

National Libraries – Not For Researchers Only

How to Market the Content of National Libraries

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Background

In Australia, as in many other countries of the world, it is now accepted that cultural institutions, especially government funded ones, must have social relevance and significance for the general public. Their success is determined to a large degree by the extent to which they engage with different audiences and by the range and diversity of the programs they offer. Performance measures are used to report to funding bodies to justify on-going financial support.

The democratization of cultural institutions that we have witnessed in recent years has spurred a more discerning public with heightened expectations of what their cultural institutions should be delivering. It has also to varying degrees, introduced a tension or confusion into the roles or focus of these institutions as they try to meet the needs of their traditional audience while attracting new ones – this is an issue that it might be interesting to explore during our discussions.

National Library of Australia Strategic Objectives

In its strategic statement document, *Directions for 2000-2002*, the National Library of Australia states that its overarching goal is that:

All Australians, at their place of choice, have direct, seamless access to print and electronic sources of information.

The document identifies five key objectives and associated priorities that will be pursued to meet this goal.

The key priorities that shape our marketing strategy are those that relate to the Library's cultural and collecting responsibilities. These are to:

- demonstrate our national role
- promote knowledge of the collections and facilitate their use
- affirm our role in supporting scholarship and other creative and intellectual activity, and
- selectively interpret the collections to contribute to an understanding of Australian history and culture

Marketing activities

The National Library of Australia undertakes a range of public outreach and marketing activities that aim to appeal to the general public, including the research community.

Marketing our collections involves traditional as well as newer technology-based approaches. We have active publication, exhibitions and events programs (with an accompanying quarterly brochure), and we also produce marketing merchandize, make use of the advertising media and our own web site. To reach a wide audience we consider it is necessary to continue to take a range of approaches in order to have broader appeal.

For instance, most publications are still published in print format but some, for example, a major directory of our holdings relating to Aboriginal Australians - which will eventually link to digitized content from its bibliographic descriptions - will be published on the Internet.

As well as more scholarly publications based on in-depth research of the collections, we also publish books with more general appeal which we hope “humanize” the collections – as Dr Billington expressed it in his talk on Monday. For instance, we have recently published books on the history of childhood, sport and food in Australia.

This slide shows the web page for the Endless Playground, the book about childhood. The web page is used to advertise the book and provides online ordering facilities for it.

The Library actually has the largest publishing program of any cultural institution in Australia – as well as commercial publications based on our collections, we also publish a very popular newsletter called *NLA News* which includes contributions by a range of authors on different aspects of the collections.

Our exhibition program also aims to establish a wide appeal and relevance. In recognition of our national role, all our **exhibitions** now have an online version available through our web site and many travel to locations elsewhere in Australia. As well as reaching new communities, our exhibitions have attracted record levels of attendance in the last 2 years. This is partly attributable to the use of well-trained volunteer guides who explain the works on display to interested visitors.

Web site

The Library’s web site is an extremely important aspect of our marketing strategy and we measure growth in its usage as part of our performance assessment. It is a recent and powerful marketing tool that provides unprecedented opportunities for reaching a much wider audience and for highlighting the content of collections and providing direct access to them.

A major way in which web technology assists with marketing the content of collections to the general public, is by providing a delivery mechanism for digitized content - so, people can have direct access to content without having to visit the Library. Web technology also enables new ways of presenting collections and revealing their content.

Digitization of collection material is now a high priority, routine activity for the National Library of Australia. This year we aim to digitize several thousand pictorial, map, music and manuscript images.

How to appeal to the general public

Marketing to the general public requires careful consideration of the best approach to take in order to establish the relevance of the collections **and** the Library to the needs and interests of the public.

Some of the ways in which we attempt to capture the attention of a broader audience include:

- Using the collections to entertain – e.g.: musical performances and readings can be used to bring the collections alive.
- Stimulating curiosity and recognition – by revealing the unusual and the familiar in collections and using these aspects to connect with peoples’ lives
- Connecting Library activities to public events
- Demonstrating the diversity of the collections – something for everyone!
- Making it easy to find out about and to use the collections - e.g.: reference guides, online access to our catalog, contextual material, easy to use interfaces

I’ll now give some specific examples of current marketing activities to illustrate the approaches outlined above.

