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New customers through new partnerships – experience in Scotland and elsewhere

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Abstract

The National Library of Scotland (NLS) has engaged in ambitious and proactive work in recent years to ensure its future place and significance in this rapidly changing world.

A new mission and vision for NLS was developed, supporting a new strategy, entitled "Breaking Through the Walls, which is now being implemented. The Library has enjoyed success in achieving its aims and goals so far, especially regarding the key policy areas of collections and access, which were highlighted as the two areas of strategic importance.

As a part of this strategy NLS has worked to define its customers and their requirements particularly through a programme of market research. This has allowed NLS to develop the services customers demand from a modern National Library, and provide innovative ways to meet the requirements placed upon us. With projects such as the Digital NLS being initiated and developed, the Library is creating different access routes for people who might not have used our resources otherwise.

To further widen access NLS has nurtured partnerships with various organisations helping a wider range of potential customers to use the Library than would have been possible through traditional means. These partnerships are providing new ways for new customers to use the Library, making access easier and customers' interactions with NLS more fulfilling. This all combines to help us engage with not only our traditional users, but also with underrepresented groups and minorities who might not otherwise interact with NLS and help them to learn from, and gain access to and enjoy the wealth of information in our collection.

Examples of other national Libraries who have successfully broadened their access to their collections and engaged in partnerships are also given and discussed.

Speaker's Biography

Martyn Wade was appointed National Librarian of the National Library of Scotland in September 2002, after 25 years experience in the public library sector. During this time he worked in a number of rural and urban authorities throughout the United Kingdom, and has a strong interest in and commitment developing customer and community focused services.

At the National Library of Scotland, Martyn is leading the development and implementation of a new strategy for the Library. This is placing lifelong learning, research and universal access to information at the heart of its development as an open and accessible library, aiming to meet the needs of all the people of Scotland

Introduction

Like many national libraries, the National Library of Scotland (NLS) has, in recent years, been examining its purpose, functions and priorities, particularly focusing on issues that are changing the expectations of our customers and funders. These are not unique to NLS, and so in this paper I would like to consider two issues that we have focused on, and which affect all national libraries, illustrating them with some examples from my own library in Scotland, as well as examples from other national libraries drawn from the Anglophone world.

The first issue is how we define our customers – how we identify who we exist to serve. The second is the importance of partnerships, and in particular how we use these to ensure we effectively meet our customers' demands and needs.

Scotland

It might perhaps be useful to start by providing a little context and background to NLS.

Scotland forms one of the four countries that make up the United Kingdom. In 1999 devolution was introduced into the United Kingdom, and Scotland's Parliament was re-established as a primary legislature with responsibility for around 80% of issues, with only such matters as foreign affairs, defence and social security retained in London. At the same time, powers were devolved to a new Assembly Government in Wales, and devolution legislation has also been enacted for Northern Ireland.

The United Kingdom may not be unique, but certainly is unusual in having three national libraries. It is worth clarifying that the British Library is the national library for the United Kingdom, and its functions and responsibilities remain unchanged by devolution legislation. The National Libraries of Scotland and Wales exist as national libraries within their own devolved countries, and work closely with the British Library.

National Library of Scotland

The National Library of Scotland has a long and proud history, with its roots going back to 1689. The Library was established as the Library of the Faculty of Advocates – the library of the lawyers of Scotland. This gained the right of legal deposit in 1710 and over the decades became in all but name a national library of Scotland. In 1925 the Faculty of Advocates donated their library (apart from the legal books and manuscripts) to the nation and the National Library of Scotland was formed.

For almost 80 years NLS has continued to develop in a broadly traditional manner in line with many major research libraries. However, in 2002 the Trustees identified the need for a new strategy for the Library, and over the

next twelve months a number of key questions were considered as part of a process that re-defined the role the Library. This was important, as the legislation that established the Library actually does not say why it should exist – only that there should be a National Library of Scotland. In fact most of the legislation goes on to consider how the first Librarian should be paid.

