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**Using the L.E.A³.D. Technique to Turn
Your Competition into an Emergent
Strategic Tool**

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Abstract:

Libraries are facing increased competition for providing information services to their customers. The development of the L.E.A³.D. technique will allow libraries to respond to competitive pressures proactively. The effective implementation of the L.E.A³.D. technique will allow library administrators to:

- *Identify forms of competition.*
- *Develop strategic responses to improve your organization through competition.*
- *Increase stakeholder understanding of the primary strategic principles of libraries (Access, Accountability, and Alignment).*
- *Increase internal and external communication of competitive responses and actions.*

- *Demonstrate your organizational success by increasing stakeholder (internal and external) involvement and appreciation of your strategic and tactical efforts.*

Key Words or concepts:

Competitive responses, environmental scanning, access, accountability, alignment, and strategic marketing and communication

The world of library and information service provision is getting more crowded and more competitive in nature. Consumers of library and information services have historically had limited choices of the types of providers of library and information services due to limited geographical access and a small group of providers. Over the past 20-30 years, technology has closed and nearly eliminated the geographical access gap. The changing global economy (i.e. flat world economics) has allowed for and created more library and information service providers; many whom have not been traditional powers in this market sector or have entered the market under a for-profit business model.

The result has been the creation of today's highly competitive market place where consumers of library and information services have a multitude of choices in providers of library and information services. The environment that many libraries are now operating within is driven by competition; there is an essential need to innovate the products and services delivered to a consumer and the consumer's access to these products and services to enable the creation of a valued service or product that makes a positive impact on the consumer's information needs. Otherwise, the consumer has the option to locate and utilize another library and information service provider. This situation has lead to the following realities:

- ✓ Libraries (You) are not the **ONLY** provider of library and information services in your area.
- ✓ Libraries (You) may not even be the **BEST** provider of library and information services in your area.
- ✓ Libraries (You) may not even be the **FIRST** provider that your customers think of when obtaining library and information services.
- ✓ Someone would take **YOUR** customers from you in a minute if **YOU** let them!

The competitive environment libraries operate within contain many types of competitors; these competitors can be grouped into the visible, the invisible, and emerging.

The visible competitors¹ compete for the consumers and their resources of library and information service organizations and fall into three categories:

1. For-profit online and traditional book stores; 
2. For-profit service providers. 
3. Online/electronic information providers. 



The invisible competitors compete for the consumer's time and commitment to using library and information services and fall into four categories:

1. Social activities/options. These include family, recreational, and entertainment activities, resources, and services.
2. Educational/professional responsibilities and options. These include school and work requirements on time and commitments, continuous/life long learning, and reduced time for other aspects of life.
3. Cultural activities/options. These include religious, community, and ethnic activities and resources.
4. Technology access. This includes the affordability and variety of access to digital and electronic information, entertainment, and educational pursuits.

¹ All logos and service marks are owned by their respective companies.

How can libraries compete in this highly competitive world?

What strategic responses are available to library and information service providers?

Library and information service organizational leaders have been looking for answers to these questions for some time. To date, the majority of strategic responses by administrators seem to have fallen into three traditional strategic response categories that have yielded little success:

- ✓ **Ignore it** - This response uses a false assumption that competition for library and information service is not a serious threat to frame strategic responses. Frequent representative comments from administrators in this group include, "Just do what you do and let the rest take of itself;" "I have too much to worry about already;" and "What can I do about this?"
- ✓ **Give up / Retire** - This response is usually framed by administrators who do not wish to engage additional effort or activities due to their eminent departure (retirement, resignation, etc.), their lack of knowledge in how to respond to the situation, or to their lack of ability to accept responsibility for addressing the situation. Frequent representative comments from administrators in this group include, "I can't win, so why bother;" or "I only have x amount of time before I plan to leave and I am not adding to my responsibilities."
- ✓ **Unaligned response** - This response is the usual response pattern for administrators who do not have the necessary or validated strategic information, data, etc. (by choice or lack of knowledge) to make effective decisions and lack a proactive management style / service commitment. These responses are usually reactive actions conceived to address the perceived competitive forces in the operational environment; usually implemented without long term consequence consideration or commitment understanding; and result in less than effective responses and usage of strategic resources. Frequent representative comments from administrators in this group include, "I don't know what else to;" and "we should do something about that one of these days ..."

