

Building library service value and visibility in a health promotion NGO

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Abstract

This presentation discusses approaches and tools to optimise the value and visibility of the library service at Women's Health Victoria – a health promotion NGO with 17.4 FTE, based in Melbourne.

Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is part of the 'Victorian Women's Health Program' – a network of 12 agencies that receive program funding from State Government. WHV has a leadership (coordination) role and works at a statewide level to improve women's health, empowerment and equality. Hallmarks of our approach include:

- Gender analysis - highlighting issues and solutions specific to women
- Feminist - championing women's rights, equality and empowerment
- Social determinants - underlying structures and factors in society that impact on health
- Upstream health promotion - prevention focus, population-level

WHV's work relies heavily on published information. Examples include:

- Current awareness - '[Health News Daily](#)' (a news digest - sent by email)
- Gender analysis - '[Women and oral health issues paper](#)'
- Knowledge translation - '[Labia Library](#)' website and the '[Victorian Women's Health Atlas](#)'
- Consultation submissions - '[Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#)'
- Gender norms and training - '[Take A Stand](#)' Program
- Policy and practice - the Family Violence Steering Committee

Surveying the scene

The information landscape is constantly changing. There has been an explosion of sources and platforms with an increasing percentage of content published online, or online only.

Most patrons have experience with a wide range of online applications. There is a growing expectation that any required information should be available online, anywhere for free. This may include the perception that patrons can 'just Google it'—so who needs a librarian?

Staff are increasingly accessing office applications and information via email, mobile devices, and offsite. This has the effect of making the librarian and the library service less physically visible.

One thing that hasn't changed is the library competing for scarce organisational resources.

Be prepared to stop

It may become necessary to stop or reinvent certain library activities. For example, the Clearinghouse at VWC is moving from 'just in case' collection development to 'just in time' supply.

Faced with an explosion of gendered health literature, we are being more strategic about what is collected. We focus on key, repeat-use materials – such as those cited in our own topic guides, issues papers, and submissions. If we need something else, we go looking for it at the time. Gendered material that is reliably curated on other websites, including the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

We dispensed with the circulation module when our loans became too few to be worth measuring. . Staff now use and re-shelve physical items on a trust system. Long-term or offsite loan details can be entered into the Item record if necessary. Our focus moved from counting physical loans to measuring online catalogue usage.

Library footprint

Six years ago, the Clearinghouse collection was moved from a dedicated room to a shared-purpose meeting room. At the same time, the librarian's workstation was moved forty metres away to the policy and health promotion team area.

Although not a planned outcome, moving the librarian greatly increased their visibility and exposure to the team's work and information needs.

Our collection is gradually 'ageing' in appearance as fewer new hardcopy items are being added to it. An aggressive weed is planned: hardcopies of online PDFs will be removed. Signage will direct users to browse the online catalogue (to access the full range of resources). The shrinking library physical footprint needs to be balanced with a growing 'cloud print'.

Decision time

By 2014 the Clearinghouse OPAC was becoming unreliable due to WHV hardware limitations. A decision was made to move the increasing search traffic to a cloud-based platform.

A major problem was the time, expertise and cost to upgrade or change the system. We started by asking: 'What can our trusted supplier offer?'

Maxus provided several options to choose from: a mix of all-cloud and part-cloud solutions. Presto Cloud for DB/TextWorks emerged as the most cost-effective platform that met our needs. We were offered the option to become a demo site for the US vendor (with pricing and support benefits).

The next problem was how to obtain organisational buy-in and approval in a climate of scarce resources and questions like: 'Remind me again - why do we need dedicated library software?' The key was to include the new library platform in the WHV IT strategy: creating a discrete, costed project that was tied to organisational objectives.

Drilling down

The new Presto interface provides access to the Clearinghouse database and services via a homepage that can be customised. It includes simple and advanced search, widgets (canned searches, for

example, or an image carousel), the ability to add textboxes / links, and the ability to add images and PDFs to records.

