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## **The Proposed Manitoba Centre of Knowledge: A Revolutionary Approach to Building a Smart Community**

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I LINK THEREFORE I AM ? with appropriate apologies and acknowledgements to Rene Descartes, who in his own way, revolutionized the thinking of the modern world. Perhaps we are on the brink of a further revolution, a revolution created to a large degree by the internet, the effects of which we are just beginning to realize.

This paper is put forward as the philosophical underpinning and rationale for the proposed Manitoba Centre of Knowledge.

Last year in Victoria, we bemoaned the fact that when it came to libraries and the business community, there seemed to be two solitudes, and that in order for the libraries to succeed in getting additional funding for their many various projects it was urgent that the senior administrations of libraries go out of their way to communicate with the business community. That advice was based on the fact that funding for libraries has been the subject of reduction after reduction, and that the only source of additional funding (short of appealing to the general public directly for operating assistance) was the business community.

Conversely, on the side of the business community, it was discussed that it was high time they got involved with a very important community resource which has heretofore been neglected and left to public funding from the various civic communities in which they happened to be located.

Today it is time for chapter 2, in the crusade of how to involve your business community in the library of the future, because there is now, in my judgment, a unique opportunity for libraries to demonstrate their worth to the community. With that realization, and with the proper communication, might I suggest that libraries should be able to experience a renaissance that they were not expecting.

In presenting this paper I propose to relate particularly to Winnipeg/Manitoba conditions, but from what I have heard here in the past 2 days, I believe that the conditions which exist in Winnipeg are common across Canada. Hence, with small variations and allowing for individual differences, Winnipeg's proposed solutions may be transferable elsewhere.

GOING BACK HISTORICALLY: approximately 8 years ago, perhaps beginning with the Gulf War (if one needs a benchmark), a number of events seem to have coincided that are affecting libraries and what people expect of them. Why these events occurred at all or at the same time is really not known. Maybe it was sheer happenstance, but occur they did, and they changed the expectation of what people expect of libraries, perhaps forever.

We have all heard about the downsizing that corporations have been going through for the past decade. In my day, we called that being "laid off", while today it is euphemistically referred to as "downsizing". Of course, if it happened to you or a loved one, no matter what one called it, it meant you had lost your job.

The real difference with the last downsizing however, has been this time it affected not only the lower paid, hourly employees, but also the white collar, managerial and professional ranks.

Part of the reason was the recession and the general slow down in business. It was also partly caused by another creeping sickness (at least in the eyes of the employer): the runaway cost of employee benefits. At some point, in addition to one's salary, the cost of employee benefits in the form of added group insurance and extended medical policies, employment insurance, vacation with pay, pension benefits, etc. totaled on average about 30% above the pay package. Add to that the Courts' standard of allowing about one weeks pay for every year of employment in the event of termination of a permanent employee, and you start to get the picture. Full time employees are expensive to keep, and even more expensive to let go, so why hire them in the first place. The magic word became "contract work" and "contracting out".

So that even when the economy got rolling again (as it has now), there are fewer employees and more and more contract workers. When people got downsized, instead of sitting around and waiting to be re-hired at their jobs that disappeared, instead they began to fend for themselves and, for the lack of a better word, became "entrepreneurial". Many opened their own businesses and became their own bosses.

New businesses were therefore opening and hiring new employees of their own at a much greater pace than the businesses and governments that laid them off. For every job wiped out at a major factory in the mid-1990's, 1.5 jobs were produced in their place, mostly in small firms. This in turn also stimulated further innovation since it is well established that small firms (for various reasons probably due to their size, flexibility and creativity) innovate at roughly twice the rate of big firms.

