

Books Unbound – A pop-up library for eResources

Background

The Camden LGA sits on Sydney's South West fringe. Its quiet semi-rural reputation is currently being transformed by huge levels of development. As part of the NSW's South West growth zone, the next 25 years will see Camden grow from a population of 68,000 in 2014 to an estimated 261,000ⁱ.

Strategic planning for this growth is outlined in "Camden 2040"ⁱⁱ, which forms part of Camden Council's integrated planning and reporting requirements. One of the five key directions of this plan is developing an "Enriched and connected community". The provision of library services is included as a way of achieving this goal. There is commitment to the building of new physical libraries, with a new library at Oran Park scheduled to open late 2016. And another library at Leppington is planned for some time in the future.

But our new communities are moving fast, with 1533 building approvals in 2012/13ⁱⁱⁱ. And it was the need to fill this gap between residents moving in, and physical libraries being built that sparked the idea for a pop-up eLibrary at Camden.

The use of pop-up libraries as a tool for community building and social inclusion has been explored overseas and in Australia. Case studies in Brooklyn^{iv} show pop-up libraries as a personal response to urban renewal. In Australia, the City of Sydney has a successful lawn library which operates as part of the Festival of Sydney^v. These and many other examples use physical books and magazines, and drop-in activities. However we decided that a model that made use of our eResources would be a better fit for our situation.

By focusing on access to virtual services, we overcome the problem of opening hours and physical location. Statistics told us that a large proportion of our residents travelled out of the area for work. And our customer feedback told us that our opening hours discouraged greater use of the library. We also knew we needed a model that would encourage a long term engagement with the library. Models that are based around providing physical items with no expectation of return, or one off activities, were more likely to attract casual usage. We needed something that gave customers a reason to return to us, virtually or to a physical building.

With this reasoning, we were successful in applying for a Library Development Grant from the NSW State Library in 2013. The grant was worth \$22,791, this amount being supported by more than \$50,000 that the Council had already committed to eResources in current and coming years. It was also linked to the redevelopment of the library website which we were working on at the same time.

Project Outcomes and Benefits

The following is what we set out to achieve with our pop-up eLibrary:

Increased membership. By joining people to the library on the spot we can give immediate access. By taking away the need to visit the library or waiting for a card to arrive by mail. We also make it more likely for people to start using the services while the idea is still fresh in their minds.

Increased usage of eResources. Anecdotal feedback from the community told us that people were not aware of the range of eResources available for free at the library. We wanted to give people the opportunity to see and use these resources. As well as bringing their own devices to get help setting up and to trouble shoot. Increasing usage of our eCollections was important to validate our budget commitment and maximize the resources already spent.

Provide alternative opening hours. With a budget that did not allow for increased opening hours of our physical libraries, we wanted to highlight the parts of the library that are available 24/7. We are a fairly small service, with our two libraries only open late two nights a week on alternate days (so we have one library open each night over 4 nights) and no Sunday trading. But our eResources are available anytime.

Increased appeal and confidence in the library. We are very fortunate to have beautiful modern libraries to work in, lots of popular programs, and a history of innovation. But like all libraries, we know we have large parts of our community that cannot imagine how they would use us. They have a traditional “book warehouse” view of libraries and no recent experience of what a modern public library is like. Our pop-up eLibrary could present appealing and accessible services, and make it easy and friendly to join. Well designed visuals, lots of technology and professional staff, are great PR for the Library.

Reach non-traditional users. Like any form of outreach in a library, a pop-up eLibrary would allow us to meet the community that never comes near a library building. With a flexible kit of materials, we have the widest range of events and places to pop-up at. Locations include large community events, shopping centres, retirement villages, schools and sporting events.

Improve technology skills and confidence in the community. The Library has always played a role in teaching and trouble shooting technology. Our service provides formal classes, individual tutoring by both volunteers and staff, and device trouble shooting in the library. But our pop-up eLibrary can take this learning any place. There is opportunity to learn on your own device, linking into our wifi hub. It would also be possible to run laptop based training for small groups with the equipment included as part of Books Unbound.