The star feature, however, is the **taxonomy**, which enables true ‘browsing’ in an online environment – rather like an electronic shelf. Taxonomy enables users to “drill down” to content by subject or region, without having to key in any search terms.

To achieve this, a new taxonomy field was added to the Clearinghouse database structure. All records (print AND electronic) have taxonomy strings added for one or more subjects and sometimes region. Adding the taxonomy has been the most time consuming part of the upgrade, but is yielding the greatest benefits.

The subject taxonomy is based on the Clearinghouse shelf classification scheme. Here is an example:



Figure 1. Image shows a screenshot of the WHV subject taxonomy

We created the region taxonomy ourselves, making sure to include the regions served by each of the Victorian regional women’s health services. Here is an example:

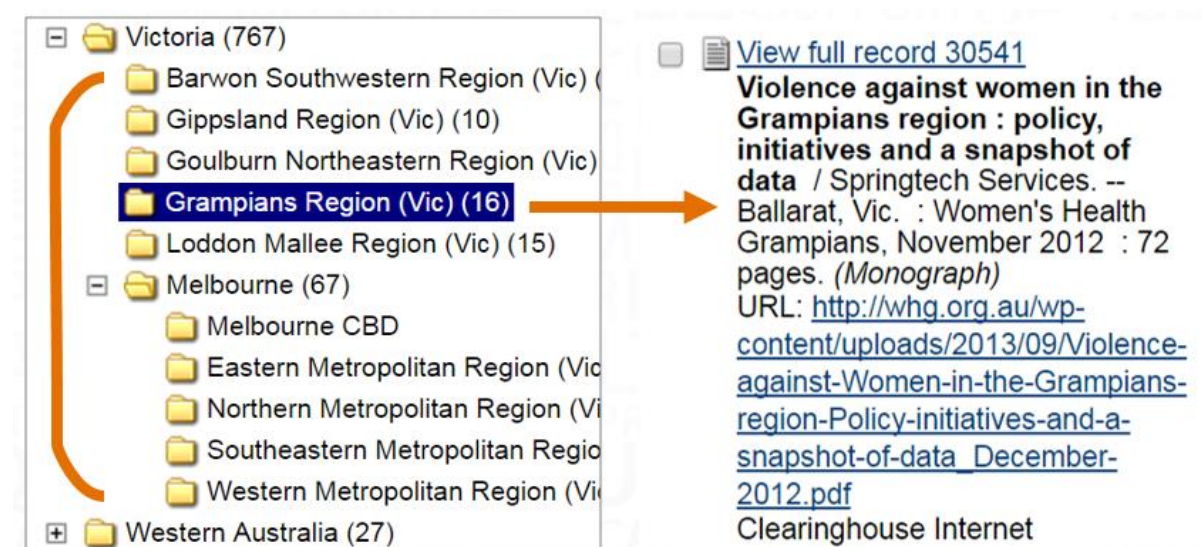


Figure 2. Image shows a screenshot featuring the custom-built region taxonomy in WHV's Presto interface

The taxonomy strings look like this – note that there can be multiples:

Women are missing from clinical trials (record 32010):

- Subject | Research and education | Clinical trials
- Subject | Health conditions | Sexually transmitted infections | HIV and AIDS
- Subject | Substances | Pharmaceuticals | Prescription drugs
- Subject | Equality | Gender sensitivity
- Region | Americas | North America | United States

Violence against women in the Grampians region (record 30541):

- Subject | Violence | Family violence
- Subject | Violence | Intimate partner violence
- Region | Australia | Victoria | Grampians Region (Vic)

Being a demo site is beneficial in terms of direct high-level support. The US vendor applied a process (at no charge) to making our catalogue records discoverable in Google searches, and is using our site in product demos and training.

Metrics

It is vital to monitor and measure online information service activity, which should more than make up for any decline in traditional activity. At WHV, Google Analytics are enabled for the Clearinghouse Presto interface. This enables collection of usage data such as top resources, total users, and user demographics. Usage reporting is now a breeze, compared to previous year efforts to extract data from the library system query log and manipulate it using spreadsheets.

