

Remplacé par Jason Hyatt

Abstract

Creating an inventive and non-traditional library facility takes a combination of dreaming, collaborating, negotiating and much hard work. What does it take to create a dynamic space and still stay “on mission?” How do we make sure that we don’t lose sight of our primary clientele (children, teens and caregivers) in the urgency to finalize capital campaigns, make design decisions and promotions and marketing? In this presentation, I explore these questions and suggest recommendations for creating dynamic spaces using the lessons we learned while designing this one-of-a-kind facility. Included in the paper will be these sections as well. The youth-focused facility, *ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center* is a primary example used to illustrate the process and reality of creating such facilities. The following narrative is an overview of the presentation I have prepared called *Is This Really A Library? Creating Dynamic Library Spaces for Today's (and Tomorrow's) Users*.



At the end of a large National Library Week Celebration that drew hundreds of children, teens and adults to ImaginOn in Charlotte, NC one teen was noted as saying "This is really cool...do you do this very often?" The staff member replied, "Yes, we have large events every month or so, but you can come to the library at any time to do most of these activities. The teen looked puzzled. "This is a library?" he asked.

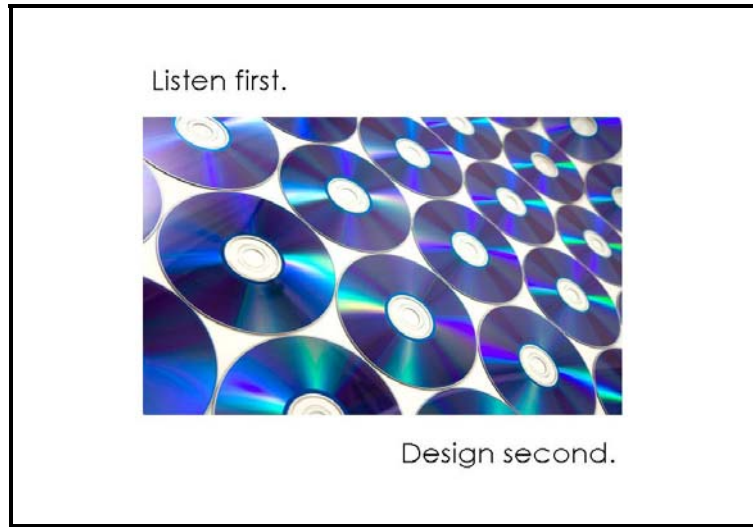
For many library staff members this would be a horrible thing to hear. As libraries progress, I'd like to suggest that we'll find more and more of this type of reaction to our buildings, services and experiences.

ImaginOn: The Joe & Joan Martin Center opened in October 2005. This complex project began with a simple idea: what if The Public Library combined forces with the successful Children's Theatre of Charlotte and created one dynamic home together? About nine years later the concept became a reality.

From working on this project from its early stages, I have seen it grow and expand from a dream into a uniquely functioning endeavor. The ImaginOn Core Team who worked on this project as well as the staff who now inhabit the building have learned numerous lessons along the way—and still do each day!

We often like to say that ImaginOn is the library of the future—today. Of course, ImaginOn continues to grow and morph. One valuable lesson we continue to learn is that a truly "alive" effort, building or partnership is naturally going to change with time and usage.

Let's look at the essence of what it takes to create a dynamic facility that embraces the needs (and desires) of youth while still leaving room for the future growth—growth that could take us in directions we can't even imagine today.



Listen first, design second.

We talk much about listening and responding to our communities these days. What does this mean? Focus groups? Customer surveys? In what ever manner one goes about it here are some key points to keep in mind:

- Approach community input with **real intention to listen**
- **Act on the feedback** and responses of your users
- **Clarify the dedication** by the leadership of the project (without this dedication decisions can often default to single-minded decision making or moving forward without regard to the mission of the project)
 - I suggest creating a "commitment statement" that defines the dedication of the project leadership as well as certain expectations of involvement

Please don't conduct focus groups or ask for the community or staff input or feedback unless you truly intend to use it in the development of the project. Obligatory (yet meaningless) focus groups take time, pull focus from staff and can send mixed messages about the purpose of the project.

Considering Operational Needs

Making sound decisions on staffing and operational needs far before the doors of your facility open is vital. This can be like looking into a crystal ball that is murky, with only a few details of distinction. In many ways there is a

certain level of “guessing” at what your staffing and operational needs will be. Survey the field deeply. Find other facilities that are similar in size and scope as your proposed facility.



