Get Smart! Economic Development, Libraries & Smart Communities 1999

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Session 6B

Libraries, Internet, Community Development in Canada; An Assessment of What?s Working, What?s Not, and Why

**?Professional Attitudes and Institutional Postures Required if
Libraries are to Meet the Challenge of Community Development using Internet
Technologies?**

A paper presented by GC Salmers.

Sometimes, attending an conference such as this as a member of the
audience,
I have trouble identifying the presenter, where they are from, work, and the
connection these have with the conference theme. I hope the short
biographical notes given just now help you connect me with the conference
theme. I sense I have a unique perspective to offer this event, and it wasn?t
until recently that became clear to me. My experience comes from the grass
roots level in Estevan, Saskatchewan, serving a small prairie city with 11,000
people
as a public librarian. At the same time, I have regional, provincial, and national
responsibilities. In these roles I have travelled widely in Canada. As a result, I
have begun to see commonalties in the role of libraries in economic develop,
and have also come to see the uniqueness of efforts in various parts of the
country. I have enjoyed several roles with Industry Canada, and enjoy steady
grow in interaction with the educational community. It is this unusual
perspective that I hope to share with you today.

In my travels I have witnessed a tension among librarians concerning Internet,
changing library roles, and the appropriateness of involvement with economic
development in particular. I hope to show in this paper that this tension is
unnecessary. That it is as James Clavell wrote in Shogun, a ?complaint?,
which in turn is a sign of weakness. And finally, that this weakness can be
overcome by revisiting our roots, and then more boldly advocating and
working for traditional goals.

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At the start of this century, libraries had as their roots elements of economic development. Hamilton Public Library, as did other libraries, grew out of a Mechanics Institute, a service designed to re-tool agrarian labourers for urban trades. In Estevan, a need for another aspect of community development was espoused by the local branch of the Womens? Christian Temperance Union, when it asked Town Council for a facility to house the free lending library. Their hope was that library service would serve to improve the esteem of and opportunities for women, and reduce the frequency of violence in family environments.

Recent discussions within Saskatchewan Association of Community Networks have focused on whether economic development is an acceptable part of community development. I argue economic development is one part of community development, and it is up to the community to ensure that economic development occur with a ?social conscience?. I bring this up because the opportunity before libraries today is very broad in its scope, and a key part of that opportunity concerns economic development. Many library customers, and many librarians don?t visualize economic development, or even community development as a library role. So what are the opportunities for Libraries involving Internet today?

While most of us would associate Industry Canada with economic development, it has stated goals which show a shift toward a broader ambition of community development. Industry Canada?s Connecting Canadians strategy involves several thrusts, for example. Among these are Canada Online, Smart Communities, Canadian Content Online, Electronic Commerce, Canadian Governments Online, Connected Canada to the World. A full description of Connecting Canadians can be seen at www.ic.gc.ca . In each of
these six ?pillars?, libraries have a legitimate role, and in my view, ought to be assuming a leadership role.

The first initiative, Canada Online, involves the Community Access Program(CAP), an initiative in which libraries throughout Canada have found a natural role as principal partner with school boards and municipal councils to provide public Internet access, education and entertainment. With Urban CAP occurring this year, this opportunity will intensify for libraries. Another aspect of Canada Online is VolNet, which intends to connect 10,000 voluntary organizations to Internet by the end of the year. Libraries have always had an affinity for interaction with the voluntary sector, and the voluntary sector has always had an important role in community development.

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Smart Communities will enhance community economic, social and cultural development by ?empowerment of community residents and institutions so that better health care delivery, better education and training, and better

business growth can be achieved.? Note that Industry Canada through Smart Communities has expressed an interest in community development beyond economic development to include social and cultural development. If libraries overlook this and maintain a posture of having insufficient resources to be creative in their work in this regard, a beautiful opportunity will have been missed.

Canadian Content Online includes digitizing heritage resources and making these available to Canadians locally and citizens everywhere, online. This is another natural area of endeavour for libraries. It is also offers library-based employment opportunities through funding available via Canadian Library Association and Young Canada Works in Heritage Institutions. Estevan Public Library and many others have digitized local genealogy, historical content, some of which highlights struggles pertaining to economic development. The opportunities in this area are endless, and yet attainable in large or small projects for large and small institutions. Examples of this work can be seen at http://www.schoolnet.ca/collections.