(i) A worthy example of using the collections to entertain is a program currently being offered at the Library called, Performing the Collection. This is a series of concerts based on little known musical works in our collection that celebrate some aspect of Australian culture and history. They involve eminent singers and musicians who perform the music. The series has attracted record crowds and has received very favorable reviews.

(ii) To celebrate the Library's 100th birthday this year we negotiated a double page article in the major national daily newspaper, *The Australian*. The article, called **100th Birthday Book Search**, highlighted the range of subject areas and formats in which the Library collects – for instance, there are segments on restaurant menus, sheet music, children's books, journal titles, early Australiana and multicultural materials. The intention was to thereby raise awareness of the richness and diversity of our collections and to demonstrate that we are a library for all Australians! We also used the article to draw attention to important material missing from our collections in the hope that the public might be able to help locate this material.

A web site has been established to support the article by providing a desiderata list of the actual titles we are looking for.

Federation Gateway

(iii) The Federation Gateway site is an example of how we link our collections to public events – in this case the celebration of the Federation of Australia as a nation – and make it easier for people to find out about our collections. This site provides context for the collections through information about the history, events and people associated with Federation, and it provides detailed guides to the wide range of resources, both print and electronic, that we hold on the subject.

Picture Australia

Picture Australia is an award-winning site that brings together the pictorial collections of a number of different types of cultural institutions in Australia, including our own. It was established and is managed by the National Library but it is a cooperative effort. It is a one-stop shop for images of people, places and events that document the history of Australia. When it was launched, it was marketed widely to schools and this sector is a heavy user of the service – as well as publishers and the general public. (We use postcards and bookmarks for on-going promotion.)

Trails

A very useful feature of the service that makes access very easy, is the use of trails for searching.

–Trails relate to popular themes represented in the collection – such as Federation – and provide highlights from the collections.

A recent user survey of Picture Australia highlighted that the feature valued most highly was the single point of access provided to different collections. As one appreciative respondent commented:

“It makes it much simpler to find what I need. I think it's a great site, and an excellent example of how the Internet can make wonderful resources available to people who might not previously have had access. It brings history to your desktop in an accessible, easy to use fashion. “

Digitization –Barton

I mentioned earlier that we are undertaking routine digitization of parts of our collections to make them more accessible to the public. An example of one project just completed is digitization of the personal papers of Sir Edmund Barton, Australia's first prime Minister.

The web page you see here indicates that access is provided via the traditional Finding Aid structure which is the way scholars are used to navigating manuscript collections. However, in order to make the collection more accessible to general users as well, we intend to link this page to one that provides more popular highlights from the collection and provides contextual information about Barton and the period he lived in.

In this way, we hope to maximize use of the digitized collection by meeting the information needs of a range of potential users.

Digitization – George Raper

The George Raper Collection is a rare First Fleet collection acquired by the Library about 18 months ago. It is a smallish collection so we decided to digitize it as a priority immediately on acquisition and to then issue a media announcement publicizing both the acquisition and web site. The publicity angle was that this extremely rare and beautiful collection was available to the nation, not just available to the privileged few who could visit the Library to see it.

This point was picked up by one user who provided feedback on the site. He said:

“With this marvelous visual display and textual materials, you have probably managed to bring more history to more people than a host of dry history books, and I say this as an historian. I'm sure this site will turn on viewers and encourage them to seek out more information from the NLA and other libraries. This is a wonderful acquisition for the Library and for the nation...”

Exhibitions -- Nora Heysen

I'll finish off with two examples of our online exhibitions. You will see that they are very different. The first one is an exhibition of the works of Nora Heysen, a documentary Australian artist. If you can read the information on the web page, you will see that links are provided to contextual and supporting information and that entry to the exhibition itself is via subject categories.

The online exhibition consists of the images belonging to the categories and, as in this case, the images are often supported by explanation from an oral history interview with the artist which we hold - thus, bringing the pictorial and oral history collections together to strengthen one another.

Bunyips

As you have probably worked out already, this interactive, online exhibition is aimed primarily at school children – who can be viewed as a new generation of national library users? - and it draws on material in the collections about Bunyips. Bunyips are scary creatures featuring prominently in Aboriginal legends and culture but also the subject of serious scientific inquiry in the early 19th century. The physical exhibition has traveled widely around Australia and was actually launched at a school in a small town called Bunyip in Victoria.