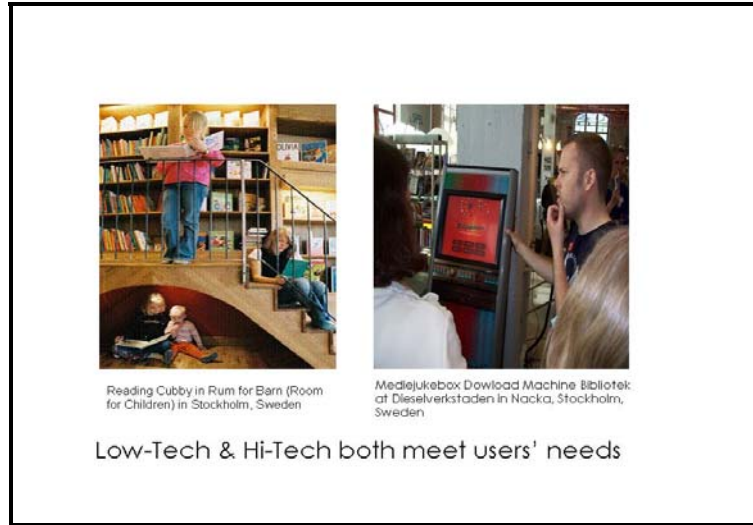
While looking, make sure you reach out beyond the library field both for inspiration and for practical decision making. It is vital to explore children’s museums and interactive learning facilities as well as popular stores that cater to your demographics. Don’t be afraid to look at retail methods of service. Such service-oriented stores as Build-a-Bear Workshop, Club Libby Lu or even Aveda (with their very user-centric approach) can offer many innovative ideas for reaching our customers in new ways.

Attempting to fully mimic a retail style or mode of operation is not what I am suggesting. I am a proponent of celebrating the uniqueness of libraries. Often libraries appear to run from the ideas or connotations associated with them. We can infuse our core practices with the freshness of new methods or procedures we see working in other fields, companies and organizations while still embracing who we are and our role in the community.

The Future is Flexibility

I often said during the design and building of ImaginOn that everything should be on wheels. I meant this both for our fixtures and for our philosophy. In 2007 the ImaginOn Library Services Manager, Lois Kilkka, traveled to Sweden to see several innovative libraries there. One of the items she noted upon her return was that many or most of the library shelving was on wheels! Will Bruder, the architect who worked with teens to design the Teen Central space in Phoenix, Arizona’s (US) main library, also saw the importance of keeping space flexible. He crafted custom-

made shelving for a large portion of the book collection in Teen Central. When special events are happening and more space is needed, the shelving can simply be rolled to another area. The same idea of flexibility and mobility is important with other furniture and fixtures as well.



A large, dense CD storage fixture was crafted for the children's library in ImaginOn. It is certainly a grounding visual unit in the multi-media area but offers very little flexibility when it comes to rearranging the space for program needs. This CD unit can easily be representative of the need to look ahead when designing libraries for tomorrow's users. With the likelihood that downloadable music will soon be commonplace in libraries as well as the fact that our library system is now "floating" our collection, the unit itself allows very little flexibility to shift when CDs are in short supply (because of the floating collection) or assist staff or users in visualizing digital capabilities in the library (that are common in many other locations—including our homes).



Reflect your users.

Working to Support the Future Now

Whether you are working to create a grand new library or trying to work with your current facility to make it more inviting and meaningful to youth, I offer up the following five guidelines give construct to your approach.

1. **Create space.** Work to maximize what you have been given. Keep as much space flexible as possible. Be able to pare the room or space down to its very essentials when necessary. We want people—many people—to visit our libraries. What if they all came at once? Where would you put them?
2. **Bring in community partners.** Build collaborative programs and services that can expand and support the core mission of all agencies involved.
3. **Ideas, not things.** Represent and promote *ideas* (learning, literacy, community-building) not only the *tools* that support these (such as building features or technology). Even if your library isn't able to provide the most current technology or service, remember you can feature and celebrate the idea behind it.
4. **Library as mirror.** Allow your library users to leave an impression of themselves on the space, the program or the service of the library.
5. **Welcome users "home."** Everyone likes the feeling of being "at home." This can take many forms with various users—offer up as many of these options as possible.



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Meaningful libraries for children are also meaningful libraries for all people. ImaginOn brings in visitors of all ages and delights with color, uniqueness of program approach and works toward offering the full “experience” that we talk so much about in library services. The experience will be different for each child, each family or visitor. Being ready for the future—what does this mean for libraries? Keep the doors—and the mind—open.



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Thank you.

Tony Tallent