To review then, this time around, the downsizing included to an unprecedented degree, managers and persons who were on career tracks, not simply hourly wage earners. And this time, due to the severance packages, many left their old jobs with pockets bulging looking for new opportunities. What occurred should not have been surprising: many became consultants, operating out of their homes or small offices. Many provided the very same services to their old employers (particularly as the business cycles improved and their services were suddenly required again), albeit on different employment terms. Now, the employees were no longer employees. They were independent, free-standing business people who had a much greater control over their own destinies! In fact, in losing the security of a pay cheque, they also lost with it the requirement that they follow orders or be at the mercy or whim of a boss. Now, they were free to set their own hours, operate out of whatever premises they wished, and take on whatever jobs they wished. They had the freedom to say "no" if a particular customer became difficult. So, in giving up security they gained a new-found freedom.

Multiply that by several hundred thousand Canadians, and you will see that a whole new industry was created.

And that was only part of the earthquake.

Add to that the larger number of single parent families where the parent looking after the children also has to work, and would rather have flexible hours and perhaps work at home. A perfect recipe for a contract worker ? control of his/her work flow, time, and he/she could still be at home when the children came home or were ill!! Contract work suited the single parent much better than having to arrive at a downtown office and have the hours dictated by the boss.

Finally, superimpose on that the fact that jobs and their demands are now constantly changing. People are being asked to work on computers on which they never had experience. People are being asked to do work which a few short years ago was non-existent. Who is to teach and re-train the work force? Large employers may do so, but at a price. Small employers either cannot afford to do so or are not capable. Besides, it does not pay a small company to gear up a training program for a small group. It is not economical. Employees in that situation are often left to their own resources, but where is the re-training to take place?

In the sum total, our society has to provide a place for that learning to take place, be it for the laid off worker, the contract worker or for the worker that needs retraining either to get back into the labour force, or to get a contract of his/her own.

What we are talking about fundamentally is the place to learn and accumulate what the Management Consulting firms know more about than anyone in our society, and that is ?Intellectual Capital?. Intellectual Capital is their stock in trade. It is what they sell.

Thomas A. Stewart in his seminal book on the subject: Intellectual Capital, The New Wealth of Organizations, described it succinctly as follows:

?Information and knowledge are the thermonuclear competitive weapons of our time. Knowledge is more valuable and more powerful than natural resources, big factories, or fat bankrolls. In industry after industry, success comes to the companies that have the best information or wield it most effectively ? not necessarily the companies with the most muscle. Walmart, Microsoft, and Toyota didn't become great companies because they were richer than Sears, IBM, and General Motors ? on the contrary. But they had something far more valuable than physical or financial assets. They had intellectual capital. ?

It will be the position of this paper that the comprehensive training or re-training (as the case may be) should take place at a location such as the proposed Centre of Knowledge, or some very similar place (for, in the end it does not matter what you call it ? what is important is its function).

We have a much greater demand for constant re-training than we have ever had before in human history. Change is perpetual. The private and public sectors both recognise the demand and are responding to it in their own separate ways. The question is: where and how should it be done? Is there a more efficient way? Should existing institutions perhaps get together with the private sector and co-operate in this new venture?

What is being done now is that the retraining can and does take place today in different settings, but it is disjointed and fragmented. How can the public sector know what the private sector needs by way of trained personnel if they do not communicate and co-operate? In fact, several existing institutions are competing one with the other to provide certain aspects of that retraining. There is expensive duplication. Yes, you can take continuing education courses either in the day or the evening. Yes, you can go to a library (and with some luck) find what you want, although the libraries are not particularly geared for it at present. Yes, you can try to find a government department that is involved in economic development and try to find an incubator and some money to pursue your new venture. But it is not under one roof. It is helter-skelter, and one has to know what one is looking for before pursuing it.

What we propose to have is a Centre of Knowledge, a sort of smorgasbord of available options, under one roof, at the present downtown site of the main Winnipeg Centennial Library. It would be not only be an expanded library, the Centre would have at its hub the main library. Adjoining that as a major and very important component would be the Market Driven Training Centre and Distance Education campus of Red River College, as well as the Continuing Education and Distance Education campus of the University of Winnipeg. Both recognized institutions already providing practical training for the new labour market. Various other provincial and city agencies dealing with economic development would also have a presence on the site. In the heart of the Millennium Library would be The Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre.

