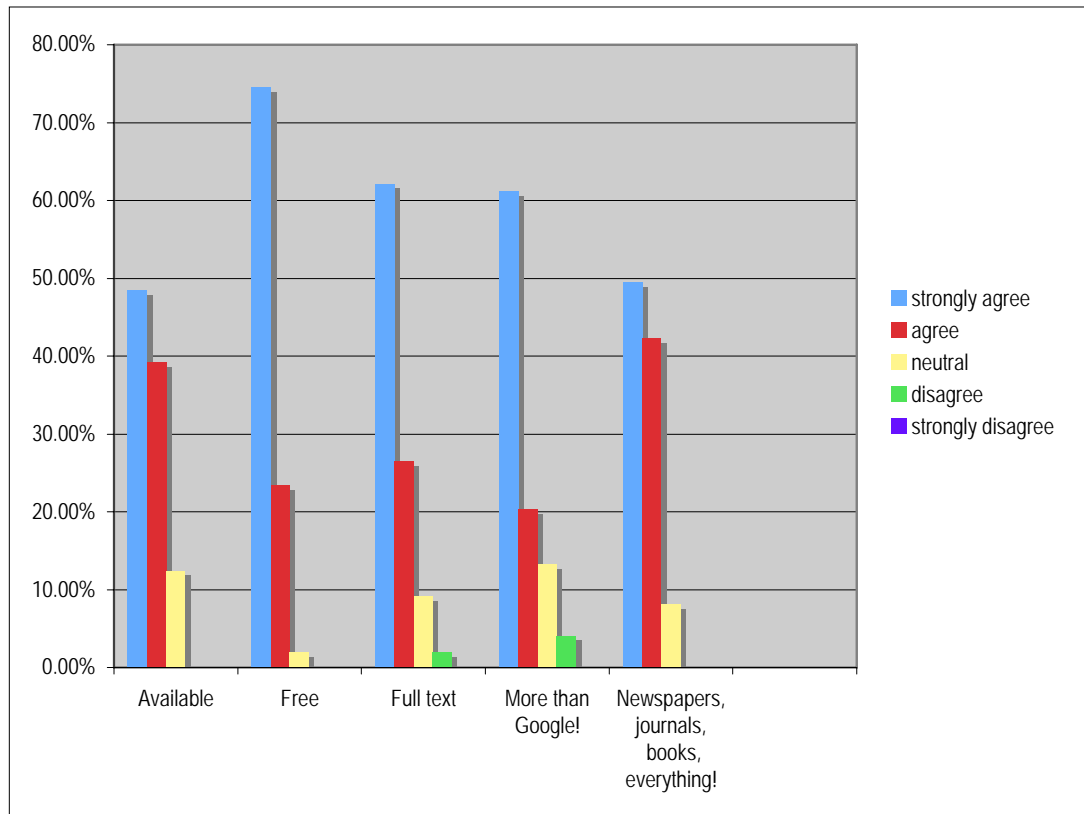


Public libraries should keep statistics on how many people are using online databases

Win themes

Some of the strongest survey responses related to the need for a concerted marketing approach with the inclusion of positive win themes like 'free'.

Marketing messages should include...



Using new communication tools

Many public library staff are enthusiastic about embracing new Web 2.0 technologies and media in order to promote library resources; others are cautious and sceptical about whether these tools would make a difference.

Where public libraries are using these new tools to get the message out they are producing positive results. One library stuck a web camera on a 'stackies' head and broadcast what was in the library stack as part of a theme week called 'The Great Unread' (quoted in one of the focus groups). Others are using pods, vods, blogs and wikis to make local history events more exciting and appealing to younger generations.

Some believe that utilising these new communications and marketing tools can only be fully realised when Council Information Technology staff work more cooperatively with their public library counterparts.

Enthusiastic

"Podcasting, blogs, wikis are great. We've used them with local studies – to share memories, photos, stories on local history, got lots of responses."

"Marketing to people who don't necessarily come into library – the Google/web generation – requires different skills, different collateral. We need to recognise the importance of the social networking environment and use it."

Cautious

"Temper the technology a bit – how many kids going onto 'you tube' will go to their public library? Be realistic."

