



**Trends, Strategies, Success and Learning Points – The Young People’s Services, Public Libraries, Singapore**

**Heng Huey Bin**

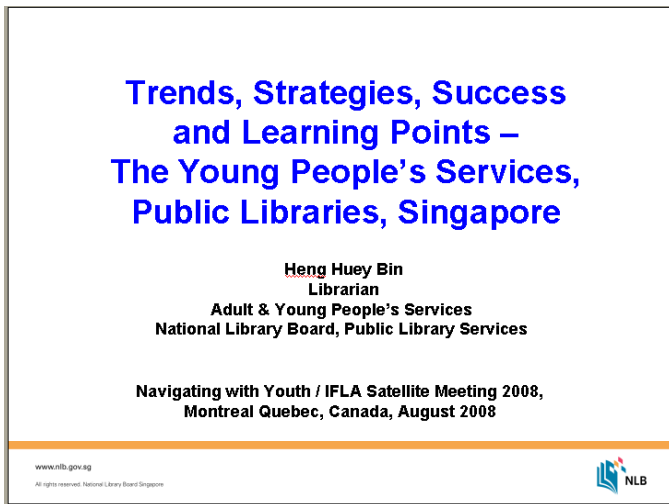
Librarian, Adult and Young People’s Services  
 Public Library Services  
 National Library Board, Singapore  
 email: Huey\_Bin\_HENG@nlb.gov.sg

**Lim Li Sa Rachel**

Senior Librarian, Adult and Young People’s Services  
 Public Library Services  
 National Library Board, Singapore  
 email: li\_sa\_lim@nlb.gov.sg

Meeting:	Innovative practices and reading programs
Simultaneous Interpretation:	No

**NAVIGATING WITH YOUTH: IFLA SATELLITE MEETING 2008  
 5-6 August 2008, Montreal Quebec, Canada**

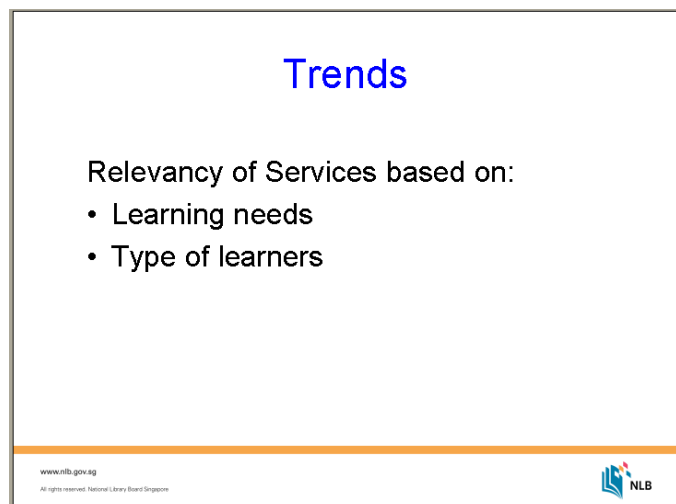


**Abstract**

This paper outlines the initiatives for young people in the Public Libraries, Singapore, which include innovative projects and programs for teens and a five-year service plan that guides the Young People’s services. As such, it reports reading and learning trends of today’s young people, the service strategies, success factors (based on qualitative and quantitative measurements), learning points of each initiative and the use of technology and new media in our teen programs.

## Introduction

Since 2002, the Young People's Services of the Public Libraries, Singapore, have grown from mobile library services to schools to a suite of engaging and activity-based reading initiatives inside and outside the library walls.<sup>1</sup> We have drawn on technology and new media and developed a blog for young people, a program using online chat, a fun and lively reading group by teens, for teens and interactive reading modules to encourage fiction reading and motivate reluctant readers.



## Trends

The Public Library Services (PLS) must continue to stay relevant to meet the information and learning needs of this age group (especially the 15-19 years old), which is likely to reach 36% of the total youth population in 2010.<sup>2</sup> The needs of this target groups are dynamic and ever-changing due to external influences, thus it is of utmost importance for our public libraries to continue to build relevant and responsive teen library services.

We have also found that this segment of young people (13-19 years old) is narrow-focused learners and low motivators.<sup>3</sup> The narrow-focused learners read only materials relevant to their needs, for example reading only their school textbooks and low motivators are those who do not see reading as beneficial or lack of desire to learn continuously.