The concept behind the Centre of Knowledge is that we have multi-purpose buildings, encouraging joint uses. There are a number of synergies and efficiencies that occur as a result. From a patron's point of view, he/she would find everything under one roof: not unlike the regional shopping malls, where with one trip you can accomplish all your shopping. A one stop-shop.

We believe there are a great many synergisms to be had by having all the functions under one roof. While a great deal of duplication can be avoided (certainly each institution could avoid having its own separate library), perhaps the best argument for it is that central combined location would give citizens with similar interests the opportunity to meet and interact, not only amongst themselves, but also with educators, professionals and business types who will also be there (not unlike a mentor program).

While there is a larger and larger pool of people becoming entrepreneurial (for whatever reason, as described earlier), there have been simultaneous major developments in the world of technology which have also had a major impact on the change required of libraries.

It is very important to track those changes since they seem also to have started at about the time of the Gulf War, and have accelerated exponentially since then. These changes in technology include -

Overnight low cost package delivery; 24 hour-a-day photo copying services that include the latest technology for overhead slides, etc. and other audio-visual material that allow even the smallest businesses to prepare first class presentations; voice mail, cellular and satellite phones as well as beeper services that obviate the necessity of having an office staffed with receptionists

(virtual offices); national and international direct dial long distance service at economical prices; real-time desktop video conferencing that you can add for a mere \$160.00 to an existing computer; budget cost fax machines and low cost transmittal; supersaver fares that let you go from Winnipeg to Toronto and back for less than \$300.00. And of course, the substructure and superstructure of e-mail and the internet. How lives are being changed by them all!

In the same way that employees who were downsized came to realize it may have been the best thing that ever happened to them, with all the major changes in the technologies and their availability at low cost, these same people suddenly realize that in order to function like big companies they do not need all the technologies that only large corporations used to be able to afford. As the costs came down, everyone could afford a computer, with all its accompanying benefits. Everyone could afford long distance. Everyone could afford a virtual office, such that the other party has no idea whether the presentation was done at Kinko's the night before, or at the head office of a large corporation and prepared weeks in advance. Large and small companies were suddenly playing on the same level playing field and few consumers seemed to notice or care.

Where will these new entrepreneurs get their information? Where will they spend their days? Will they all stay home, as has been suggested by some?

With due respect, that has not been the historic pattern. People do not hibernate. As social beings, they like to get out of the house (if for no other reason, to keep the divorce rate down!). When one harkens back to the first days of television in Canada, it was widely predicted and even became the conventional wisdom, that movies and movie theatres would all become obsolete. They would vanish within months. Look around you now and you see more and more new movie houses being built. More and more movies being made. People still like to socialize. Attendance is at record levels.

If the Centre of Knowledge for example, has what the people need, that is where they will go. We simply have to know our market, and cater to it. Of course, in finding the market we have to be certain that the research is accurate and valid.

A recent interesting example in Winnipeg will give you an insight into how one should not take information and statistics at face value. Approximately one year ago, when we were about to set our goal for the Millennium Library campaign, we were urged to do a preliminary study to see whether our community was willing to fund an addition and renovation to our library. One of the ?selling points? we were exploring was whether the leaders of the business community felt they had a need for a modern, expanded Business Library (an extension of the Canada/Manitoba Business Service Centre). What came back from the study shocked us all.

Not a single one of the 20 or so senior business executives interviewed believed there was any need for a business library since they personally would not use it! Well, it turned out that several months prior to the survey, the Canada and Manitoba business centres had (at great expense) moved from their locations in offices high above the streets to a retail location in the middle of a high traffic business area. They almost immediately doubled and almost tripled the number of visits.

The question then became: who were these patrons who were coming through the front door if

they were not the business leaders who had been interviewed.