I believe that it is time for new competitive strategic responses and I would like to propose a fourth:

L.E.A.³D. your customers away from the competition using proactive organizational learning, information gathering, and competitive response and marketing strategies.

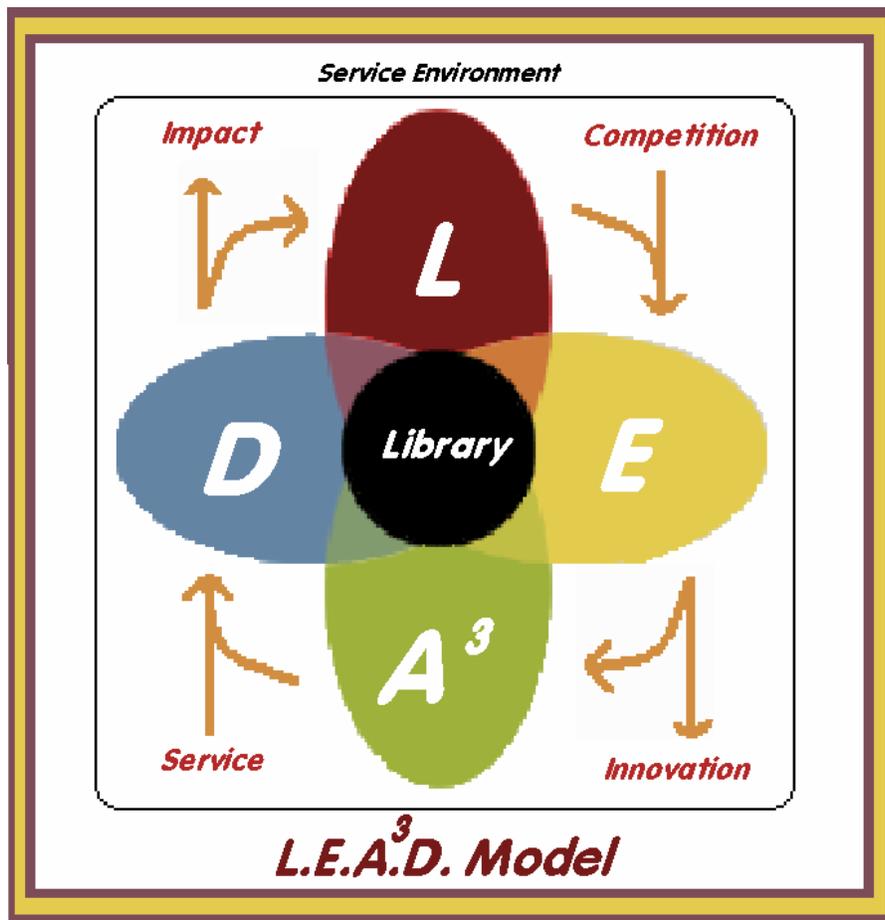


L.E.A.³D. is an acronym for collection of proactive strategic responses to competition designed by Larry Nash White and stands for “Learning (about yourself and the competitive environment), Entrepreneurial (spirit), Access (by), Accountability (to), Alignment (with customers), and Demonstration (success) (L.E.A.³D.)

The L.E.A.³D. technique is a proactive set of competitive response strategies that synergize together to promote organizational learning, innovation, improved customer service delivery and access, and greater positive impact in the information needs of your customers. The L.E.A.³D. technique allows you to use your competition to create loyal customers of your library and information services. Figure 1 on the next page illustrates the L.E.A.³D. model and its operational parameters.

The Library services as the focus of the L.E.A.³D. technique, just as it sits at the center of the service environment in your community. The driving forces of the service market: competition, innovation, service, and impact, provide the context for both the competitive force and the strategic response and is cyclical in nature.

Beginning with “Learning,” the library implementing the L.E.A.³D. technique would learn about itself, the library’s products and services, and the competitive opportunities/environment around it. The Library would then proactively leverage this new strategic knowledge against the environmental competition in order to identify and create new/possible innovations in products and services.



Design by Larry Nash White. 2006.