So, it is important for the Young People's Librarians to ensure the relevancy of our services, given the fact that the library is faced with competing demands on the teens' use of their discretionary time.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lim, Li Sa Rachel and Lee, Huey Shin Ivy (2004). **Developing Library Services for Teens: The National Library Board Experience in Singapore**. Singapore: Singapore Journal Library Information & Management, Vol. 33, pp. 47-56.

<sup>2</sup> National Youth Council. Youth Research Network URL: [www.nyc.gov.sg/ym/atoz.asp](http://www.nyc.gov.sg/ym/atoz.asp), last accessed date: 15 April 2008.


<sup>3</sup> Segmentation of NLB customers and implications for future strategies. (2003), Unpublished report, National Library Board, Singapore.

## Our Strategic Approaches

### Our Strategic Approaches

- To establish a clear YP service identity
- To engage the teens
- To enhance the YP collection
- To create possibilities for publicity and outreach

www.nlb.gov.sg  
All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



As such, we started to chart the direction and service priorities for the Young People's services (YP services) in 2006 for the next five years. The strategic approaches in our service roadmap for Young People are to establish a clear Young People's service identity, to engage the teens, to enhance the Young People's resources and to continue to create opportunities for publicity and outreach so as to keep our stakeholders informed of our services.

### *To establish a clear YP service identity*

A clear identity gives a sense of belonging and ownership and is a prerequisite in adolescent development. Culling learning points from the Verging All Teens (VAT) at Jurong Regional Library, one of the successful critical factors is the exclusive library space that is visually appealing and relaxing. Although it is not feasible to create such a teen space in all the public libraries, it is important to recognize this success factor that gives the young people a special identity in the library.

### *To engage the teens*

Engaging the teens is another influential move to reach out to the teens. In fact, by involving the teens in library programs strengthens YP identity within the library space and ensures that our services remain relevant to them. Quoting from a VAT teen volunteer, "Teens are a very fickle group. For it to remain relevant, it's essential to involve them – to keep them in touch."<sup>4</sup> The involvement and participation of teens in VAT programs has proven to be a critical success factor for teen library services. Performance-based programs have an average of 100 participants at any one event and Pseudo Book Club generates an average of 15 participants per session.

---

<sup>4</sup> From **New Library Spaces for Young People in Singapore and Sweden: Transferable Lessons for English Public Libraries.** (Aug 2006). An unpublished research report by Ciara Eastell, Senior Advisor for The Reading Agency, England.

Teen engagement is also one of the key success factors of some overseas public libraries such Teen Scape at Los Angeles Public Library, Teen Central at Phoenix Public Library and Teen Central at Donnell Public Library.<sup>5</sup> These libraries have involved teens in one way or another, especially in the design of the space and programs.

### *To enhance the YP collection*

YP collection should not be restricted to print alone, as reading and learning come from various channels such as watching TV/videos/VCDs/DVDs, as supported by findings from avid readers and self-suppliers.<sup>6</sup>

The Y-generation grows up with Internet and computers and thus it is natural that they show preference for audiovisual materials. Reference to '*Connecting Young Adults and Libraries*', research has shown that circulation of audiovisual materials has increased to more than 32% in the last three years.<sup>7</sup> With the advancement of technology, some libraries are already exploring and loaning out iPod shuffles.<sup>8</sup>

Hence, it is important for us to bring in materials that meet the learning styles of teens and explore new media and formats when delivering information to the teens.

### *To create possibilities for publicity and outreach*

Having a generation growing up with Internet and computers and the growing popularity of blog, the library finds that it's time to explore another channel to push out library services and collection.

Y.O! blog serves as a platform to connect and engage these maturing teens to resources that are fundamental to their overall developmental needs and enhancing their learning capacity in a content-rich, visually appealing and engaging manner.

### **Y.O! Blog**

It also serves as a channel to reach out to the young people. This addresses the gap in our marketing efforts, which are mainly achieved through physical interactions such as programs and activities via schools, institutions and youth-focused organizations.

---

<sup>5</sup> **Teen Scape** at Los Angeles Public Library, <http://www.lapl.org/teenscape/>, **Teen Central** at Phoenix Public Library, <http://www.phoenixpubliclibrary.org/>, **Teen Central** at Donnell Public Library, <http://teenlink.nypl.org/teencentral/>, last accessed 15 April 2008.