Metrics for Health News Daily are available via the MailChimp platform. This includes 'open' rates, 'click' rates, most opened items etc. A paid MailChimp account is required to access more than 12 months of data and compare between years.

The librarian also monitors downloads of WHV publications published on the WHV website and on external sites where we upload our content. This is highly valued by the team and by communications, who use the information in reporting to demonstrate 'reach'.

Flow dynamics

Information flows in any organisation are complex, with many different channels and inter-connections. Just like plumbing, the flow can be disrupted or effort wasted due to blockages, leaks, and unnecessary duplication. Librarians can be a catalyst for action to streamline these flows, especially in small organisations. This includes seeking interoperable platforms between library and organisational processes.

EndNote example: At WHV the librarian supports the policy and health promotion team to use Endnote software. For each major publication or submission, an EndNote library is created to house all of the references. This enables authors and library staff to work collaboratively in a shared workspace from the literature search to final publication. The software eliminates three duplications of citation data, ensures consistent referencing, and minimises email traffic. But more importantly - the librarian is seen as a valuable part of the authorship team.

Scanning example: The WHV librarian maintains a spreadsheet of over 100 print and electronic newsletters / newsfeeds arriving to either the Clearinghouse or arriving directly to six policy and health promotion staff. The first list we compiled had over 200 titles, and revealed the massive hidden burden (time cost) of scanning duplication. The team reviewed the titles (grouped by topic), and decided:

- (1) Which titles (or stakeholder organisations) to monitor (keep) and which to cancel,
- (2) Who would be the designated scanner, and

- (3) Whether the title should come via the Clearinghouse or be received directly by staff.

While the system will never be perfect, it has greatly improved the efficiency of current awareness scanning by the team.

High visibility

The key to promoting the library and the librarian is to understand the information needs of your user groups, and position your services to best support their workflows. The WHV Clearinghouse librarian increases visibility by:

- Meeting annually with senior management
- to clarify current information priorities and needs, and pledge support –‘When you need published information - think library!’
- Ensuring that library planning is integrated with organisational planning and objectives.
- Attending team meetings
- Providing orientation to all new staff (a two-way conversation)
- discuss their role, and tailor the orientation to their needs
- Helping out during pressure points
- research support for submissions to government consultations
- proofreading document drafts and checking reference lists
- Providing user education for key information sources
- EndNote, Google Analytics, Clinicians Health Channel
- Assisting staff to monitor information in their specialty areas
- Set up Auto Alerts on bibliographic databases
- Circulate items of interest (within reason)

Powering up

There has never been a greater need for information experts to assist patrons to filter and ‘make sense’ of key information. An example of this is ‘Health News Daily’ – compiled primarily by the WHV Clearinghouse for over 10 years and emailed to 270 subscribers in the women’s health sector. This service puts the Clearinghouse in a trusted position at the very centre of information flows within WHV and to our community of interest.

A second example is the WHV ‘Clearinghouse Connector’ series. Each Connector contains a selection of free online full text resources that collectively provide an overview of a topic for example, ‘Sexualisation of women and girls’. The URLs for each resource take the user via the Clearinghouse catalogue to the full text on the external publisher website. This promotes increased awareness and uptake of library resources.

Another area of opportunity for librarians is to assist with managing organisational knowledge, especially anything involving citation data, taxonomy, classification, attention to detail, database fields, or searching and retrieval. Examples of this at WHV include:

- WHV website editing
- Assisting with mapping the new website site structure
- Thesaurus construction for any specialised subject area
- WHV in the media archive
- WHV publications archive
- Streamlining and renaming the file directory hierarchies within shared drives

Making an impact

In the same way that a hammer is a ‘must-have’ tool within every toolbox, you can aim to be an indispensable information asset for your organisation – visible and at-the-ready to add value to any ‘information project’ (big or small) that is ‘in the works’.