Luckily for us, the statistics were available in fine detail since the Canada /Manitoba Business Service Centre continued with its practice of having people sign in (for security reasons, no doubt) before they could enter. The surprise was that a number of senior employees and management consultants who were preparing reports for the very business executives who said there was no need for the Business Centre, were among its biggest users! So much for surveys and how careful one has to be in analyzing them.

Who were the balance of the users? There were many male and female entrepreneurs (some getting ready to go into business for the first time), students, small businessmen and of course, the researchers. By far the largest users however, were people who would call themselves ?consultants?. They were packaging information, often on assignment, and were using the Business Centre as the source of the raw data.

In the end, as you know, once we straightened out the mystery of the non-users, we opted for a campaign from the public in the range of \$7-\$10 million. In doing so we kept in mind that there is a whole new category of user out there.

To whom are we really catering in expanding the library and establishing a centre of knowledge? Or, to put it in marketing terms, who is our target market?

First, a few overall observations about what is happening as a result of the information glut, for that is what it is. As the amount of information being made available approaches epidemic proportions (it is doubling and tripling now at a frightening rate), the response has been a tendency for disciplines to specialize, sub-specialize and then to further sub-specialize. As the subject matter of various disciplines become more and more specialized, it can be seen that different areas of knowledge come to be isolated. No matter that doctors and accountants cannot not speak the same language. Doctors in different specialties can almost no longer understand each other.

This could be referred to as DIVERGENCE. It is created by too much knowledge and information. How should it be handled?

Some people in the marketing business came to regard each divergence as a separate segment and began positioning their products for each separate niche, hence the term ?niche marketing?. Find out what each little niche needs, fill it and start a new business, was the advice being given. It came to be in their interest to encourage divergence.

Of course, with divergence comes segmentation and with segmentation comes fragmentation. Something is lost, and that is the variety and the opportunity for people in different disciplines to mix with people with different ideas. Is a doctor going to be a better doctor if he only takes science courses, for example, and neglects the arts? Will he be a better doctor if he associates only with other doctors who happen to practice only in the same specialty? Perhaps something should be said for the benefits of mixing and encouraging the cross-fertilization of specialties and ideas since it is pretty well acknowledged that a great deal of creative thinking comes from the very process of having people from diverse disciplines and backgrounds meet, inter-relate and compare notes.

As the world of technology gravitates toward CONVERGENCE, namely the same delivery system for C.D. Roms, Television, Computers, Audio, telephone and cable, there is a corresponding underlying rationale to combine educational services that were traditionally separate. Convergence in the field of continuing education, so to speak.

At the present time, continuing education courses (sponsored for the most part by universities and colleges) have many and varied separate programs. They often over-lap, and are sometimes redundant. It is highly inefficient for example, to have three or four ESL programs in a City with low immigration, where all the classes have low attendance. With limited resources, better to have a greater variety than to have duplication.

Similarly, if it is conceded that a Business Library should be in a high traffic location, why not locate it in a place most convenient for its potential users? If small business is the target market, why not provide them with the first class access to the latest technology and information relevant to their business, at the same location. Encourage them as well not only to interact with each other, but also to meet their corresponding academic professionals in the field. Academic marketing professors would do well to meet people actually doing marketing. They have much to teach each other, and bringing them all together can only be beneficial to them both.

Indeed, why not have business incubators as an integral part of the Centre? Why not go further and invite the financial institutions to set up small offices or kiosks and pitch their wares to their potential customers? Why not have the government departments most closely associated with encouraging business development right there on the spot to meet with their client customers?

The importance of the internet in communication -

When computers first came on the scene with the introduction of the ENIAC at the University of Pennsylvania in 1946, it was first being promoted as a speedy way of doing calculations for ballistic missiles that had to be programmed in flight. No person could do the correcting calculations fast enough to keep track of and guide the missile. Only a warehouse full of vacuum tubes could, and so it went of course, until the invention and implementation of the transistor. Since then, we have been downsizing and miniaturizing transistor to the point where what would have taken a 40 story building to house, now only takes the size of a desk top computer.