"Cool technology, but we're not cool, so why go to us?"

"I think librarians get a little over concerned about trying to convince users that we are 'more than Google' We should concentrate on marketing and promoting our services alongside Google through the use of Google like interfaces, and showing how our resources are reliable and add value."

More cooperation needed

"Library staff would love to use communication tools daily but are not able to due to organisational restrictions put in place."

"Pod/vod casting, blogs etc are often blocked in an organisation as IT people see them as possible hacker opportunities & supervisors can see the possibility of abuse of the system instead of using it as a work tool."

Focus group participants took the opportunity of being together to share ideas and examples of how these tools could work in a library environment, even though this was not the ostensible purpose of the session. The enthusiasm with which they discussed this issue would indicate that more opportunities to share best practice should be encouraged.

Best practice

Piggybacking off other initiatives

Using existing opportunities to market the library and its online resources is a good place to start promoting state-wide databases. Seniors' Week, Youth Week, whatever is happening in the local environment – it's important to piggyback off these events and let people know about their online library resources. From school kids to pensioners, research participants told us that most people are pretty amazed when they realise they can get access to these resources for free.

Postcards, brochures, clearly visible signage within the library and prominence on the library or Council web sites, were approaches recommended throughout the research. Research participants perceive the library and its resources as 'good news' story, as 'giving something valuable to our ratepayers'.

Simple language

Some public libraries in NSW are currently advertising the availability of online databases via their web sites using terms such as 'online library' and 'digital library'. The highest scoring term in the online survey was 'e-library'. Participants said they wanted common terminology that could be used across all public libraries. A name that everyone can embrace may need to be canvassed further. People in the focus groups and the online survey were clear about one thing – the term 'database' should be avoided.

Using Web 2.0

These tools are cheap and generally easy to use; where people have used them the response has been positive.

However, a number of participants noted that no matter how enthusiastic public libraries are in embracing these new tools, the broader Council IT environment could act as an inhibitor to experimentation. Others mentioned the time and resources needed to learn and use these tools effectively may not be available within small to medium sized libraries.

Training

"There should be training for those who want it, but others should be able to carry out a successful search without training."

Keeping up-to-date with new online databases requires ongoing training for library staff. How this training is delivered and what new communication tools could be employed to enhance this training, was a discussion topic in focus groups. Improving interfaces and ensuring that library clients can conduct their search using subject and title, will reduce the need for additional training. Some people still think that face-to-face training for clients should be available within public libraries.

What people said in the online survey

Using and promoting database resources needs ongoing training – 48.0% strongly agree and 49.0% agree that public library staff need more training in order to use and promote online resources.

Knowing what's there – 63.3% strongly agree that library staff should know what is available in the databases.

Online training – 29.6% strongly agree and 49.0% agree that training for library staff should be available in the form of self-paced online modules.

Library clients may need training too – 33.7% strongly agree and 55.1% agree that client access to online training in how to use the databases is desirable.

Face-to-face still important – 26.5% strongly agree and 59.2% agree that user training should be made available within the library and that face-to-face training is preferable for some users.

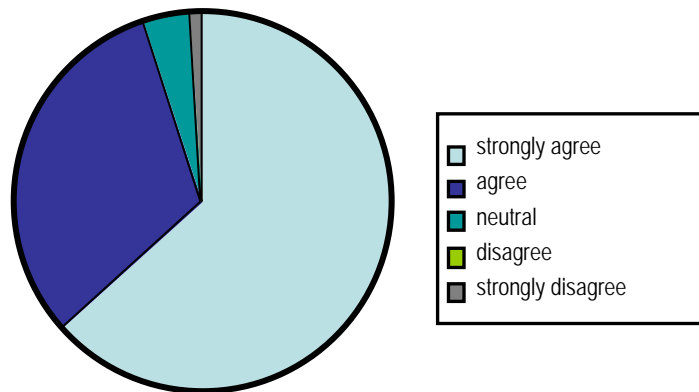
Using and promoting databases needs ongoing training

"Library staff need face to face training – they need to not only learn how to use a database but become enthusiastic and confident, see databases as part of the library collection not just a side arm for reference to use."