Putting the library together.

This phase of the project can be looked at in two parts. The physical items that make up the library and the marketing developed for the service.

Developing the branding and marketing for the pop-up eLibrary.

Our pop-up eLibrary was planned as having a limited lifespan, as a response to the rapid growth of our community. But we also wanted to use it as an opportunity to develop some library branding that could be used for other longer term projects.

As this project ran along side the redevelopment of our library website, we were already working with a design and marketing company^{vi} looking at developing a style and character for our Library service.

We expanded this process for our pop-up eLibrary to go through a full brand development process. This included workshops to develop a clear understanding of the values we wanted to portray. Development of a name “**Books Unbound**” and tag line “**your anywhere, anytime library**”. And graphics that could be easily recognisable as relating to a library, but are surprising enough to make people curious.

We have been very happy with our decision to go with a professional marketing company for help on this part of the project. The process was really helpful for building enthusiasm and focusing on the goals of this project and library outreach in general. Working with non-library people gave us a perspective on how we appear to our community.

The end result is branding and materials that suits this project well, but are also applicable to other outreach activities. Making it worth investing in materials with this branding as a result. It also gives us an identity beyond a “pop-up”, which as an idea is used widely for all sorts of activities and is likely to become dated quite quickly.

The items that make up the pop-up library are:

- Telstra 4G wifi hub.
Chosen because we can have 10 devices connected at a time, with a good high speed link and a battery life of 10 hours.
- 6 x iPad2's and 2 x iPad minis.
Each iPad is set up as an individual device. With its own email address, apple id, library card and logins. We decided to do it this way to make the device work as much like a personal one as possible. Rather than a mirror of a generic library one. The two iPad mini's are linked to two of the iPads, so share a profile. This has worked well, all updates etc. are done while we are out, often as part of showing a customer how it would be done on their own device. All the details for the device – id's, logins, passwords etc. are recorded and attached to each device. And records for each kept on the library wiki. Gift cards were used for the setting up of the apple id's so nothing is linked to a Council purchase card.
- 1 x Samsung galaxy android tablet
Set up the same way as the iPads, but allows us to show (and practice) using an android device.
- a number of different eReaders
Not used and not needed. Technology moves so fast, they were outdated before we really started. We do assist people that come to us with them.
- 4 laptops
These allow us to access a web version of our library system. And also to demonstrate a number of eResources that are not tablet friendly. Some of our online educational products are still PC based. We also find it easier to show people how to navigate around research databases on the laptop, just because of screen size and the text heavy format.
The laptops used with the data projector can also be used to run small group training. We offer self paced online training across a number of technology topics. These can be guided with this equipment.
- Data projector and lightweight small screen

- Hard travel suitcases on wheels x 3. We lined these with shock absorbing foam. Used to carry devices. Not all cases needed for all events – often just the one.
- Pull up banners.
4 large banners that include project branding, and 2 small banners with simple text and branding (join here now and get free stuff + Free Tech help @ your library).
- Marquee
3m x 6m enclosed on three sides. Custom printed with project branding. Highly visible for large events.
- Furniture
Small scale foldable outdoor tables x 5 and light weight stackable stools x 7.

This is the complete kit that makes up “Books Unbound”. However we only take this complete kit out for large events.

Staff training and buy-in

From the start, we made the decision that for Books Unbound to work, all staff needed to be comfortable with and advocates for eResources. As Books Unbound had to operate with existing staff, we needed all staff able to come along to an outing. We also needed any staff member to be able to troubleshoot or answer an enquiry that came into our libraries following a Books Unbound event.

As at any library, we had a wide range of skills and interest in eResources among our staff. We ran demos of eResources at morning meetings but didn’t run formal scheduled training. Instead we provided access to iPads for use on the desk and also to take home. While we have always had iPads on the Reference desk, they are set up as staff tools.