However, as it turned out, computers could not only compute quicker, they also spot patterns quicker. Thus, one of the main human cognitive functions, being able to identify codes and patterns, was delegated to the computer.

Finally, as the technology surrounding the e-mail and the internet developed, there has been added a totally new dimension to the computer, one that no one would have predicted even a decade ago, at the beginning of the Gulf War. We refer of course, to the communications revolution it has brought about.

What is emerging as the real revolution is the ability to send e-mail and even speak to anyone on the globe at almost no cost. My friends in the business community tell me that we are on the

verge of using the internet for commerce on a massive scale. Commercial web sites are being added daily by the thousands. The speed of commerce and of communication in the professions has accelerated noticeably in the past 2-3 years alone.

Friends in the medical profession tell me that many of their medical journals are now online and instead of receiving them monthly or bi-monthly, they are now updated weekly or even daily in some cases, all via the internet. The internet articles often have the e-mail addresses of their authors, and sometimes the authors even took the time to have their material placed on a web site, making it exceedingly easy to communicate directly with the author. Hence, there can be almost instant communication amongst doctors world-wide, on any subject. Unlike the past, when doctors waited for annual conventions or used their professional journals to bring discoveries to the fore, now doctors are comparing notes world-wide the day after they made their discoveries, both large and small!

In the field of law, judgements in western Canada are now coming via the internet. It is likely that there will not be sufficient demand for the paper version of these publications for their publishers to bother with a small run, the market already being so tiny. Paper law reports are probably on a short life. This has all occurred within the last 2 to 3 years!

How does that affect libraries and what they do?

DRAMATICALLY, to say the least. In fact, it is not hard to over-emphasize the impact.

Perhaps the best guide to understanding the impact of the new communications revolution comes from Marshall MacLuhan, the Canadian communications guru extraordinaire (and an ex-Winnipeg, I might add) who died some 20 years ago.

He still seems to have summed it up best. Of course, we should remember that when he died, e-mail and the internet were not yet part of the public domain as it is today. His predictions and observations were based on a comparison of the earlier technologies, the wireless, print and radio, print and television.

‘The Medium is the Message’, ‘The Global Village’, ‘The media is an extension of our nervous system’: ‘the media has the effect of creating the immediacy of participation in the existence of others’. These were all his, and most were crafted in the 50’s and 60’s.

Based on what must have been an instinctive comprehension of the effect of media on the community, he argued as early as the 1960’s, that the communications revolution would soon be upon us and that it would result in everyone become part of one global village, getting more and more intimately involved in each other’s lives.

That has of course proven itself out in spades. It is frightening now to note how accurate his predictions have been, not as much about the effect of television on our lives, but more with respect to the effect of the internet on our lives.

One need only go to the recent reporting of the war in Kosovo to know that the KLA got its story out via the internet. It was picked up by hundreds of individuals sitting at their home



computer terminals all over the world. These individuals were instrumental in releasing the stories of atrocities to the Press, whereupon it became an issue that was reported world-wide, thereby focusing public opinion in favour of the victims. Probably the first example of a small pressure group getting their story out via the internet and catching world attention. Considering its success, we can only be certain that this tactic will probably be repeated by other minorities seeking attention for their perceived or legitimate grievance. Without in any way commenting on the merits of the Kosovo case or any other case for that matter, my only observation is that free and open access to the internet as a tool for attention certainly beats the more traditional way of attracting world attention normally resorted to by terrorists.

AS AN ASIDE: CAN YOU IMAGINE WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED TO THE IDEAS OF AN ICONOCLAST SUCH AS KARL MARX HAD HE HAD ACCESS TO THE TECHNOLOGY OF THE INTERNET WHEN HE WAS STUDYING AND FORMULATING HIS THOUGHTS AT THE BRITISH MUSEUM?