<sup>6</sup> Based on **Non-User Survey & Segmentation Study**. (2004). An unpublished report commissioned by National Library Board, Singapore.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Jones, Michele Gorman and Tricia Suelletrop. (2004). **Connecting Young Adults and Libraries: How-to-Do-it Manual for Librarians**. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

<sup>8</sup> Ann Kim. (2006). **The Future is Now**. New York: Library Journal, 15 May 2006. Vol. 131, Iss. 9, pg 60.

## Y.O! Blog

@ <http://blogs.nlb.gov.sg/yo/>

- Teens' Voices/Viewpoints
- Teens in Action
- Librarians' Voices

www.nlb.gov.sg

All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



The overall strategy for the YP blog is to connect teens to teens, teens to library and teens to librarians, with the following framework:

- Teens' Voices/Viewpoints
- Teens In Action
- Librarians' Voices

### *Teens' Voices/Viewpoints*

This is an avenue for teens to showcase their other talents, besides academic results and to earn “peers acknowledgement” – a vital aspect in establishing identity and self-esteem in their growing up years. Teens can “show and tell” their masterpieces and interests through content and formats like music sound bites, dance performance video clips, artworks or travelogues.

### *Teens Voices/Views*

This includes teens' comments on social issues (eg. dating/sexuality) and teenage angst (eg. growing up pains), “Teen votes for ...” to get feedback on library collection and matters and Peer-to-Peer book recommendation in any formats, for examples, teens can videocast a book dramatization or podcast an interview.

### *Teens In Action*

*Teens In Action* highlights teen service learning in the community and library events or programs and happenings at the libraries and around the community. So *Teens In Action* engages teens in library affairs, connects them to library through community involvement programs, service learning programs and programs in the community or libraries.

### *Librarians' Voices*

The YP blog acts as a medium for us to push information or library services to a generation who is growing up with Internet and computers. An internal poll by the librarians showed that 89% of teens had email account, 80% had instant messaging account, 63% had Friendster account and 50% played online games.


Librarians can suggest good reads, provide information literacy guidance and post articles or information that are relevant to teens.

## Highlights of Young People's Program


### Highlights of Young People's Program

Attributes:

- T – Teen-centered
- E - Engage
- A - Appeal



www.nlb.gov.sg  
All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



The following attributes guide our Young People's Programs:

- T – Teen-centered (eg. selection of topics and themes based on what the teens want and not what we want and must be relevant to them)
- E – Engage (through activities)
- A – Appeal (overall packaging of the program, from publicity to the actual program)

We will highlight the unique selling points of our signature programs, teens reading group, Teen Fiction Kit, Reluctant Readers' Service Package and our service roadmap and strategies that steer the Young People's services in Singapore.

### *Signature Program*

The key features of our Young People's Signature Programs are to engage teens' in the program planning or execution as well as to create a platform for knowledge exchange with overseas teens and the integration of technology and media into the program.

The Public Library had organized *The September Project (TSP)* and *Teen Signature Online* as the Young People's Signature Programs in year 2006 and 2007 respectively.

## Highlights of Young People's Program

- Signature Program:

- Teen Signature Online
- The September Project



[www.nlb.gov.sg](http://www.nlb.gov.sg)

All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



### *Teen Signature Online*

The online chat event aimed to connect teens of two countries and created learning opportunities through the planning and participation in the chat session.

The main theme "Slice of life" with sub-themes such as what teens do during their leisure and the current trend among teens in each country. This included popular reads, music, movies, animation, sports, and recreation activities (collecting model kits, comic books, stamps...) et cetera in each country.

On the program day, there was sharing among 57 teens from the Urban Library Reutlingen and Stadtbibliothek Solingen in Germany, and the Jurong Regional Library and Woodlands Regional Library in Singapore. There were also presentation of Singapore's sights and sounds and sharing of common German phrases and words by the Goethe-Institute Singapore.

Librarians acted as facilitators to steer the direction of the discussion in accordance to the topics initiated. It was observed that most teens have a tendency to chat about social issues, culture, sports and education system in both countries.