Figure 1. The L. E. A.³ D model [Learn Your Competitive Arena; Entrepreneurial Spirit; Access, Accountability, & Alignment (A³); Demonstrate Your Success]

To take advantage of these new strategic knowledge opportunities in responding to competition, the library would embrace an “Entrepreneurial” spirit. The need of an “Entrepreneurial” spirit would be driven by the competition within the environment for a continuous development and collaboration of strategic knowledge and competitive opportunities (identified through the “Learning” technique) to innovate and create new services and products for customers of the library or information service organization. This entrepreneurial spirit would foster the development of multiple strategic responses and innovations (i.e. activities, products, services, etc.). The Library would then need to assess the effectiveness of these possible strategic responses and innovations

against the knowledge obtained in the “Learning” technique to ensure the “Access,” “Accountability” and “Alignment” of the responses and innovations.

By ensuring the possible strategic responses and innovations align with the library’s need to provide access and accountability of resources and actions before implementation, the Library can ensure that strategic needs and stakeholder concerns have been effectively addresses and the existing quality of service provision is not adversely affected by the new responses and innovations. Once accomplished, the library can use the strategic knowledge gained in “Learning” to market the implementation of the new responses and innovations in the service delivery to maximize customer awareness and utilization.

Utilizing the successful results of the strategic responses and innovations implementation, the library then “Demonstrates” the new services, responses, and innovations and the positive impact of the services, responses, and innovations are producing in the lives of the library customer and the environment. The resulting information and positive impact in the customer’s lives will change the tactical and strategic forces within the environment and the Library then initiates the “Learning” technique over again to identify the redefined competitive environment.

L.E.A.³.D.	Technique in Summary: “L” - Learning
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The “Learning” technique is the most essential component of the L.E.A³.D. technique. The results of the “Learning” technique are the foundation of model and enable the other techniques to operate effectively. The “Learning” technique involves using needs analysis, environmental scanning, organizational performance assessment, and competitive intelligence techniques to gather the following types of strategic data:

- ✓ The library (internal and external operations and relationships)
- ✓ Customers (Internal, external, and non-customers)
- ✓ Competitors (Visible, invisible and emerging)
- ✓ Environmental Factors (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats)
- ✓ Proactive Competitive Processes (Competitor’s customers, processes, and capabilities)

- ✓ Innovations (New competitor responses and innovations, existing and pending)

L.E.A.³ D. Technique in Summary:
"E" - Entrepreneurial

The **"Entrepreneurial"** technique utilizes the knowledge gained from the **"learning"** technique to foster possible strategic responses, innovations, and new approaches to library and information service provision. The organizational culture will need to transform itself into one that values quality of service, proactive action, flexible responsiveness, intellectual innovation, and risk taking in order to maximize the **"entrepreneurial"** technique.

The establishment and implementation of the **"entrepreneurial"** spirit within the library, its suppliers, vendors, and stakeholders will result in:

- ✓ New strategic responses (Possibilities instead of reactions)
- ✓ New services (Capture new market share and awareness)
- ✓ New customers (Re-affirm your customers and give your competitor's customers a reason to come to you)
- ✓ New partners (Attract new collaborators and resource providers)
- ✓ Create a need / niche and fill it! (Creating new markets and the customers that exist in the new markets)
- ✓ Giving your customers what they do not even know they need! (Your customers will perceive you as a market leader instead of a follower.)

L.E.A.³ D. Technique in Summary:
"A¹" - Access

Libraries providing information access to customers and communities is one of the primary functions and brand concepts that customers have associated with library and information services for many years. The **"Access"** technique involves maximizing the customer and stakeholder's benefits of the Library's information services and products through widest and most effective access, awareness, and participation in provision of the products and services of the library, no matter where the customer/stakeholder is when they are involved with the library. This may mean taking the library's organizational

knowledge, services and products to the customer/stakeholder or providing (through collaborative) means in which the customer can access the library's services and products in an effective manner for both the library and the customer/stakeholder in a manner never before attempted.

The "Access" technique will lead the library to provide effective access between itself and:

- ✓ Internal stakeholders (customers, suppliers, vendors, and collaborators awareness and participation)
- ✓ Customers (The library's, other competitor's customers, and non/new customers)
- ✓ Competitive environment (Customers drive the competition process instead of the library reacting to it)
- ✓ Future (Creates/re-affirms opportunities, resources, partnerships)

L.E.A.³ D.