What impact has this technology had in our daily lives? What impact can we reasonably predict it will have in the foreseeable future? Today, less than 5 years or so into the universal availability of the internet, according to a recent feature story in Time Magazine on the subject, more than 40% of our teenagers already check their e-mail either before they go to school in the morning, or at school (if they have no computer at home).

This is an immense and sudden new development. There is a whole new subculture that is developing around the internet, and it is being adopted by our children en masse. As we venture into it, we have cannot know where it will lead us.

All that we know for certain is that it is a new form of communication with which the next generation is very comfortable. Should we ignore it, or should we embrace it and also make it our own? Do we have any thing to gain/lose by adopting it? What should we do to adjust, if we chose to do so? That will be the subject of the balance of this paper.

The internet, provides a rapid delivery of information plus instant or virtual communication. Whether the information the internet provides is accurate or not is become a major issue. There are no editors on the internet. Subject to the existing laws dealing with defamation and copyright, anyone may transmit anything they wish, without prior screening or editing. Suddenly everyone is free to be a publisher, but the editor is gone. That in itself is an extraordinary development.

There is no one to distinguish the correct information from the false, to separate the good material from the bad, the wheat from the chaff. Try typing into the directory or search engine of your choice almost any subject (say, "solar system?") and thousands if not hundreds of thousands of sites will suddenly be available to you. What the engine comes back with by way of responses will also surprise you.

SLIDE

In fact, having done so in preparation for this talk last week, under the words "solar system?" on altavista.digital.com., there were 123,263 web sites entered. What was surprising however was listing number 8, which dealt with a ubiquitous sex site. Not knowing how sex got listed under "solar system?" (honest, I did it for the sake of science), the engine came back with: "if

*you want to meet girls from out of this world?..?.*

I was then tempted to look at the heading "constellations", but it occurred to me that "STELLAR BEAUTIES" was bound to show up, so I terminated my searching.

So much for the importance of editing, and also a lesson on how some people already know how to infiltrate a web site category with a little creative thinking!

Anyway, back to the serious topic:

Where does one start with this explosion of information? Who is to guide us through the searching of the internet, who can provide us with the best sites in the quickest time?

In my judgment, LIBRARIES must recapture their traditional role as the primary reliable providers of information. Librarians must get involved as leaders not followers in dealing with this new information delivery system. If they do not, I fear they may lose their most important reason for being, namely their duty and ability to help the public find the information they seek, in an efficient way.

There is a distinct possibility that the private sector could get interested and become major players here, just as they have become major players in providing books via the mega-bookstores and the sale of books via the internet. In economics we are taught that no monopoly is forever, and if the delivery system we have in place does not keep up with the times, it is certain that people will find other ways to achieve their needs.

Our thesis is that librarians are uniquely trained (in the past, primarily in the print world), and should now become the experts in electronic information retrieval. Librarians are not and should not become the equivalent of the sales clerks in the mega bookstores. They have a much more important function to fulfill.

No matter how much proliferation there will be of computers, and no matter if every household has one (as is already being predicted as the prices comes down), the fact is that getting reliable and accurate information from the internet on a timely basis will be a major challenge for us all. Never mind training our patrons to do a simple search. That is a given. Remember, in the traditional libraries, people could always find books themselves too. And yet there was a need for the librarians. Today, with the huge number of web sites and the dreadful information overload that most of us are subject to, we will need help to find what we are looking for more than ever. There are already more web sites in the world, I suggest, than there are books. We are speaking now of more and more complex situations, all created by the information glut.

What will happen the day a teenager walks into the library and says he/she wishes some information about several careers the youngster wishes to explore? The internet will not supply that automatically. It will need the intervention of a professional.

What will happen the day that a senior wishes some help researching some medical treatment? Again, although there are thousands and thousands of websites, a trained librarian will be able to help.