### **Feedback:**

Teen participants and our collaborative partners have responded favorably to the *Teen Signature Online*:

- "Thank you for sending the German phrases over. Greatly appreciated. Generally, I enjoyed the event and had a nice time chatting with them over the MSN. I would definitely be glad to attend more of such events."
- "Thank you very much for this singular and special experience, which the teens could take with. Your idea, to start up an international chat for young people, was wonderful."

### *The September Project*

In year 2006, the public libraries in Singapore had participated in "The September Project" (TSP) – [www.theseptemberproject.org](http://www.theseptemberproject.org). This program aimed to showcase the library as a "social learning space", where teenagers could share ideas and thoughts on global issues. All 23 public libraries in Singapore were featured as participating venues, with Youth.SG from the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Singapore and overseas libraries as our collaborating partners.

The broad objectives for this program were to engage and increase awareness among teens in global issues through the expression of art, music, writing in any media (digital formats such as 3G mobile phone clips, mp3, powerpoint slides, Microsoft Word documents, postcards, scrapes, own blogs or online file sharing services such as YouTube). This event was also planned to coincide with International Literacy Day in September 2006 to promote reading among teens.

Teens were encouraged to express themselves by adopting a broad theme of 'My Global Neighborhood' with suggested discussion points such as "What does September 11 mean to you?", "What does being poor mean to you?", and "What does literacy mean to you?". Activities and discussions also centered on the importance of literacy and how literacy strengthens ties between countries. The intention was for participants to make use of their knowledge (gained through books or any authoritative resources) to voice their views, stands or opinions through this project.

Approximately 100 entries were received from Singapore and overseas and one of the entries was a youtube production on teens sharing their thoughts during a book discussion. All these entries were featured on the Youth.SG blog (<http://youth.sg/blog/>).

## Feedback

This program has received positive feedback from our collaborating partners and the September Project organizers:

- "This is such a creative and empowering event. Bravo."
- "It is great that you allow teen expression in the formats that they use. It is very forward thinking."

## Success Factors

Our signature programs are customized according to fit the trends and lifestyle of young people and using technology and media that they are accustomed to. It aims to make teen programs more visible and relevant to teens so as to reinforce the library as a social learning space and increase teen's participation in the libraries.

We find that having an online platform serves as a good resource or archive to showcase the teens' contributions as in *the September Project*, particularly in highlighting qualitative aspects like creativity and expression. It will be worth exploring the use of such a platform or online learning community organized around teens.

It is evident from the submitted entries that the teens are both fluent and creative in their expression of thoughts and ideas in abstract art, drawings, collage, writing, poetry, book reviews and letters.

In the case of the *Teen Signature Online*, teens are very adapt in using online chat tool which more or less removes their reservation to share and learn from peers while simultaneously exposing them to another culture and wider knowledge.

## Learning Points

As technology is an integral component of the program and often, the technical aspects of the program could pose as an initial challenge. Take *Teen Signature Online* for example, it is essential to determine an online communication chat tool but the stability of the online communication chat tool is beyond our control. Therefore, it is necessary to prepare a backup plan to anticipate any hitches in technology and equipment.


Another discovery is that a one-to-one chat session would prove to be a more focused and meaningful learning experience for the teens in comparison to a group chat.



## *Prove It! – An Information Literacy Competition for Youths*

### Highlights of Young People's Program

- Prove It!
  - Competition
  - Fun learning
  - Challenging



www.nlb.gov.sg  
All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



Developing from our standard library information and media literacy workshops for students, *Prove It!* arises from the need to create an exciting and interactive environment to introduce information and media literacy to students.

It is a nation wide competition that aims to make learning fun and challenge students' ability to seek information from credible sources and to develop a strong aptitude for research (using library resources). Prior to the contest, students are required to attend workshops that offered pointers to information sources.

Through the competition, students would acquire skills on information literacy and teamwork by completing the quiz questions within a stipulated time. Teams have to search for various print and online sources such as Internet and electronic databases for answers and more importantly, verify their answers with at least two authoritative sources. In this way, the Library would gain teen's recognition as a trusted and reliable source of information.

### **Feedback:**

Many participating students find the contest challenging, interesting, and useful.

"It is fun and useful. The challenges, the joy of teaming with your friends, the knowledge and experiences that I've gained are only a small part of this unforgettable experience. It is not often that we (school librarians) get to do something together so the Prove It! Contest gives us opportunity to bond even closer. I have to do my homework, that is, to build up my researching skills, in order to get an edge of the contest."