The issues that were addressed during the development of the new strategy included:

- What is the National Library of Scotland for?
- What are we collecting, preserving and making available?
- Who are we doing this for?
- How can customers and potential customers most benefit from this activity?
- How can we do this better?
- How can we improve as an organisation?

We undertook a considerable amount of work, and started by agreeing a new Vision and Mission for the Library:

The Vision and Mission is:

“The National Library of Scotland will enrich lives and communities, encouraging and promoting lifelong learning, research and scholarship, and universal access to information by comprehensively collecting and making available the recorded knowledge of Scotland, and promoting access to the ideas and cultures of the world”.

This is a bit wordy, but does try and encapsulate what the Library is about in a single sentence.

The Library also agreed its values as an organisation:

- Service
- Excellence
- Learning
- Commitment

The Mission and Vision formed the basis for a new strategy entitled Breaking Through the Walls which you can find on our website at <http://www.nls.uk/professional/policy/strategy.html>

Breaking Through the Walls

To answer the questions outlined above the strategy covers six main strategic policies:

- Collections
- Access
- Consultation and relationships with our users and stakeholders

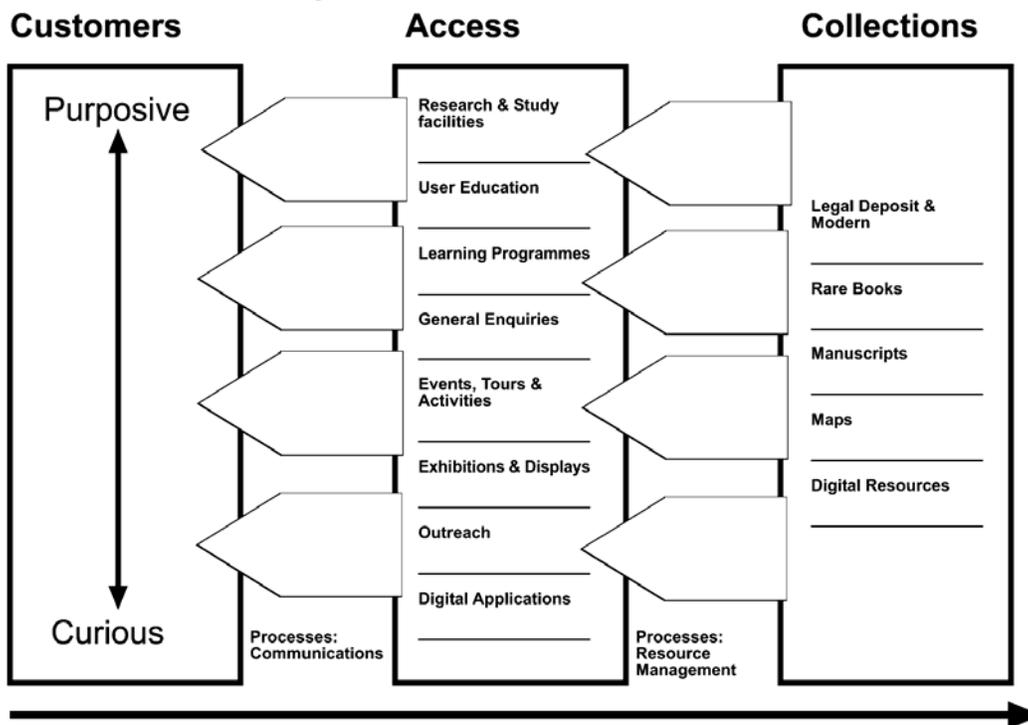
- Partnerships and collaboration
- Organisational development
- Infrastructure

The first two – collections and access – are the two key policies in the strategy, with the others acting as supporting strategies that enable the Library to achieve them.

A New Model

Implementing the new strategy has required the development of a new model for the Library, focusing on the service journey for customers:

The Service Journey



As can be seen, this identifies that customers range from the curious (or even those who do not know that the National Library of Scotland exists) to the very purposive. It is the purposive customers that in the past we have served very well. However, our strategy means that we must focus as our efforts on a much wider range of potential customers.