NOTE: this part of the talk was not presented at IFLA

Measuring performance

To determine the success of their public outreach and marketing strategies it is generally expected that cultural institutions should be able to measure their performance. At NLA we have a number of performance targets and measures in place that we use to report on performance. These include:

Effectiveness: The percentage of visitors/participants who consider our public outreach activities result in improved access to and knowledge of the collections

Quantity: The number of visitors to exhibitions, participants in events, and sales of books

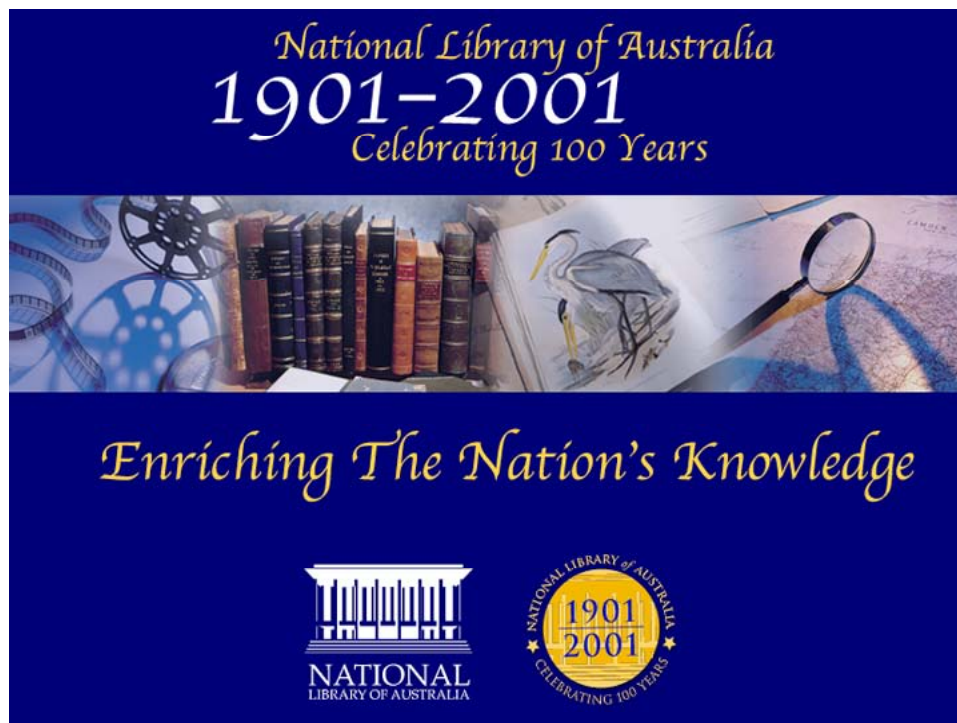
Quality: The level of satisfaction of the public with exhibitions, events and publications

With the goal of direct, seamless access in mind, the Library also measures the extent to which the public is finding out about our collections and services without having to visit the Library. Measures include:

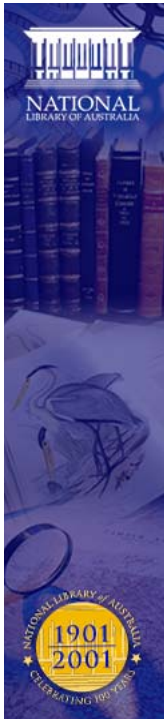
- The growth in usage of Library owned online content services
- The growth in usage of the Library's web site

To gauge the success overall of our marketing strategy we have also surveyed the level of positive public awareness of the Library, using a commercial agency. For instance, a recent survey indicated that over half of those interviewed were aware of the Library with 20% knowing either "a lot" or "a little" about the Library. Of this 20%, 76% thought the Library was fulfilling its role well in providing Australians with access to information.

Slide 1



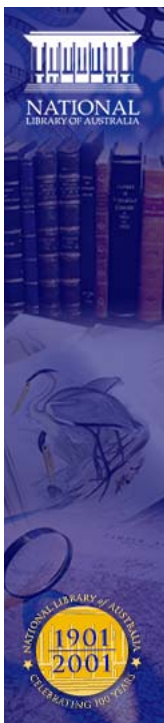
Slide 2



**Not for Researchers only –
How to Market the Content
of National Libraries**

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Slide 3

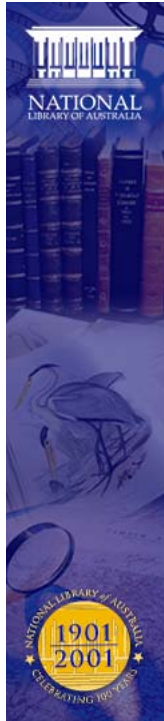


**National Library of Australia
*Directions for 2000-2002***

- Goal:

All Australians, at their place of choice,
have direct, seamless access to print and
electronic sources of information

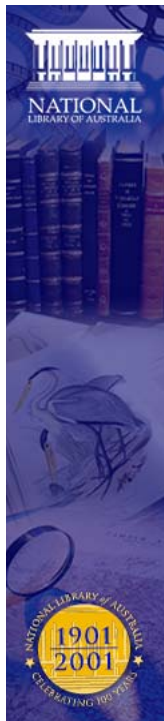
Slide 4



Marketing the collections – strategic priorities

- Demonstrate our national role
- Promote knowledge of the collections and facilitate their use
- Affirm our role in supporting scholarship and other creative and intellectual activity
- Selectively interpret the collections to contribute to an understanding of Australian history and culture

Slide 5




Marketing activities

- Involve traditional and newer technology based approaches
- Include:
 - Publications
 - Exhibitions
 - Events
 - Merchandising material
 - Use of advertising media
 - Use of web site
 - Digitisation of collections

Slide 6



Slide 7



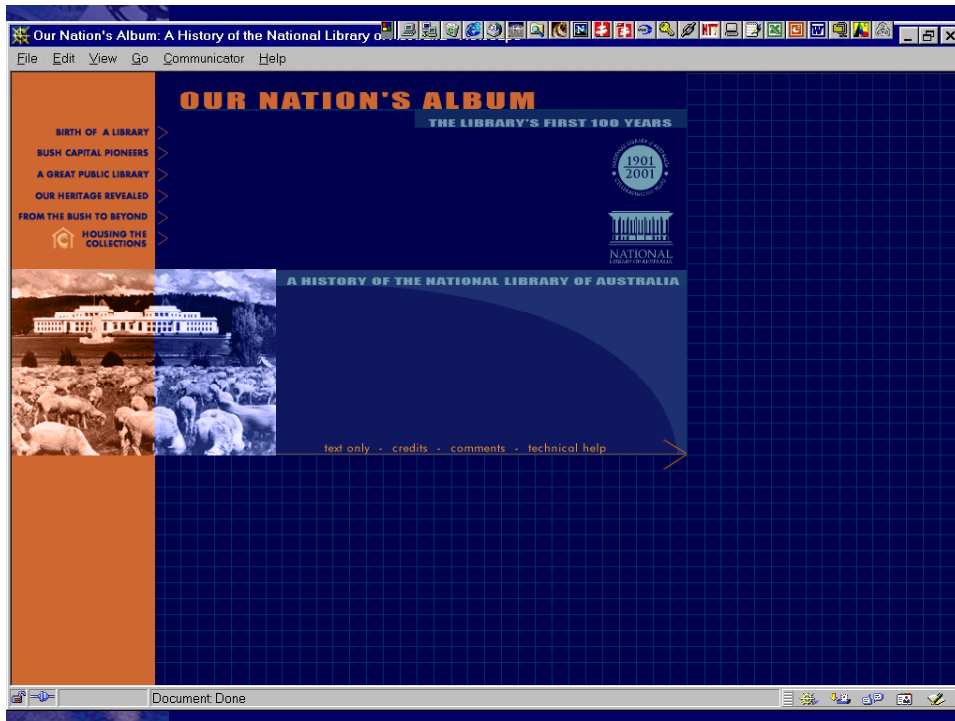
NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