Community Store Fronts, an Industry Canada e-commerce promotion, involves encouraging small businesses to sell their products and services in real time via Internet. It also invited the not-for-profit sector to use Internet to garner their contributions online. Some libraries have been involved in this work by doing the recruiting, providing the venue for training, and promoting the opportunity among the businesses in their community. Another logical role is for libraries to offer vendor and consumer awareness workshops about e-commerce issues such as privacy, encryption, and security. The details about this initiative can be seen at communitystorefronts.com . Libraries have an opportunity with e-commerce to strengthen connections with and service to their community?s business sector.

Canadian Governments Online will strengthen connections between citizens and government, an activity which is strongly related to the value of public library service in a democracy, as exemplified by Canadian Library Association?s Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In particular, Canadian Governments Online will make business information more readily available through regionalized Business Resource Centres and online access. In Saskatchewan, the provincial government has taken steps to permit ?one stop business registration? or OSBR at local kiosks, a service which will be Internet-deliverable soon. This activity can be occurring in a public library environment just as many urban libraries have

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traditionally offered excellent print business resources. Saskatchewan?s Queen?s Printer is making legislation and regulations available online to libraries, greatly improving the speed, accuracy and quality of library responses to enquiries of that nature in even the smallest communities. While this is happening many libraries have very few public access terminals or none at all.

Connected Canada to the World hopes to make a connected Canada available internationally. In business this has obvious, serious consequences for our economic development. There are demonstrated advantages in tourism. In Estevan, since the library manages the City?s official web presence, and has made available a wide range of content, the library receives, answers or routes numerous enquiries about hotel accommodation, housing, camping facilities, land development fees, and so on. In this role the library is an information ?utility? for the City as a corporation. It is perfectly legitimate for a public library to digitize, update their community?s economic profile, then answer or route incoming enquiries from developers, tourists, consumers. It is very gratifying to generate over 100,000 hits per month on the City web site cap.estevan.sk.ca, for a community of 11,000 people.

This list of opportunities is written from the perspective of Industry Canada?s Connecting Canadians strategy. This is just one perspective, and yet shows numerous, creative, and natural ways libraries can be central to community development in the broadest sense, and economic development specifically. It also shows how librarianship, provision of service using electronic tools, and Internet, are bringing excellent economic development roles to the forefront for libraries.

In my experience and in the opinion of people who travel widely in Canada, it is the small and medium size library institutions which have been able to respond quickly to the convergence of library service, Internet and community development. In the examples which follow, I will attempt to show why this is so by discussing the institutional postures and professional attitudes which result in successful community development efforts.

Southeast Regional Library in Saskatchewan automated all 50 of its branches using Internet. This platform allowed the staff and the institution to see the Community Access Program as a productive step. At first the result of CAP was simple access buttressed with Internet training. A deeper result was partnering between libraries and Regional Economic Development Authorities(REDAs), municipal councils, voluntary organizations, Chambers of Commerce, educational institutions, and tourism authorities.

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Once CAP projects have met the initial goals of access and training, the opportunity to create local web content becomes more feasible and attractive. With very little strain, libraries in the region have become centres for access, training, web page creation and skill development, and enhanced government information. All of this lends itself well to participation in community economic development activities. To achieve this the Regional Library engaged in an ambitious and courageous redefinition of staff roles and found innovative ways to improve service using Internet technologies.

Estevan Branch assumed a leadership position in a vibrant CAP project, hosted

the first Connecting Canadians Day, and became a recruiter for Community Store Fronts. The Librarian sits on a ?Stakeholders? Committee? which meets to discuss ways to attract new businesses, encourage entrepreneurs, and promote our strengths. These achievements, in hindsight, were possible because staff were given the administrative and fiscal latitude to pursue creative ideas. It is apparent that many librarians feel confined by their job description, institutional policies, level of staffing, or funding. With enduring federal financial support for CAP, digitization, and student employment, funding is available.