"Core information desk staff must have comprehensive training and all staff must have a basic awareness of how to access databases, what services/information sources are available and who to direct users to when they need further assistance. Awareness is key!"

Public library staff value the training provided by the State Library – especially through NSW.net and the Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC).

They recognise that many libraries, particularly regional libraries, do not have the resources available to provide such training to their staff. Up to 94.9 per cent of survey respondents strongly agree/agree that all library staff should know what is available in the online databases; the question is how best to learn about them given the constraints within specific library environments.



All library staff should know what is available in the databases

Online training

"More than one training option should be available for both staff and customers as people prefer to learn in different ways."

"Make separate online guides/tutorials available. For example, an animated version of how to access with screen shots etc, step by step guides for beginners"

"Online tutorials are great but not convenient for everyone; individual face to face training is more effective for library customers and group training sessions for staff are effective."

"While training of library staff is essential, in practice it will not be possible for all library desk staff to have comprehensive database training."

Stretched for time and resources and aware that people have different learning preferences, means that more than one learning pathway is preferred.

Library clients may need training too

"Make separate online guides/tutorials available e.g. an animated version of how to access with screen shots etc, step by step guides for beginners."

"Simple webcam overview to get a user started."

"Databases should be so simple idiots can use them, advanced training should be offered if requested for specific users. A simplified dummies guide would be good."

"We need to be as good as Google i.e. no training required for good search results."

"There should be training for those who want it, but others should be able to carry out a successful search without training."

"It is essential for libraries to provide training and communication for using databases to lift the profile of the library and I see it as the Library's role to provide these resources and information to keep libraries viable and relevant. We need to be needed!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

Many respondents pointed out that if searching online databases was 'as simple as Google', training would not be an issue except in relation to advanced searching. However, other respondents believed that the provision of online and face-to-face training in how to use databases was still a necessity for many library clients.

Making it interactive and fun

"Webcam episodes (accessed online) that make it fun should be made for the different types of databases."

"People should be able to 'dive in' and have positive outcomes, but we should also make it easy for them to access help options. Database providers should provide training as part of their service delivery."

Using new tools to create visual and interactive training experiences, would work well in helping to guide people through the initial steps in how to access and navigate online databases, according to some survey participants.

Face-to-face still important

"It would be great if training wasn't necessary for users or staff to do an effective search but it is not a current reality. Face to face may always be the preferred method for some but we need to cater for different preferences of users & online training would always be available whereas face to face isn't."

Not all public libraries have the skills and resources to produce online modules or use Web 2.0 tools to create exciting new training experiences; and not all library clients want to learn in this way.

Best practice

Simple and visual is good

Using highly visual and step-by-step online training modules will facilitate better search skills for librarians and library clients alike, according to many of the people who participated in this research.

Interactive and fun were words used often. Training materials available at service points for clients to take home and share with friends was also suggested.

Face-to-face training is still important

Public library staff value and enjoy the training they receive from the State Library and other sources. Many library clients prefer face-to-face training in the first instance, as they can ask questions and try things out in a supportive environment. Some of the visual tools mentioned above can also be used in the context of face-to-face training; both mediums can be used simultaneously.

Cultivating a training culture

Research participants noted that the specific culture of a public library is a strong determinant in how training is perceived. Finding the time and having the resources to conduct ongoing training and experiment with new approaches can be difficult particularly in regional libraries. It was therefore important, they said, that library managers budget for training activities and actively encourage them.

Raising awareness and sharing resources

"Share and 'steal' ideas – we need to harvest the best ideas so we can all improve"

The topic of sharing resources covers a broad range of activities – from more formal issues such as consortia arrangements to sharing marketing approaches and online database usage statistics.

There are currently a number of obstacles to sharing resources freely; some survey respondents had lots of ideas about what could be done differently while others were less optimistic about the possibility for change.

What people said in the online survey

Increasing usage rates is important – 52.1% strongly agree and 45.8% agree that increasing database usage rates is very important.

Will best practice guidelines be valuable? – 38.9% strongly agree and 49.5% agree and that they would be.