### **Success Factors:**

The critical success factor is tapping on students' competitive nature and their fondness for teamwork so as to draw their interest to join and learn through this fun and interactive competition.

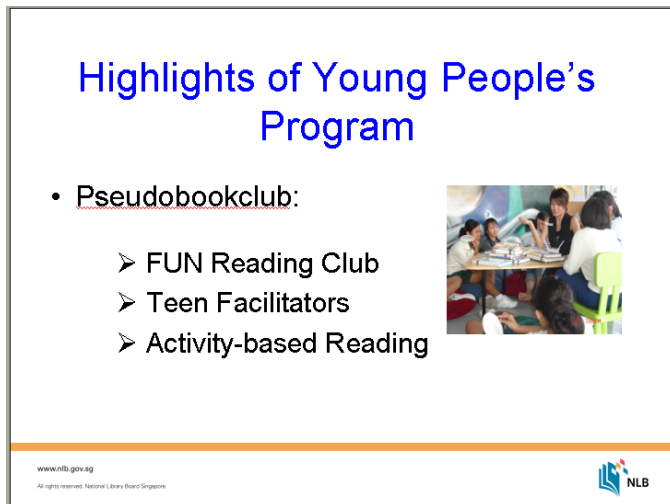
We have found that some answers provided by the winning teams are of a high degree of accuracy from credible sources, which could be potential "model examples" for sharing in our information and media literacy workshops.

## Learning Points

Being a competition, it is critical to set guidelines and marking scheme so as to prevent disputes on the credibility of the resources or even allocation of points for incomplete answers.

Crafting of quiz questions is equally important to ensure that teens have to hunt for several resources and not simply making use of one resource to find the answers to all the questions.


### *Pseudobookclub*



**Highlights of Young People's Program**

- **Pseudobookclub:**
  - FUN Reading Club
  - Teen Facilitators
  - Activity-based Reading

www.nlb.gov.sg  
All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



A fun activity-based session for teens, by teens - where books you've made up can come alive! That about summed up the concept of *pseudobookclub*.

Formed in Jan 2006, *pseudobookclub* adopts a for-teens-by-teens approach to book sharing. It deviates from a traditional book club as it aims to promote reading among teens through fun games and activity-based book sharing. At the same time, it seeks to align with our strategy to engage the teens. Hence, teen volunteers are recruited to act as facilitators of the bookclub sessions. Our reading groups spur participants to discover and deepen their joy of reading, by discussing and sharing personal perspectives and social experiences through books.

Each book club session sees an average of 10 participants and they are mostly of age 13 – 19 years old. The books shared thus far included YP fiction and non-fiction genres and subjects such as fashion, art, food, music, contemporary life, Singapore collection et cetera.

### Feedback:

Here are some feedback from pseudobookclub teen facilitators:

- "Yes, the library seems more like a second home now."
- "Certainly. The library is really interested in encouraging reading. The Pseudobookclub strives to instill interest in readers (proactive/passive), guides teens through reading, encourages them to think about the theme in different perspectives, explores different possibilities etc."

- "I've come to understand the difficulties of being a library staff to promote reading as it is a really difficult task and something impossible to achieve in the short term. This makes me respect the librarians even more."
- "It has shown me that the library is more than just quiet books, it is an entity that wishes to interact with its visitors greatly. The interaction also works within the visitors as well, who can bond with similar interests in books."

## Success Factor

The approach to leave it all to the teens to run the bookclub worked, as they are the best candidates to come up with fun and creative activities to connect themselves to reading.

## Learning Point:


We could infer from the feedback that indeed there is a change in teens' perspectives of the library and library staff when we actively engage them in our programs.

## *Reading workshops*


Comprising of fiction and non-fiction modules, the reading workshop seeks to advocate and instill the joy of reading among young people through a fun and interactive reading workshop that simulates creative thinking and discovery.

### Highlights of Young People's Program

- Reading workshops
  - Fiction & Non-Fiction
  - Activity-based
  - Themes that APPEAL to teens



www.nlb.gov.sg  
All rights reserved. National Library Board Singapore



## *Fiction Module*

It targets first time fiction or non-fiction readers. Besides an introduction of different genres and followed by the focus on a particular genre, the workshop is also interjected with activities and games to make reading fun and interactive. Among the many activities for the fiction module, teens get to create stories in many different ways and express their stories creatively, be it rapping, storytelling or simply acting out a play.