The iPads we made available, were set up like a customer’s personal device, as per those in Books Unbound. Each device was clearly marked with all id’s, logins and passwords, and all apps were loaded. So staff could get started using the eResources straight away without worrying about how to get started or setup. This built confidence, and allowed them to enjoy the format, becoming sold on eResources as just another way of accessing great stuff from the library.

This is the same approach we take with customers when we are showing them eResources.

We also encouraged less confident staff to seek help from the early adopters on staff. As well as helping each other and playing with devices at quiet times on desk. Devices were also taken home and we had many staff buy personal devices after lending a library one.

To follow-up and ensure all staff had developed competency with our eResources, we tested all staff to ensure they could find, loan, download and return an eBook, eAudio and eMagazine. We also asked for demos to show understanding of other eResources. This was done informally and by a number of staff.

One of the training issues that came up with some older staff, and some of our customers, is the need for printed take home instructions. We did initially produce some guides, however we quickly abandoned the practice due to the speed of change in apps and processes. It is a better use of time

to do one-on-one training with someone and help them to develop their confidence as an explorer of the technology.

Practical problems

Battery life and power connections. Most items in the kits are fine for a day out without access to power. However a lack of power does create problems for a couple of items. Laptops only have about 3hrs battery life, even less if using hungry programs. We work around this by only having a single laptop out at a time for most events and swapping them when the battery runs out. We have found no solution for the data projector. However we tend to only use this when inside talking to larger groups, like at retirement villages or land sales offices, so has not been a problem. We did investigate options for a battery pack / generator, but weight and noise is an issue.

Device covers are expensive. I know this is a basic one, but we forgot to factor this into our budget. At around \$50 each, this added up to a sizable amount of money which we had to find from other places. And even with our travel cases being lined with shock foam, we would never take out a device without a hard protective cover.

Web circulation for our LMS is still new. We planned this project to use a newly developed tablet based app for doing live registrations on our LMS. However, between grant writing and receiving the grant, we had a major upgrade of our LMS. Development stopped on the app, and a web circulation module for the LMS became available. This web circulation module is still in early days, and while other libraries report using it, we find it troublesome for new registrations. As a result, we take registration forms back to a physical library, having issued a card to the customer with the warning it will be a couple of hours before the card is ready to use.

We are not selling anything, it really is free. At some of our first outreach visits, particularly to shopping centres, we did meet with some suspicion. We think there were two reasons for this, our presentation is very professional – making us look pretty commercial. There is also some lack of understanding in the community that public libraries generally are a free service. To help counter this problem, we added some pull-up banners with two very clear messages:

“Join here today.... And get free stuff”, and “Free tech help @ your library”.

There was also a certain amount of learning for staff to develop the best way to start a conversation without appearing pushy.

Transport and set up. When taking out the smaller version of Books Unbound everything fits into a mid sized station wagon. At a shopping centre we can get a shopping trolley and have everything set up and going in less than 15 minutes. This is the version we take out for most events, generally with two staff.

However if we need to take out the full kit, complete with marquee, we need a ute, van or trailer to fit all the equipment in. This means that we have to arrange a loan of these vehicles from other sections of Council. Or for some events, we arrange for the marquee to be dropped off by Council's Building team. Putting up our large marquee is possible with two staff, but harder than we would

like. We use more staff wherever possible to make the set up process easier. At large events, we often go and barter help from other stall holders to assist us.

Again this is a basic consideration, but generally this type of item is bought online. Our marquee was described as fitting into a standard car. Which it only does with all the seats folded forward. It's worth double checking information given by sales staff.

Choosing where to pop-up. Our priority is to pop-up in the new suburbs of Camden. Our most common location is the new shopping centre at Oran Park, the largest of Camden's new release areas. The shopping centre includes a glass wall overlooking the building site of the new Oran Park Library due to open in late 2016. This has been an easy way to engage people in conversation about the library. We appear at different times of the day to reach a wider audience.

Our other pop-up sites include retirement villages, community markets, service group meetings and large Council events. We also pop-up at sporting fields during Saturday sport. This has been a particularly good option as parents are waiting around, often with their own device.

