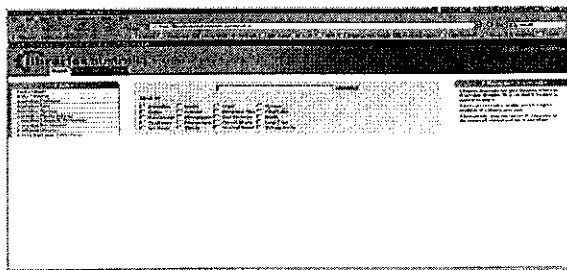


Libraries Australia Announcement



Libraries Australia, a service that enables anyone with an Internet connection to select from more than 40 million items held in over 800 libraries across the nation, was launched on Monday 27 February at Parliament House, Canberra by Senator Helen Coonan, Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts.

This innovative service is an Australian first, opening up the collections of Australia's libraries to the public.

Libraries Australia, developed by the National Library of Australia, is an e-ticket to a world of information consisting of books, journals, newspapers, theses, pictures, music, manuscripts, maps and much more. Many online resources such as digitised images and full text government publications can also be accessed immediately online.

Underpinned by cutting edge technology and data contributed by the nation's libraries, Libraries Australia makes it easy to search for information across the collections of the national, state and university libraries and most public, research, government, health and other special libraries.

Jan Fullerton AO, National Library

Director-General, says that Libraries Australia changes the dynamics of the way people use libraries. "Libraries have continually been at the forefront of technology to improve the way people find the information they need.

"The beauty of Libraries Australia is that it uses a very simple search mechanism to find the item the person requires. Once found, the item can be borrowed, copied or purchased. All this can be done from home or work in regional centres or major cities.

"It puts the individual looking for the information in charge of their search, rather than a librarian. This saves time and is empowering for the information seeker." Some of the features of Libraries Australia are the ability to instantly access many digitised items; borrow from a local library or order from another library; copy selections of items at a small price; buy from online bookshops; and find library locations nationwide".

Libraries Australia can be used to further education or personal interests, advance research, obtain information to develop business opportunities or to facilitate lifelong learning. It is available at librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au.

Background

In 1981, the National Library of Australia developed an online service called the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) designed to be used as a working tool by librarians. The aim of the ABN was to enable Australian libraries to share the task of cataloguing resources and to know what titles were held across Australia so that libraries could borrow resources from each other for their users.

At the time the ABN was set up, the Federal Government required the National Library to operate it on a cost recovery basis. Since 1981 the service has had tremendous support from the Australian library community, which has invested millions of dollars in its development and maintenance. Australia has the only truly national database that lets people find out what resources are held by libraries across Australia.

Development

In 1999, the ABN was moved onto a new technical platform and was given a new name, Kinetica. About the same time, the National Library began strongly encouraging Australian libraries to allow their users to search Kinetica directly rather than having to ask library staff for information about resources held in other libraries.

Some of the larger state and university libraries, which were paying an annual subscription to search the database, agreed to allow their users to search the database directly. However, many smaller libraries, especially those paying each time they used the database, could not afford to allow their users to search the database directly.

Libraries in the Online Environment

In 2002, the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (ECITA) References Committee conducted an Inquiry into

Libraries in the Online Environment. The Inquiry received 155 submissions with the critical issue raised in most submissions was the importance of providing free public search access to Kinetica.

The Committee reported in October 2003. One of its key recommendations was related to the provision of free public access to Kinetica.

This recommendation is a strong indicator of the value of Kinetica to Australian libraries and the communities they serve, as well as of the need to provide Australians with the capacity to do their own database searching in line with growing user expectations of easy, immediate online access to information via the Internet.

Towards Libraries Australia

In late 2003, the National Library commenced a two-year project to redevelop the Kinetica service so that all Australians could search the database through an easy 'Google' style interface. This redevelopment, released in two stages, was completed in November 2005.

The National Library also sought ongoing financial support from the Australian library sector for the core Kinetica service in order to offer a free public search interface. On completion of the Kinetica redevelopment, the service was re-branded Libraries Australia.

Libraries Australia public access

From 27 February 2006, the National Library will offer a free search interface to Libraries Australia, accessible via the Internet to all Australians. No other country in the world has an equivalent national database representing the nation's library collections.

Libraries Australia contains information about more than 40 million books, journals, newspapers, pictures, maps and much more.