1901 2001
CELEBRATING 100 YEARS

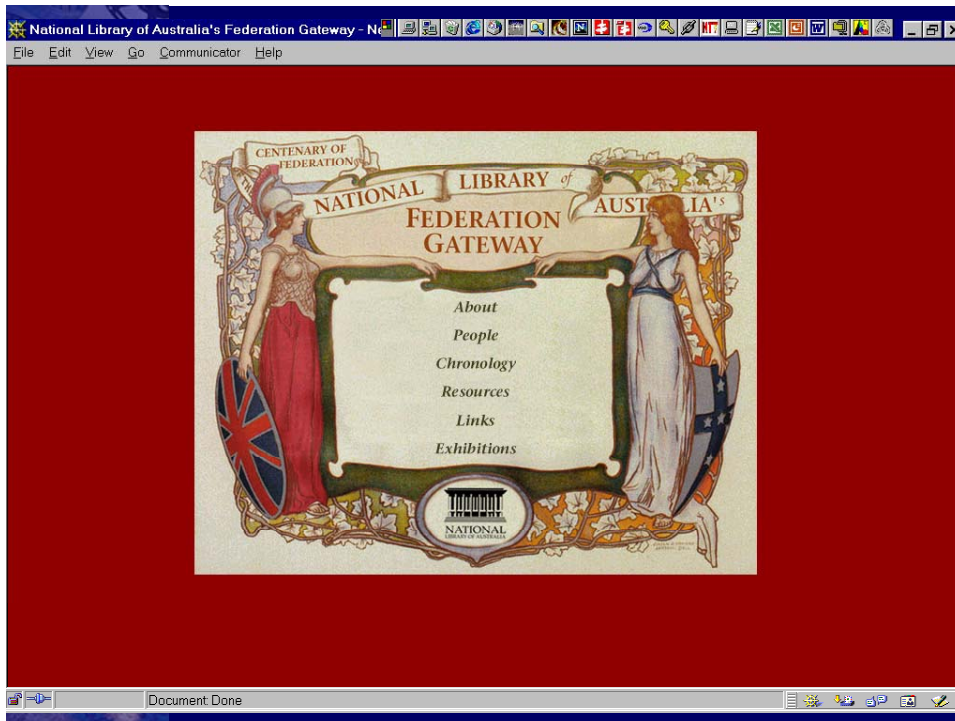
How to appeal to the general public

- Use the collections to entertain – eg., musical performances
- Stimulate curiosity and recognition
- Connect activities to public events
- Demonstrate the diversity of the collections – something for everyone!
- Make it easy to find out about and use collections

Slide 8



Slide 9



Slide 10



Slide 11



Slide 12



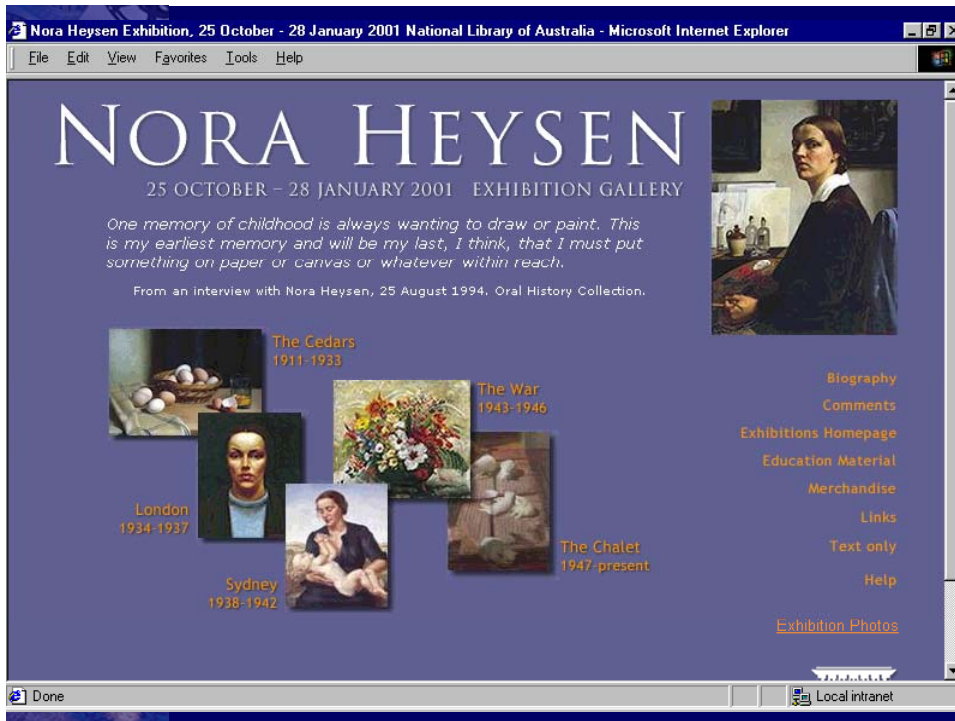
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Slide 15



Slide 16



Slide 17