The Library has responded by starting to develop continuum of access offering a range of services for customers with different levels of experience in using research libraries, and different degrees of purposiveness. These have different levels of interpretation, mediation, and support from library curators and other staff to help customers gain access to use the collections in a way that is most useful to them.

Developing the Library

The new strategy and model have had a fundamental impact on the whole of the Library, providing a much clearer and stronger customer focus. In response we have reviewed our organisational structure, and the range of staff skills and expertise we require to develop this continuum of access. Organisationally we have simplified the structure into Collections Development, Customer Services, Corporate Services, Strategy and Communications, and Development which is responsible for fundraising.

As part of this, we have placed functions where they would have the most impact – for example cataloguing has moved from collections to customer services, emphasising that the principal function of the catalogue is to enable customers to find what they want. We have a new Digital Library Division, to provide a stronger focus for content in the developing Digital National Library of Scotland.

We have also brought new skills into the Library, such as education and exhibition staff to help customers explore and understand our collections, digital library staff, and marketing and communications staff to help broaden awareness and understanding of the library's role and services.

I would like to look in a little more detail at the strategic policy areas that are most relevant to this paper – Access and Partnerships and Collaboration.

Access

Our access policy contributes to the re-definition of our customers:

“We will work to ensure that everyone who can benefit from the Library's unique collections, services and expertise can do so, by identifying and removing actual and perceived barriers to use.”

Formerly, the Library limited access to those who met its definition of research. We have now adopted an entitlement model. The Library remains a research library, but the definition of research now lies with the customer rather than the Library and everyone is entitled to use our collections and services. And it is our responsibility for removing barriers that may prevent anyone from using it.

The Library's access strategy has identified three ways in which the customers can use NLS services:

- Visitors to NLS in Edinburgh
- Remote customs who independently use NLS through the website and other digital resources, or direct contact with the Library

- Remote customers who will need mediation and support to use NLS through the website and other digital resources, or direct contact with the Library

Services for the first group have always been the strongest, and these are continuing to develop using the entitlement model outlined above. However, the Library itself has limited scope for expanding its capacity which will always constrain its use. Perhaps even more importantly, many potential customers are simply unable to visit the Library in person – whether through distance (even in a small country like Scotland it is impossible for substantial numbers of the population to use the Library without an overnight stay in Edinburgh), disability, working hours, other commitments or other reasons.

As a consequence, the Library is developing its website into a Digital National Library of Scotland. This will develop to offer remote customers a level of service that as closely as possible reflect that offered to visitors to NLS, and provide the principal route of access for those unable to visit the Library.

Partnerships and Collaboration

As an enabling policy, this is intended to help achieve the two key policies, including access:

“We will work closely with all types of libraries, and other learning, cultural and heritage organisations, to support key political and social priorities, including research, enterprise and economic development and access to education, lifelong learning and cultural activities”. This policy confirms that working through partnership and collaboration will be one of key ways of working.

As far as we know, every customer of the National Library of Scotland also uses other libraries – and I would suggest that this applies to every other national library. We are working now to embed the National Library of Scotland at the heart of that network of libraries within Scotland, in particular working with other libraries to provide new routes and services for new customers to use their national library.

New Customers and New Partnership

So, how is the NLS developing new partnerships to enable new customers to be able to use the Library?

I want to consider some examples of our work Scotland – projects with public libraries, projects focusing on social inclusion, work with a market research company to better understand our customers, and a partnership with an

organisation providing learning courses for schools in Scotland. I will also look at three examples from outside Scotland.

Public Libraries

The National Library of Scotland is developing pilot partnerships with public library services in Scotland, with the intention of developing direct access to as many national library services as possible. As the pilots progress, it is intended to develop a programme that will deliver NLS services through every public library in the country, ensuring that every library member in Scotland can use their entitlement to use NLS.