In Estevan, strong collaboration was achieved between two library boards, five school boards, Estevan Economic Development Board, and City Council. The library brokered the initial meeting of 23 groups. The library took on the technical challenges of the project, hosting the backbone of the Municipal Area Network which now links over 700 computers in 21 sites in 8 communities. The Librarian does the day-to-day system maintenance, financial and other administration for the Project. We are now pursuing use of Internet in ESL, literacy, labour pool skill development, GED, and adult education generally. One result of this engagement is that the Librarian meets with the Transitions group, and is a member of the local Community Advocates for Employment or CAFÉ committee.

Another example of an adventurous community project is County of Oxford Integrated Network(COIN) in Ontario. John Moore, Manager of the project, has been able to develop partnerships with County of Oxford, City of Woodstock, the Community Access Program, London?s largest community network LARG*net, Network 2000, Oxford County Tourist Association, HRDC, Oxford Economic Development, Fanshawe College FUTUREnet, fire and police departments. Funding for the work was received from the Province of Ontario Telecommunications Access Partnerships(TAP), HRDC, local government and private sector partners. TAP is intended to help schools, hospitals, libraries, and non-profit organizations meet networking goals.

COIN provides high-speed links between 8 municipal offices, online catalogue functions for 19 libraries, access to a GIS system called ?Land Related Information System? . Information Access Oxford, an HRDC funded network, has been incorporated into COIN. FUTUREnet at Fanshawe College provides Internet-based education through Maritrain Limited and other applications. FUTUREnet offers college level courses at local public libraries. ?Now people can acquire skills using interactive software with digitized photos, graphics and sound with curriculum specifically written for Canadians?, says Maritrain President Tim Alison.

In COIN, we can see a library as catalyst and facilitator linking existing networks and linking individual citizens with government, businesses to municipalities, and permitting communities to work in regional groupings to further community

development. It is a good example of library goals moving very nicely with a wide range of community goals, using Internet technologies. Their web site http://www.ocl.net/ offers the viewer library catalogues, help finding a job through free use of Job Bank computers in the library, information about the Community Access Program, HRDC computer classes, and about 30 voluntary sector and municipal web sites. COIN has received an award this week at the Ontario Public Service Quality Fair for service and innovation in the delivery of government information and services at rural branch libraries.

Another interesting project is occurring in Nova Scotia. Eight sites, some of which are libraries, some in CAP communities, offer labour pool skill development and transition training using Maritrain?s Invest Learning. The project pilots the use of Internet-based software products for skills assessment and academic upgrading.
Partners in the Project are HRDC, Central Nova Industry Education Council, Maritrain Limited, and the communities of Colchester, Cumberland, and Pictou counties, as well as North Sydney; Nova Scotia Departments of Community Services, Economic Development and Tourism, and the Science and Technology Secretariat.

?Our mission at HRDC is to enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community. This project is one example of how, by working in partnership, we can bring some skills training to people in rural communities to help them compete in the workforce,? said Charles Dixon, Consultant, Strategic Alliances, representing HRDC. John Henry, Central Nova Industry Education Council said, ?Our main objective is to link education and work, by helping students make a transition from school to the workplace. This project will help the students focus on learning the skills needed for specific jobs. It will help students still in the traditional education system as well as unemployed youth and individuals receiving employment insurance or social assistance.?

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The Nova Scotia project is called COINS, not to be confused with Oxford County?s COIN! Details about the Nova Scotia pilot and the comments quoted above, can be obtained at http://www.maritrain.com/main.html .

In British Columbia, the community of Lumby is in the developmental stages of opening the Monashee Centre, a one stop learning, training and opportunity center. Lumby has been hit hard by the decline of the forest resource sector, and in February of 1999 the local Weyerhauser mill closed, displacing 133 workers, plus affecting numerous indirect jobs. The Monashee Centre will consist of a child care facility; a local products store (The Monashee Store); Open
Learning Agency; Community Futures Office; Chamber of Commerce; Crossroads- an alternate educational facility; Okanagan University College, online and post-secondary learning; White Valley Community Resource Centre which provides social support services; Cybercafe, a gathering place and training centre for food services, and access to federal and provincial services.

Discussions are now underway to have the local library relocate from its present location and become part of the Monashee Center.