Joint leadership – 46.9% agree that a joint State Library/Public library committee designed to look for ways to increase the use of online databases would be a good idea; 33.3% strongly agree, while 15.6% are neutral.

Sharing resources – should library users throughout NSW and Australia be able to use any and all the databases they want? In relation to NSW: 33.7% strongly agree and 44.2% agree and that they should. For Australia: 31.2% strongly agree and 38.7% agree. However, this question attracted the strongest disagreement: 6.3% (NSW) and 8.6% (Australia).

Increasing usage rates is important

"This is state govt funding, we need to utilise it."

"Got to get people using them so we can justify the expenditure, more people, more likely to continue."

As one focus group participant said: 'these resources are worth fighting for'. If usage doesn't increase, ongoing funding arrangements for state-wide databases will be hard to defend.

Will best practice guidelines be valuable?

"It would be good to have a consolidated document that we could present to library management, IT, Council – this is the direction from the State Library, which is a large funder, saying we need more freedom to change things ourselves."

"They would be a leverage point, could help with advocacy."

"Our clients would benefit from a consistent look across the State."

"Yes – they would be valuable, may lose funding otherwise, better for users, we all have them set up and why reinvent the wheel, good to have consistent approach, people come from other libraries and consistency would help with ease of access."

"Why reinvent the wheel."

"Could use to take to Council, advocacy"

"Sets standards & expectations – users can hold us accountable"

A combined response rate of 88.4% (strongly agree/agree) of respondents to the online survey believe best practice guidelines will be valuable.

Joint Leadership

"I'd love to see more money spent on consortia agreements, but I like the flexibility of being able to subscribe as an individual organisation."

"It's not so much a question of libraries sharing resources, as a need to have a core set of free databases with the licence negotiated by the Australian government. I think this is the approach in countries like Japan. The government is promising laptop computers to every school student, but they don't provide free reliable resources. It's like giving people a car but no petrol."

"Most vendors set their pricing @ population served. This could make sharing impossible? Larger libraries would be financially supporting small libraries?"

"Differential NSL databases which can be accessed by any NSW citizen after obtaining a reader's ticket show the way – why not integrate that principle with the NSW.net offerings and integrate it for all citizens in the State? The same approach federally would be a fine way of encouraging federal funding for some public library functions."

One of the important leadership roles for State Libraries (and the National Library) is being able to provide resources like the state-wide databases provided by NSW.net. Research participants were keen to speculate about sharing resources more broadly across council and state borders, but few tangible suggestions were given.

Sharing resources

"We could be sharing training notes, for example, or information on new software."

"Opportunity to share resources, not reinvent the wheel, NSW.net can actively facilitate communication."

"Why not joint regional ventures – HSC events etc.?"

"We can share opinions of databases with other librarians and help and support each other more."

"Comparing with others – statistics vis a vis demographics would be really helpful."

As with the 'tracking numbers' results mentioned in the marketing section, participants noted other ways in which best practice could be shared among public libraries.

Best practice

Keeping statistics

Focus group participants pointed out that although circulation statistics are kept and used in public libraries, online usage is not. 96% of survey respondents strongly agreed/agreed that keeping statistics for online usage was important. What to keep and how to keep it (hits vs downloads) were questions left unanswered by research participants.

Sharing results

Comments made in focus groups and in the online survey indicate that public library staff don't know why sharing statistics between libraries is not more widely practised. They believe that knowing why a particular public library has a high response rate for online database usage would help them improve their own services.

Working with vendors

Working with vendors to get more accurate information about usage patterns would assist with the above. A number of research participants recommended that standardised questions be developed to use when evaluating databases. These generic questions should include some basic requirements vendors need to meet, such as access to usage statistics.

Roles and responsibilities

What people said in the online survey

NSW.net

Facilitator and advocate – 28.5% strongly agree and 67.0% agree that NSW.net could play an important role in facilitating information and resource sharing among public libraries in NSW in relation to online database issues. Being a strong advocate with vendors to make sure database design and access reflects the needs of library users is also an important role (56.7% strongly agree and 42.3% agree).