The initial partnerships have been established with Moray and Aberdeen City councils – both in the north east of Scotland. Currently these pilots are focusing on:

- NLS branded terminals providing access to the developing Digital National Library of Scotland with mediation and support provided by on site trained public library staff
- Identifying how NLS digital content can be “added” to the public library’s collections
- Creation of local digital portals using content from both libraries
- Online registration to NLS and remote ordering of books to assist those visiting NLS for the first time
- Providing access to NLS expertise to support local service developments

Equally important, staff visits and training ensure that staff at the national and public libraries better understand each others services and provide mediation and support for their customers wishing to use the increasingly integrated services and collections.

These closer links are also providing the National Library of Scotland with additional customer feedback, and allowing the public libraries to influence the strategic planning of NLS on behalf of their customers.

To explore other ways of help potential customers use their NLS is also working with another public library, Dundee City Council. Current work includes examining how their customers can use their public library tickets as a National Library of Scotland ticket to use NLS services.

Social Inclusion

Implementing an entitlement approach to access to NLS collections and services requires a commitment to developing services which help address social inclusion. This is one of the most important social issues facing Scotland today, and it is important that NLS plays its role in this area.

The first is a project entitled The Book of Me, which has been undertaken jointly with the Outreach Long and Wide project and Women’s Aid. The

project aimed to support abused and battered women and children who had left home to stay in women's refuges. The partners developed a programme of creative writing and arts projects to help the women write about their experiences as part of confidence building and increasing self-esteem. NLS used some of their unique contemporary collections – in this case artists books by Jean Johnstone to enhance the project. The group then used their new skills to create their own book called *Our Time Together*, and presented their completed work to NLS as part of the national collections.

This added greatly to the confidence building element of the project, as not only had the women been involved in writing the book, but in making it, and could now see that their work was important enough to form part of Scotland's national collections, and see their name on the web based catalogue as one of the authors.

A project with a local history group called Trondra History Group had a similar outcome. The group is based on Easterhouse – one of the most deprived areas of Glasgow. Here the Library supported the development of a community-based history of Easterhouse, which was again presented to the Library.

These projects are beginning to demonstrate how the national collections held by NLS can add a unique element to partnerships and projects aimed at addressing social inclusion, and will be explored further in coming years to help identify how even those who believe that NLS has nothing for them can benefit from the Library working in partnership with organisations with which these people do engage.

Learning and Teaching Scotland

Learning and Teaching Scotland (LTS) is a government-funded body providing online learning content for schools. NLS has recently been working with LTS to make its content available for schools in a practical and useful way, through targeted packages designed to support the curriculum. The Library does not have staff with specific e-learning skills necessary to create such learning packages, and it is questionable whether it should when they are available from other organisations such as LTS.

Instead, NLS staff use their curatorial skills and deep knowledge of the collections, and work closely with LTS staff to identify and provide digital content in ways that supported learning in the classroom. This has provided a new audience of around 300,000 children who could use the Library's unique resources in a way that is targeted, interesting and meaningful to them.

Examples of the learning developed in this way can be seen at:
<http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/scottishhistory/nls/index.asp>

Market Research

Although not a formal partnership in the same way, NLS has developed an effective arrangement with market researchers to develop consistent benchmarking and other information to support the planning and development of the Library. NLS has contracted with a local company for the core of this work, although other companies are also used to provide a national dimension to the information collected.

This has been used to develop a much more strongly customer focused and evidence based approach to service planning – for example the digitisation programme is now based largely on a national consumer survey through which both customers and non-users can express their views.

British Library and the Lindisfarne Gospels

Moving beyond Scotland, the British Library (BL) has been working in conjunction with other bodies to widen regional access within the United Kingdom to items of cultural, religious or social importance in line with its policy:

“The British Library supports the national library and information network and meets the needs of end users by working with libraries and other organisations in the regions and home countries of the UK and by delivering content, resources and services in a regionally relevant way. ”

One example of this is a partnership with the North East Museums Libraries and Archives Council (NEMLAC) to widen access to the Lindisfarne Gospel. The Lindisfarne Gospel was made and used at Lindisfarne Priory on Holy Island in Northumberland in the 8th century AD, and is one of the world’s most remarkable religious works still surviving.