The Monashee Center is a project that had been identified by the community, through its "Community Adjustment Team" or "CAT" process, using inclusive community driven process. The CAT team process is an excellent example of what one community has done to take control over its future, through community development and collaborative action. The community of Lumby has its own web site - Lumby, the Virtual Village www.monashee.com, developed by local citizens. The CAT team's reports can be found at www.monashee.com/cat/finalreport.html.

Harry Adam, a school principal, CAP champion, e-commerce advocate, community builder and friend, has led this effort.

The benefits of these projects for the libraries involved, and for the communities in question, are clear. Yet so many libraries have done very little to offer Internet access, training, and integrate library service goals with community development.

By example, we can see partnering is a key institutional habit. I believe this habit is the principal benefit of the Community Access Program. Libraries without this habit will, by definition, be excluded from essential developments which will ensure the esteem of library service in the next few years. Our interaction with
partners needs to go beyond simply jointly supporting a common goal. We need to be working intensely with other institutions in full collaboration as a routine behaviour.

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Another habit libraries rarely exhibit, and perhaps with good reason, is risk-taking. Libraries, by law in some jurisdictions, are prohibited from taking financial risks. However, I sense as a profession librarians need to incorporate a more adventurous attitude toward new initiatives. In order for this to occur, library boards may need to soften the delineation of employee job descriptions to allow librarians to take on unconventional community roles. And librarians, rather than maintaining an attitude of ?I?ll start something new when I get new funding?, need to initiate innovative projects involving community development and simultaneously go after sustaining revenue based on demonstrated successes and project value to the community.

At Canadian Library Association?s 1998 Conference in Victoria, I heard librarians say they have no time, money, or staff to meet the challenges of public Internet access, training, and the wide range of opportunities ancillary to that access. In my view these are the three wrong answers. After all, as I hope is demonstrated in this paper, these apparently ?new? roles are actually central to what we are supposed to be doing in our communities whether viewed traditionally or from the standpoint of the electronic age.

In my travels across Canada, I have noticed another aspect of successful projects that warrants attention here today. Most projects involve a cluster of partners, a variety of institutions. Yet most of the time I see a single individual co-ordinating the work, linking the partners, advocating for the project?s central concepts, and providing this leadership over an extended period of time. It took
me a while to notice this, yet I?ve come to believe that embodiment of the work in a single individual may be a pre-requisite to success.

Just a short note now, about what doesn?t work. It is natural when a group of potential partners meet, for a sort of jockeying for position to occur. A suspicious
eyeballing of the others around the table. However, if institutional territoriality is a main motivation, the project will likely fail. Institutions encumbered with layers of
internal rigidity will also have great difficulty moving ahead or responding quickly. In a world dominated by computing and Internet we can no longer plan for two years, for by then all the parameters will have changed. Our decision-making needs to be very swift. An individual needs to be assigned the responsibility of shepherding the work, and where this is lacking, I find no one will lead and project fizzle out to their least exciting, lowest level of achievement. Attitude seems to be everything. We need to be tolerant of staff from other institutions working in our space. We need to accept that decisions made in other institutions will impact us financially. And sometimes we will need to accept that we will commence our work without secure funding at the outset. Where attitude is negative in these areas, little gets done.

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While our decision-making does need to be quick, and our funding less traditional, let me also assert that successful projects have sound fiscal plans which sustain short but well-considered bursts of work. Sustainability has become a new, albeit awkward, word in librarianship as far as public Internet access and community development are concerned.

In summary, librarians need to exhibit a pattern of partnering in which intense, collaborative efforts can be developed. Further, we have a legitimate, proper, tradition-based role to be leading community development using Internet technologies. Our key role may be to act as a ?neutral ground? for the human networking which forms the active ingredient of community networking. We will need to be bold, and to show a greater willingness to take risks. To be successful, we may need to assign to a single individual the responsibility of project leadership and constancy over an extended period of time. A key institutional attribute will be the ability to allow staff to assume new or unusual roles and afford them fiscal and administrative latitude to do the work. With this approach
I believe we can turn complaint into suggestion and action, fulfilling our long cherished traditional mandate using the latest tools.

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