Public Libraries

Feedback and promotion – public libraries should contribute to state-wide discussions about how to increase the use of online databases (39.2% strongly agree and 57.7% agree); give feedback to NSW.net about who is using the databases (32.0% strongly agree and 58.8% agree); and actively promote online databases to their clients (51.5% strongly agree and 49.9% agree).

About the role of NSW.net

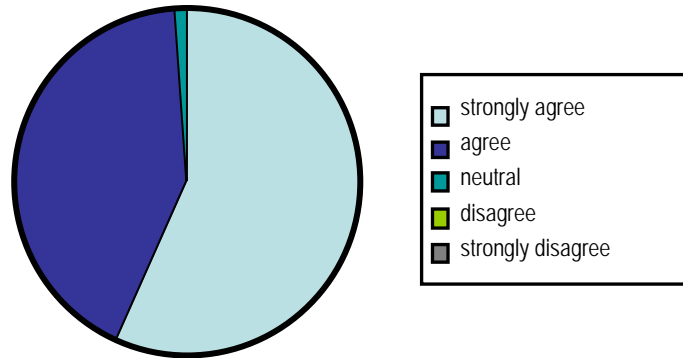
"It's a fantastic resource, and your suggestions for improving accessibility would be invaluable. Right now it's really hard for people to grasp where to go and how to get in, we have to give people cheat sheets. Make it easy for us and them!"

"There is no indication at all on the State Library home page of where to find NSW.net – there should be a link."

"Should continue to select and provide free high-quality content as many libraries cannot afford these resources."

"Please Please Please – be our advocates for better access and usage of online databases by convincing Local Council IT departments. The constant filtering means that we are losing many opportunities to keep abreast of social networking sites to promote our services and meet our clients out there in the virtual world."

"NSW.net should be promoting online resources for public libraries state-wide. eg SMH icon, radio ads, television ads etc because we have no funding to promote nationally."

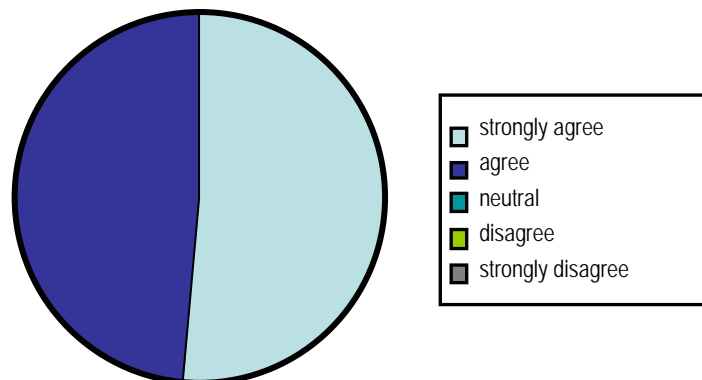


NSW.net needs to be a strong advocate with vendors to make sure database design and access reflects needs of library users

About the role of public libraries

"Many public libraries accept what NSW.net has to offer and then don't use or promote the services. We should be more politically aware, particularly in relation to the funding implications if we don't use the services NSW.net provides. We need a wake up call."

*"We should be accountable in some way for **not** using the databases as the libraries that have low use are wasting valuable funding."*