Technique in Summary:
"A²" - Accountability

Libraries are facing increased requirements to provide stakeholders with greater accountability in service provision, responsiveness, and fiscal and resource expenditure. The "Accountability" technique ensures the proactive addressing of the stakeholder concerns of accountability. Using the "Learning" technique results of organizational and environmental knowledge in combination with "Access" technique focus of stakeholders access, awareness, and involvement are provided with the results of the aware and involved in the operational administration of the library, including the

The "Accountability" technique will lead the library to provide effective customers and stakeholders with strong relationships, awareness, and accountability between itself and:

- ✓ Internal stakeholders (customers, suppliers, vendors, and collaborators trust)
- ✓ Customers / External stakeholders (The library's quality and validity in connection to other competitor's, and new/non customers and stakeholders)
- ✓ Competitive environment (The library drives the competition process instead of reacting to it)

- ✓ Future (New opportunities, resources, partnerships, and existence)

L.E.A.³ D.

**Technique in Summary:
"A³" - Alignment**

The "**Alignment**" technique is the second most important technique in the L.E.A.³ D. model. The "**Alignment**" technique provides the library with the ability to ensure its strategic needs, resources, and opportunities within the competitive environment it operates in effectively addresses the library's mission, goals, objectives, and strategic priorities for its customers and stakeholders.

The effective utilization of the "**Alignment**" technique will provide the library with the ability to align the library's mission, goals, objectives, and strategic priorities to

- ✓ Strategic priorities (Organizational survival and growth)
- ✓ Effective resource use (Reducing /eliminating waste in resources and effort)
- ✓ Internal stakeholders (Creates support from customers, suppliers, vendors, and collaborators)
- ✓ Customers / External stakeholders (The library's strategic responses and innovations to other competitor's, and new/non customers and stakeholders)
- ✓ Competitive environment (Strategy drives the competition process instead of reacting to it)
- ✓ Future (New opportunities, resources, and partnerships)

L.E.A.³ D.**Technique in Summary:
"D" - Demonstration**

The "Demonstrate" technique is the library's ability to affect the perceptions and views of the environment/customer/stakeholder of the library's ability to successfully deliver the library and information services needed by the community and customers and make a positive impact in their lives. "Demonstrate" uses the results of the previous five techniques to strategically market, brand, and position the library's success and accomplishments within the competitive environment. This marketing, branding, and positioning create the message of positive impact in the lives of the library's customers, thus providing evidence of effective operation, good stewardship of resources, and long-term viability.

When effectively implemented, the "Demonstrate" technique will:

- ✓ Enhance presence/awareness of the library and its strategic responses
- ✓ Promote activity/participation with customers, competitors, and stakeholders
- ✓ Provide evidence of value with customers, competitors, and stakeholders
- ✓ Competitiveness through positive impact and customer awareness

L.E.A.³ D.**L.E.A.³ D. Implementation Results:
A US Public Library's Story**

Dr. White designed and implemented the L.E.A.³ D. model in Washington County Public Library in Southeastern Ohio in 2003. The public perception of the library was of an outdated organization which did not have a wide, positive impact in the community it served (approximately 62,000 people.) There was a visible lack of community awareness and support. Library outputs had stagnated, as evidenced by circulation counts of approximately 500,000 and the library visits of approximately 300,000 per year for several years running.

In a two-year practical trial of the L.E.A.³.D. technique in a rural public library in Southeast Ohio, the library administration was able to increase library circulation by 80%, increase library customer attendance by 60%, increase community awareness and appreciation of library services, and maintain a competitive staffing compensation plan while experiencing an 15% reduction in state supported revenue.

Before L.E.A. ³ D. (2003)	After L.E.A. ³ D. (2005)
<p>Circulation: 500,000 Visitors: 300,000 New Services offered: 0 Customer Satisfaction: 88% Community Awareness/Support: No new partners or supporters established. No requests from community to participate in activities/events.</p> <p>Estimated Budget: \$2,700,000 Return on Investment: \$6:\$1 (meaning the library delivered \$6 of service value for every dollar of revenue received.)</p>	<p>Circulation: 900,000 Visitors: 500,000 New Services offered: 12 Customer Satisfaction: 96% Community Awareness/Support: Over two dozen new partnerships/collaborations established. New library foundation and strengthened friends support groups.</p> <p>Estimated Budget: \$2,300,000 Return on investment: \$10:\$1 (meaning the library delivered \$10 of service value for every dollar of revenue received.)</p>

L.E.A.³ D.

Comments and Questions:

I would welcome you comments and questions. If you need further information regarding the L.E.A.³.D. technique, please contact Dr. White at:

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