

HOW ARE YOUR LIBRARY'S MISSION AND VISION STATEMENTS?

As the joint editor and publisher for some 25 years of the *Directory of Australian public libraries* I have watched with interest as more, but still too few, Australian public libraries have included mission and vision statements in their entries in the directory.

Some of those statements have been good, but others not. They often fail to convey the distinctive mission and visions of public libraries. A few have been revisited and improved over the years, most have not. So why reconsider your mission and vision statements if you have them, or why develop them if you do not?

Australian librarian Lee Welch, in the revision of her valuable book *The other 51 weeks: a marketing handbook for librarians* (Centre for Information Studies, Charles Sturt University 2006), tells us why and how. She defines a mission statement as one 'that clearly translates an organisation's philosophy and purpose into objectives and commitments', and asserts that

What business we are in dictates our objectives, our operation, and our identity. All this, along with a statement of our values, can be distilled into what is now commonly known as a mission statement. Mission statements have had their share of detractors, and have been derided by some as another piece of trendy management hocus pocus. Some companies have indeed adopted missions that are clearly extraordinary, unachievable fantasy...However a succinct 'real' statement can provide a powerful force for motivation.

She concludes that

- a good library mission statement is brief, distinctive, enthusing and realistic
- it should mesh with the mission of its parent organisation
- the most important factor is the audience for which it is intended
- it should describe a philosophy and purpose
- it should include an identified opportunity and statement of commitment
- combining the philosophy with market research enables the development of objectives to underpin a marketing strategy.

Lee also notes that libraries may develop service charters as another aid to communicate values and commitment to staff and users, but that such charters focus on the level of service provided. They should not be confused with aspirational mission statements which must be succinct to be effective.

This point about succinct library mission statements is also made in the online *Marketing treasures* 15(2) February 2006, which is available at www.chrisolson.com/marketingtreasures/mtcuurent.html.

Under 'Casting new light on missions and visions' the advice is

- not to get bogged down with details or compose a statement that reads like answers to 20 questions
- wordsmith the statement very carefully. Each word needs to add substance, not fluff.
- the statement should be short and free of buzz words
- three or four concise, clearly written, sentences should suffice.

The article provides contrasting examples. Given as an example of a good mission statement – after noting that it is best to commence them with the word 'mission' or constructing the first sentence so that the word is easily implied – is

The mission of the ABC County Library is to promote the development of independent, self confident and literate citizens through the provision of open access to cultural, intellectual, and informational resources.

It then takes a look at library vision statements as presenting

...your view for the future. It tells people where you want the library to be and what you want it to become. It is a long range goal and what you are working towards. A vision should be inspiring.

It also points out that the taglines sometimes used by libraries, such as *Linking leisure and learning*, are not vision statements, and that if you are a painter of BHAG(Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals), then the vision statement is your canvas.

Provided as an example of a good library vision statement is

We will be the primary information and resource destination for citizens of all ages in ABC County. Through our inviting community centred branches and innovative technology, programming, services, and collaboration, we will satisfy the community's needs and exceed its expectations. Our staff will reflect the diversity of our communities and promote an accessible, friendly environment. We will be the most convenient public library in the nation and be known for our excellence in service.

Which should come first, your mission or your vision? If your goal is to reinvent your library and reshape perceptions about it, you should start with the vision because developing a vision requires outside of the box thinking. After the vision for the new service is there, the mission statement can be crafted to reflect the new model. If you aim to update existing vision and mission statements working on the mission statement first makes sense, as it defines the library's business. The vision work would follow, envisioning the future based on the library's mission parameters.

Interestingly, the article concludes by noting that although many libraries will begin the process of developing or revising their statements by collecting other library statements, these are often *not* the best examples – and that examples from outside the library sector should be looked at on the Man On a Mission blog <http://manonamission.blogspot.com/>

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