Currently, the *Teen Fiction Kit* consists of 6 genres: *Adventure, Contemporary Life & Issues, Fantasy, Horror, Mystery* and *Science Fiction*.

## ***Non-Fiction Module***

This module is intended for the uncommitted and unmotivated readers. Activities consist mainly of games, quizzes and hands-on recreation activities are weaved tightly throughout the workshop to reinforce the idea that one not only reads for leisure but also for knowledge, skills and practical reasons.

It highlights themes that appeal to teens and engages teens in discussion and activities on topics such as *Friendship, Recycling, Hobby and Grooming*. For example, on the topic of friendship, one moment the participants are paired up to answer a quiz (taken from a library book or magazine) to test their understanding of friendship and the next moment they are divided into groups to make friendship bands using library books as reference.

### **Success Factor**

The appeal of the reading workshop is that teens can now experience the joy of reading firsthand through carefully designed activities which either coincides with their interest or allow them to discover joy of reading and explore beyond their current reading preference.

### **Feedback:**

Many teens have found the reading workshops enriching and rewarding as they walked away with a different perspective on reading:

- "Reading book is also fun; you can act out the play"
- "We had a chance to share out thoughts and imagination"
- "It was engaging and full of expressions"

### **Learning Points**

After running the workshop for half a year, we have discovered that it is vital to find out the reading abilities and interests of teens prior to the workshop and make adjustments accordingly for optimal results. Yet, it is often found that the participants in the same workshop have varying reading abilities and area of interest, which could pose as a challenge for the librarians conducting the workshop.

### **Conclusion**

The YP services and programs, which are guided by our five-year service plan and strategy approaches, have proven positive quality and quantitative outcomes.

In a broad sense, our efforts to continue to create library services and programs with a "for teens by teens" environment through engaging teens in the planning and execution and ensuring that there is an appeal for teens in the overall packaging and needs have brought our services to the next level.

From teens' anecdotes and a higher number of participants as compared to our past programs where programs were organized without their input, there has been a change in their perceptions of a library and library staff, as well as reading and learning.

The suite of engaging and activity-based reading initiatives inside and outside the library walls, which include programs that drawn on technology and new media such as blog and MSN, a fun and lively reading group by teens, for teens and interactive reading modules (*Teen Fiction Kit* and *Reluctant Readers' Service Package*) to encourage fiction reading and motivate reluctant readers have created possibilities for the teens to explore their imagination and creativity.

## Reference

Ann Kim. (2006). **The Future is Now**. New York: Library Journal, 15 May 2006. Vol. 131, Iss. 9, pg 60.

Lim, Li Sa Rachel and Lee, Huey Shin Ivy (2004). **Developing Library Services for Teens: The National Library Board Experience in Singapore**. Singapore: Singapore Journal Library Information & Management, Vol. 33, pp. 47-56.

Lim, Li Sa (2006). The September Project at the Public Libraries URL: <http://singaporelibrariesbulletin.wordpress.com/2006/12/15/the-september-project-at-the-public-libraries/>, last access date: 15 April 2008.

National Youth Council. Youth Research Network URL: [www.nyc.gov.sg/yrn/atoz.asp](http://www.nyc.gov.sg/yrn/atoz.asp), last accessed date: 15 April 2008.

**New Library Spaces for Young People in Singapore and Sweden: Transferable Lessons for English Public Libraries**. (Aug 2006). An unpublished research report by Ciara Eastell, Senior Advisor for The Reading Agency, England.

**Non-User Survey & Segmentation Study**. (2004). Unpublished report. National Library Board, Singapore.

Patrick Jones, Michele Gorman and Tricia Suelletrop. (2004). **Connecting Young Adults and Libraries: How-to-Do-it Manual for Librarians**. New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, Inc.

Review of VAT at Jurong Regional Library. (2005). Unpublished report, National Library Board, Singapore.

Segmentation of NLB customers and implications for future strategies. (2003), Unpublished report, National Library Board, Singapore.

Yap, Ian and Chew, Ivan. (2007, December). Country highlights: Singapore. *SCL News*, 67. Retrieved May 14, 2008, from <http://www.ifa.org/VII/s10/pubs/s10-newsletter-December07.pdf>