

NEWS

New Zealand's libraries band together

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Collaboration is the name of the game, according to New Zealand's public libraries, which have joined with the National Library for what they say will be strategic advantage.

"It's really an act of linking local government libraries with a central government department for furthering common interests" says spokesperson for the initiative, Jane Hill, who is also manager of Wellington City Libraries.

Jane Hill and a group of library managers from around the country representative of local authorities large, small and medium, including libraries from Hurunui District, Waitakere City, Tauranga City, Masterton District, Wellington and Kapiti Coast District, met representatives from the National Library in Wellington on Tuesday 15 February to strategise how they will take our country's public library services into the future.

The Wellington meeting was the first since the National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa in September 2004 signed up to a Memorandum of Understanding with Public Libraries of New Zealand, represented by Metronet (a network of the 18 metropolitan public libraries), and by the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA).

"The idea behind this relationship is to have a strategic approach to providing library and information services for the public," Jane Hill says.

National Librarian, Penny Carnaby, says the National Library's agreement to partner with Public Libraries of New Zealand will formalise and strengthen the already good relationships the National Library enjoys with the 74 local authority public library systems throughout the country.

She says New Zealand participated in the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and that the national/public library partnership will leverage the principles of the World Summit, while also giving local government and communities a voice in the government's Digital Strategy.

"New Zealand has got some magnificent public libraries that are strong community hubs of information. Because collaboration is the name of the game, we'll be working together and building on some of the fantastic digitally delivered projects New Zealand libraries have recently introduced. "

Recent collaborative projects include:

- One-stop public access to the digital collections of Auckland City Libraries, Christchurch City Libraries, Alexander Turnbull Library, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, and Otago Museum through Matapihi: <http://www.matapihi.org.nz> .
- EPIC, an initiative facilitated by the National Library which provided the public with hugely increased access to thousands of New Zealand and international full-text journals, magazines, billions of biographies, photos and graphics, all through their local library.
- www.Anyquestions.co.nz a new service to be launched on 23 February that gives school students online access to a librarian able to help them find answers to their homework.

- For more background see next page. For more information contact: Christine Field
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Questions and answers

Who goes to libraries now anyway?

New Zealanders made more than 30 million visits to public libraries in the year ended June 2004; electronic business increased dramatically in many libraries – as much as 80 percent in two years; nearly 50 million items were borrowed from public libraries last year – that is 12.5 items for every man, woman and child.

What do people want from their library?

Access to the world's knowledge through books, CDs, DVDs, electronic resources and the internet. Computer access, help with finding information, lifelong learning opportunities, programmes for all ages, particularly kids, a welcoming community place, and a café.

Why is it important for libraries to collaborate?

People's increasing need for information literacy, digital literacy and the necessity to address the 'digital divide', or the gap between the e-haves and the e-have-nots, can be facilitated by collaborative partnerships between the National Library, local authority libraries, and other government departments working for information democracy in New Zealand.

Public demand for electronic content within libraries is growing. Collaboration among our libraries will introduce efficiencies, reduce duplicated effort, and realise the vision of making information more easily available - for example, to a farmer in the South Island, a student in the far north, a researcher in one of our large metropolitan areas.

Why is the Digital Strategy relevant?

The Digital Strategy, drawing on principles from the World Summit on the Information Society held last year, is an over-arching national vision for New Zealand to be "*a world leader at using information and technology to realise economic, social and cultural goals*". The National Library played a major role in drafting the strategy and was instrumental in ensuring that the strategy recognises three key principles – *content, confidence and connection*.

What's the National Library's role?

The National Library's role is to help New Zealanders participate and prosper in a society shaped by access to information and knowledge while also being aware of our unique dynamic cultural heritage.