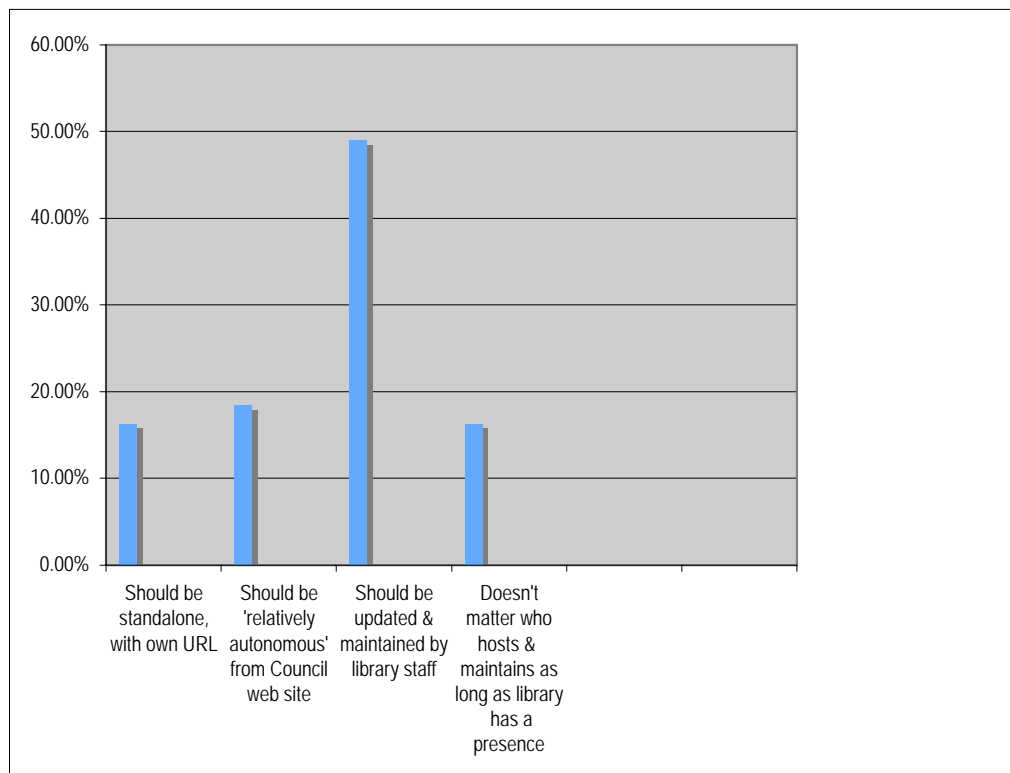
Public libraries should market and promote online databases to their clients

Focus group participants generated a list of role descriptions for each partner. Here is what they said would be 'best practice':

NSW.net	Public libraries
Evaluation of resources	On-training of other staff
Training	Keeping our contacts up-to-date
Funding through the Public Libraries Consultative Committee	Supporting NSW.net – by responding to emails, doing evaluations etc.
Advocating with database vendors re interface design, search protocols and consortia arrangements.	Market and promote online databases to their clients
Continue to select and provide free high-quality content in consultation with public libraries.	

Other Comments

Focus group participants were asked to bring examples of best practice public library web sites along to the session. Looking at good examples of public library web sites in NSW and from overseas, generated debate about what would be needed to achieve this standard. The conclusion was that a certain degree of 'autonomy' from the Council web site would be needed. A question relating to autonomy was included in the online survey. The question was: online access to most public libraries in NSW is through the Council's homepage, tick the statement you agree with.



This question generated one of the highest responses in terms of additional comments, almost 30 per cent. Here is a sample of what was said:

"Libraries that have web pages incorporated into their council websites can become very hard to find and get enveloped in all the other services offered by council."

"Council has a backlog, we need independence to keep things up-to-date, we're paying for these subscriptions; waiting degrades the value of investment."

"There is a strong need for Libraries to be able to add content 'dynamically' and fast to meet client needs – therefore a separate presence or fast access to update facilities is essential."

"Library staff must have some input into the design and maintenance of their sites. Where possible library staff should have the ability to update library websites (or at least part of them ie. 'what's on' in the library, reference links, guides to collections etc)."

"Library staff need to have at least one staff member who is able to/permitted to liaise with Council IT departments (sufficient training and understanding to communicate re technical issues)."

"Public library web sites could be maintained by library staff if they have the ability to do it. It really isn't just an IT thing, but being able to maintain attractive, easy to use sites that 'invite' you in rather than daunt you."

We hope this report is a positive contribution to the ongoing discussion on how to continuously improve the range and quality of services offered by public libraries throughout NSW.

A full copy of survey responses can be found on the NSW.net web site at <http://www.nswnet.net/databases/bestpracticeguide/surveyresponses>

Appendix one: Additional quotations

Visibility and accessibility

"At the moment it's like a hidden treasure, only the determined will find it!"

"If you don't see it, you won't use it."

"Google like searching – simple and intuitive."

"One button access on library homepage."

"Prominent placement on library web pages, visibility, minimum number of clicks."

"Clients use Google first and databases second."

"Make it simple. If it's not as good as Google it won't be used."