The Lindisfarne Gospels have been fully digitised, allowing people to access it online as well as at the Lindisfarne Heritage Centre, where people can thumb through a digital copy turning the pages of the book and being able to zoom in on details that might have previously been difficult to observe. In addition, the BL and NEMLAC worked together to organise a tour of a very high quality facsimile of the Lindisfarne Gospels at venues throughout the north east of England between November 2004 and October 2005. The outcome of this collaboration was very positive, helping to generate both local and national interest in an item of incalculable significance to Britain and the wider world, both for its artistry and its religious content.

New Zealand - A Cultural Partnership

On the other side of the world, the National Library of New Zealand (NLNZ) has developed a partnership with the indigenous Maori peoples of New Zealand, and their various community groups.

In common with other national libraries, NLNZ has been developing its collections to reflect the demands of the modern technological era. However, it is also working to also meet its responsibilities to past acquisitions and donations of cultural significance, such as taonga, which have a living spirit (mauri) that is imbued into it upon its creation, forever linking it to the family group that created it and its decedents. NLNZ has worked, where possible, with the family groups associated with the taonga in its collections to ensure that due care and attention is taken to treat these important cultural items in the manner they deserve. The concept of the “guardianship” of taonga is a development of the existing legislation and intellectual property systems already in place and runs in parallel to them. The guardians have a responsibility to look after the physical object by protecting and preserving it, as well as the requirement that they maintain its integrity and significance to past, present and future generations.

To further the appropriate use and care of items of cultural significance, staff at NLNZ who are responsible for them and make decisions that would impact upon their conservation and intellectual property rights, have access to kaumatua and/or Maori staff who can promote effective relationships with iwi and hapu, ensuring the proper use of an item, whilst still allowing access to it by a wider community.

Such measures help to include, and give access to, an important part of the New Zealand population to national collections, often through front line organisations like the public library network, helping to develop good will and respect between communities and institutions. They also help the development of other projects that rely upon major contributions from communities, such as the recording of oral histories, the interpretation of important items and educational opportunities for the community.

Working with community groups that represent the native peoples of New Zealand has helped to give communities and individuals increased access to objects of cultural importance to them, whilst also helping NLNZ to gain access to a wealth of cultural information and history held by the Maoris to further enrich and develop their collections.

Australia

In Australia, the national library is also working with public libraries, in this case to increase access to its collections and the library itself, particularly using the internet.

The National Library of Australia (NLA) had previously concentrated on collaborations that gave access to specific resources, such as PictureAustralia. Working closely with Australian Public Libraries, NLA has been able to gain a better understanding of what information resources are being accessed via the Internet. This information has then been fed into policy and decision-making, allowing the NLA and APL to decide how best to meet the challenges of providing convenient access and good service in a fashion that is user friendly and appropriate to its patrons.

Technological developments now provide the opportunity to provide a more holistic approach, and NLA and APL are testing a “Googlised” search that can access over 1.5 million digital images and 35 million printed items through the “InformationAustralia” portal which utilises a number of online sources to find the available resources for the customer.

Both the NLA and APL have found their partnership to be very positive with tangible benefits to the institutions and their patrons. Since its inception over 480 items from the NLA’s collections have been made available through loans to other libraries, and this number continues to grow. Customers appreciate that this development allows them to conduct research and pursue other interests more freely and with better access to higher quality and more diverse information resources than was possible before. This partnership has successfully increased and broadened access to both the NLA and APL’s collections, raising both of their profiles at a regional and national level.

Conclusion

Working on the reasonable assumption that not all potential customers – however they are defined – do, or even can, actually use our libraries, it is clear that not only NLS but also many other national libraries are developing new partnerships with other libraries and cultural organisations to enable new audiences to use their services.

There are many and wide ranging opportunities for this approach, and it is one that is likely to continue to develop in importance in coming years.

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