The need for good, well-trained librarians will not diminish, we suggest. In fact, it may increase our need for their special skills. Their jobs will change, of necessity. Instead of searching print, they will search electronically. However, their function will remain the same.

What will be the skills required of the new-age librarian?

Certainly the traditional ability to discover what it is that the patron is looking for (a skill often compared to the art of cross-examination in complexity), added to which the librarian must have the capacity to find what is being sought, in the least possible amount of time. Instead of scanning the Dewey Decimal System, one would have to become skilled at Boolean search techniques, etc., such that in time librarians may have a select list of the best web sites in certain categories that are most often requested.

This may require some retraining for existing librarians, and it may require some changes to the courses in the library schools that are now training the next generation of librarians. Still, we suggest that it is a recipe for survival, and perhaps the only one there is.

In the same way that many new library patrons are already entrepreneurial or becoming entrepreneurial, the librarians serving them will either have to become more entrepreneurial in their approach themselves or alternatively gain a better understanding of what motivates entrepreneurial behaviour.

In 1962, Abraham Maslow, the renowned Psychologist who dealt primarily with human motivation, had the following to say about entrepreneurs:

?The most valuable one hundred people to bring into a deteriorating society?..would not be one hundred chemists, or politicians, or professors, or engineers, but rather one hundred entrepreneurs.?

Joseph Schumpeter, the Austrian-American economist (1883-1950) who did much of the pioneering work on economic entrepreneurial behaviour, emphasized the role of the entrepreneur in stimulating investment and innovation. What made entrepreneurs different from the others?

He believed that entrepreneurs distinguished themselves from others in that they were agents of change and did not fear causing what he termed ?creative destruction?.

By Schumpeter?s definition, creative destruction occurred when innovation made old ideas and technologies obsolete. CREATIVE DESTRUCTION OCCURED WHEN INNOVATION MADE OLD IDEAS AND TECHNOLOGIES OBSOLETE.

That is what is happening in the world around us, and that is what is happening at the library: creative destruction! There should be nothing to fear, so long as we understand what is happening and make an effort to adapt. It is quite a challenge!

Conclusion:

The comprehensive United Kingdom Report on Libraries, entitled *New Library: The People's Network*, published in November of 1997 by the British Task Force was established to map out the future of libraries in the United Kingdom for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They recommended that all libraries in Britain go online as soon as possible, and that they be inter-connected. Sums in the billions of pounds should be allocated immediately to accomplish the task, was also their recommendation.

The Task Force concluded that to do so was essential to the economy of the country and, in fact, the only way in which the British economy could compete favourably in the European Common Market. This blue ribbon panel, consisting of leading educators, economists and businessmen (very practical people), all concluded that continuing education was the key to economic survival, and that libraries (amongst other institutions) were the key to that survival.

Two quotes from that Report, if I may:

Prime Minister Tony Blair, in his preface, had the following to say:

“The information superhighway should not just benefit the affluent or the metropolitan. Just as in the past books were a chance for ordinary people to better themselves, in the future online education will be a route to better prospects. But just as books are available from public libraries, the benefits of the superhighway must be there for everyone. This is a real chance for equality of opportunity.”

From the Report itself:

“Tomorrow's new library will be a key segment in enabling people of all ages to prosper in the information society -- helping them to acquire new skills for employment, use information creatively, and improve the quality of their lives. Libraries will play a central role in the University for Industry, in lifelong learning projects, and in support of any individual who undertakes self-development.”

Finally, from a parallel Canadian study (which, not surprisingly, can be found online at [strategis.ic.gc.ca](http://strategis.ic.gc.ca)), as part of their work entitled: *Moving Canada into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*:

“Public libraries are identified as places where people can gain the skills that they need to play a part on the information superhighway. The first scenario of how this might happen is an extension of the access point role whereby the library acts as the means through which people get access to the training provided over the information superhighway. The second scenario is librarians themselves providing the training which will be required.”

Sounds to me like an eloquent argument for a Centre of Knowledge! Our case rests.