"Keep it as simple as possible, the more steps there are, the more likely it is that mistakes will be made and results flawed."

"Best practice would be: Subject/tile searching then authenticate."

"Library users have got to be able to access from home: federated search on home page AND catalogue (one stop shop)."

"We have to make it easy for people to search our catalogue by providing different web channels/portals for different types of users and different ways of searching, we all have a catalogue so it's easy to use this as a central point, people would just end up there".

"Most libraries have the ability to implement one stop authentication (e.g. a via a referring url through their ILMs). This would allow remote users to log on once and search databases without having to log on to each provider as most do now."

"So many things that have to come together to make this doable – will vendors listen? We need ALL of us to demand this to make it possible. The State Library can take a lead on this – make a standard for vendors to work towards, puts small libraries in better position relative to big libraries."

"Federated searching is an ideal." "Federated searching is the holy grail."

Getting the message out

"When people finally get what we have here for free – their jaws drop!"

"Don't use word 'database' – virtual, digital, e-resources, online – recognised by public, got to find multigenerational word."

"We've got to find non-library word."

"No name would be needed if integrated into catalogue."

"It would be useful to get access to comparative statistics. Usage patterns, for example."

"Good leverage point for us, we can say this library is the same size but usage is higher, why?"

"There's a bit of taboo about sharing information."

"We would need to compare like with like. The actual library could still be unnamed; maybe the information could be based on size?"

"Circulation statistics are kept, why not online usage?"

"We need to know what is used but tracking actual downloads could impose a policing role on libraries – especially given the possible legislation relating to e-regulation by ISPs."

"Web 2.0 – are we looking at it and anticipating changes?"

"Temper the technology a bit – how many kids going onto 'you tube' will go to their public library? Be realistic."

"Cool technology, but we're not cool, so why go to us?"

"Podcasting, blogs, wikis are great. We've used them with local studies – to share memories, photos, stories on local history, got lots of responses."

"Marketing to people who don't necessarily come into library – the Google/web generation – requires different skills, different collateral. We need to recognise the importance of the social networking environment and use it."

"Market databases to teachers in state-wide campaign."

"All of these suggestions are possible in an ideal world. Some libraries can do it, some can't. Some libraries, like ours, are still struggling to get a decent website together, let alone wikis and blogs and pods, etc".

"Library staff would love to use communication tools daily but are not able to due to organisational restrictions put in place."

"Pod/vod casting, blogs etc are often blocked in an organisation as IT people see them as possible hacker opportunities & supervisors can see the possibility of abuse of the system instead of using it as a work tool."

"I think librarians get a little over concerned about trying to convince users that we are 'more than Google' We should concentrate on marketing and promoting our services alongside Google through the use of Google like interfaces, and showing how our resources are reliable and add value."

"Web 2.0 tools need to be considered but only used where they are the best choice for communication messages, not just for their own sake. Staff time is an issue in Web 2.0 tool usage and must be considered in implementation of new channels of communication."

"Filtering software is a major obstacle for many public libraries. There is a definite need to educate the IT Departments in Local Government that library staff and library users need in-house and remote seamless access to quality information held in databases. Filtering in this context is causing us to lose potential and existing clients to Google!"

"The 2.0 web knowledge needs to be built into position description and work plans. It needs to become an integral part of library policy and planning. There should be dedicated roles to the development and maintenance of web 2.0 in libraries."

"I am neutral on web 2.0 only because I don't believe in doing things because they are the latest 'fad'. Need concrete examples. At the moment there is no question that they are extremely time consuming but suspect that is at least partially because we are still in an experimental stage."

"Communicating by other than Web 2.0 is important as many library patrons eg seniors do not use YouTube and social networking sites."

"Promotion is necessary now because the databases are a separate entity from the catalogue and people don't know it's there, or if they do know it's there they don't want to have to search each individual database to find what they're looking for. If we could integrate the databases into the catalogue promotion and marketing would become less necessary, still worthwhile, but not such a chore."

"We need a team whose role is marketing based on user needs and good statistics, not what we think they want."

Training

"More than one training option should be available for both staff and customers as people prefer to learn in different ways."