Measuring success

New membership. Yes the pop-up library has created new memberships. On average we sign up 6 to 10 new members over a couple of hours at a location. While these are not huge numbers, they are worthwhile when added to the other measures. These memberships have also been mostly in our new release areas, often with people who are new to the Camden area. Anecdotally, most have expressed interest in the new physical library about to be built.

Increased usage statistics for eResources. Our usage of eResources has more than doubled over the last 18 months. However we could not attribute this solely to the Books Unbound service, as there is a general upward trend for usage both inside and outside libraries. The increased staff confidence has also helped with the promotion of these resources across all our services.

Increased profile of the library and development of partnerships with other organisations. The library has received good publicity for Books Unbound in local newspapers. Because of its branding, we are highly visible when on location. Anecdotally, we see a lot of people stop and note the Library's presence, even if they don't actually come over to it.

In finding locations to pop-up at, we have established good relationships with many organisations. And have been asked to return and be part of their events.

Increased staff skills. This project was a good incentive to ensure all of our staff were trained in our eResources. It also provided us with the tools within the Books Unbound kits to carry out this training – extra devices and a higher speed for faster downloads than our normal library wifi.

Branding and promotions tools. Books Unbound has provided us with a range of tools that will extend beyond the pop-up library project. The marquee is a great base for any form of library outreach at large events, for example storytelling and performance. It has provided us with a base which we can add to. It is often hard for libraries to find money for professional marketing, however this experience has made it easier to justify the expense from our budgets.

What did we learn?

Marketing and promotion matter.

This was important even at the planning and grant preparation stage. The way we framed the idea, and linked it to wider goals of Council was part of selling the project to our stakeholders. Our website was a critical link in making Books Unbound work. As we were working on the website redesign at the same time, we could ensure our eResources were well highlighted and the branding and style of the website and Books Unbound were consistent.

Using professional designers and marketers is worth the money. We were very lucky, as the company we used was working on other Council projects. This helped with making sure that what we did would fit with Council's guidelines for the use of logos etc.

We get a lot of positive comment about the presentation of Books Unbound. We have a commitment that our physical libraries are modern attractive spaces, and it was important that this was also reflected in our pop-up library.

You need to be flexible – both with physical set up and approach to customers.

Being able to take out a different range of components to suit where we visit has been really important. Sometimes we don't know where we are going to set up until we get there. For example we had planned to go out with our marquee to a cricket match, but on the morning it looked like it might rain. So instead we took out a smaller kit, and went to a football clinic that had a covered area. And yes it did rain and we didn't have a wet marquee to deal with, and people hung out with us under the cover.

Even the set up at different retirement villages has varied. At one, we were asked to set up in a large common room beside their own library, at another we were put in a display home and residents either chatted with us on the lounge or played with the iPads independently.

Being able to offer follow-up with people that you meet is also important. Either by letting them know when you will next be at that location, encouraging them to come in for further help at one of the libraries, or giving them a business card to contact you personally.

Books Unbound needs a more sociable approach from staff. While all our staff know the technical side of things, we have staff that are better suited to the conversational style that works best in the pop-up library.

Keep everyone on top of the eResources - Users make the best advocates and teachers.

It's not enough to have a couple of eResource experts on staff, everybody needs to be comfortable with them.

It was an effort to get all staff up to speed, but we have really benefited from it. Not only can any staff member go out with Books Unbound, but they become eResource advocates in the library. For example the staff that are eBook users are far more likely to chat about them while talking to customers that come in to our other libraries. It has also improved troubleshooting for customers that ring in with questions for eResources.

ⁱ <http://forecast.id.com.au/camden/population-summary>

ⁱⁱ http://www.camden2040.com.au/assets/pdf/11_FINAL_Camden_2040_Adopted_14_May_2013.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://profile.id.com.au/camden/building-approvals> accessed 25 March 2015

^{iv} <http://m.huffpost.com/us/entry/1470544> posted 2 May 2012

^v <http://www.sydneyfestival.org.au/2015/lawn-library>

^{vi} Solutions Outsourced. www.solutionsoutsourced.com.au