"Make separate online guides/tutorials available e.g. an animated version of how to access with screen shots etc, step by step guides for beginners"

"Training is not as vital for younger people, especially with enhanced user interfaces, but older people would need a lot of help and I can't even see some of them attempting to use online databases. In these cases I still see our role as intermediaries. Our library doesn't have the staff or facilities to provide such training."

"Online tutorials are great but not convenient for everyone; Individual face to face training is more effective for library customers and group training sessions for staff are effective."

"People should be able to 'dive in' and have positive outcomes, but we should also make it easy for them to access help options. Database providers should provide training as part of their service delivery."

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"It would be great if training wasn't necessary for users or staff to do an effective search but that's not the current reality. Face to face may always be the preferred method for some but we need to cater for different preferences of users & online training would always be available whereas face to face isn't."

"Having time available for training is a constant difficulty – it would be a real luxury to be able to train both staff and users as needed."

"Library staff need face to face training – they need to not only learn how to use a database but become enthusiastic and confident, see databases as part of the library collection not just a side arm for reference to use."

"Critical that staff are kept up-to-date and State Library should help assist with training but offsite at regional areas not just in the city."

"An element of compulsion with staff training seems to get results – even the carrot of a prize for finishing self-paced training gets swamped by immediate & other duties."

"There should be training for those who want it, but others should be able to carry out a successful search without training."

"Giving demonstrations and/or training to teacher librarians can be a way of getting to a wider student audience without having to train everyone individually."

"It is essential for libraries to provide training and communication for using databases to lift the profile of the library and I see it as the Library's role to provide these resources and information to keep libraries viable and relevant. We need to be needed!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!"

"Databases should be so simple idiots can use them, advanced training should be offered if requested for specific users. A simplified dummies guide would be good."

"Webcam episodes (accessed online) that make it fun should be made for the different types of databases."

"Library clients vary in the sophistication of their needs and their skill levels. Staff levels dictate how much organized training can be provided for library clients."

"I don't know that our customers want all these complex search options. I believe they want a Google type search, your average user would have no idea what a Boolean or wildcard search was. Simple is better."

"We need to be as good as Google ie. no training required for good search results."

Sharing resources

"Everyone, share your Z39.50 parameters with us!"

"I'd love to see more money spent on consortia agreements, but I like the flexibility of being able to subscribe as an individual organisation."

"It's not so much a question of libraries sharing resources, as a need to have a core set of free databases with the licence negotiated by the Australian government. I think this is the approach in countries like Japan. The government is promising laptop computers to every school student, but they don't provide free reliable resources. It's like giving people a car but no petrol."

"Most vendors set their pricing @ population served. This could make sharing impossible? Larger libraries would be financially supporting small libraries?"

Ideally I would agree but the issue of cost can't be ignored."

"I consider what the National Library has done is cost shifting to local government (promotes free access to Libraries Australia but charges public libraries a high subscription fee.) Until public libraries are adequately funded I don't know if this resource sharing can be achieved but would like to see it happen."

"Differential NSL databases which can be accessed by any NSW citizen after obtaining a reader's ticket show the way – why not integrate that principal with the NSW.net offerings and integrate it for all citizens in the State? The same approach federally would be a fine way of encouraging federal funding for some public library functions."

Roles and responsibilities

About the role of NSW.net

"It's a fantastic resource, and your suggestions for improving accessibility would be invaluable. Right now it's really hard for people to grasp where to go and how to get in, we have to give people cheat sheets. Make it easy for us and them!"

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"NSW.net should be promoting online resources for public libraries state-wide. eg SMH icon, radio ads, television ads etc. because we have no funding to promote nationally."

"NSW.net has a good record in doing these things."

About the role of public libraries

"Many public libraries accept what NSW.net has to offer and then don't use or promote the services. We should be more politically aware, particularly in relation to the funding implications if we don't use the services NSW.net provides. We need a wake up call."

*"We should be accountable in some way for **not** using the databases as the libraries that have low use are wasting valuable funding."*

"NSW.net serves a number of purposes & in my opinion it is time its role was re-examined. If the question is only referring to databases I tend to strongly agree but can't even say that until there is clarification re NSW.net & ERA."