

Executive Summary

The purpose of this business plan is to address the decline in library usage by the local population. Borrower numbers have been on the decline for several years as people see the local library service as irrelevant. The growth of the internet as a forum for obtaining information has played a part in this decline. Consequently, in order for the service to prosper, new opportunities need to be explored and new services developed to make the service relevant in the digital age. The development of e-books provides just such an opportunity.

The introduction of e-books into the library service has a number of benefits, particularly in relation to the objectives of the authority. It can help to connect borrowers who are unable to access library services due to mobility issues as well as those with visual impairments. It is also of benefit to those who work throughout the day and do not have the time to visit their local library, as well as those that already utilise the authority's online resources. E-books present an opportunity to meet the challenges that the public library faces in the twenty-first century.

The growth in the usage of online resources suggests that there is already a large computer literate market that would be interested in the introduction of an e-book service. The growth in usage of the internet amongst the young also suggests that e-books should be considered a serious long-term proposition. Furthermore, the interest created by recent developments in e-book readers indicates that consumer demand is increasing.

In order to finance the service, a bid would be made for funding with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. If that were to fail, there is the possibility of a transferral of funding from non-fiction stock to e-books. The cost to the authority of introducing this service would be £2,518.70 over the course of the first year.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Kent County Council is a local authority which currently runs 106 libraries throughout Kent (except Medway, which is run by a separate authority). The libraries are divided into twelve districts, comprising: Ashford, Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Gravesend, Maidstone, Sevenoaks, Shepway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. With a population of 1,369,900 people (CIPFA Stats, 2007 – see Appendix 1), Kent County Council provides a library service that is within two miles for 90% of the public (Kent County Council, n.d.). According to the latest figures, there are nearly 300,000 active borrowers (those that have borrowed a book in the last twelve months) spread across the county and there have been over seven million visits to Kent libraries in the period 2006/7 (Kent County Council, n.d.).

In April 2006, the libraries came under the Communities directorate. The directorate comprises over 3,000 members of staff working in over 200 locations across the county (Hill & Honey, 2006). The directorate also includes Kent Adult Education services, Archives and Cultural Development.

1.2 Mission Statement

The authority's mission is:

‘to enhance the quality of life for all Kent’s residents and communities, by stimulating lifelong imagination, exploration and discovery.’

(See Appendix 2)

1.3 Main Activities

The main activity of the library is the provision of fiction and non-fiction for the general public. However, Kent libraries also provide a number of other services for the local population. As part of the People’s Network initiative, computers have been made available in all of the public libraries across Kent. The public access PCs

provide access to numerous programs, including Microsoft Word, Excel and Internet Explorer. Members of the public can book onto a computer for up to one hour a day by showing their library card to a member of staff, who then books them on to an available terminal. For members of the public who lack the confidence in using the computers, there are volunteers available once a week to provide support and help to develop their skills.

The library also offers many other services via its website. The website contains links to the online catalogue which enables borrowers to find books, set reservations, renew books and write reviews. The website also provides many online resources, including the Encyclopaedia Britannica, the Dictionary of National Biography and resources to research family history. These online activities have proven very popular and the website has seen unique visitors (visitors that are only counted once over a twenty four hour period) rise from 209,259 in 2005 to 454,042 in 2006 (CIPFA Stats, 2007 – see Appendix 3).

Despite a steady decline in the issuing of lending stock, there has been a big rise in the usage of the online services. Members of the public are increasingly taking advantage of the online catalogue to make reservations, renew books and utilise the on-line resources.

2 Organisational Assessment

<p style="text-align: center;">Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Large borrower base○ Online catalogue○ Unique service○ Authority's reputation○ High number of unique visits website.	<p style="text-align: center;">Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Reliant on funding○ Declining library usage○ Public perception○ Low level of issues
<p style="text-align: center;">Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ New technology○ Growth in use of on-line services.	<p style="text-align: center;">Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Cheap books widely available○ Cuts to funding○ Shift in political priorities○ Growth in internet usage

2.1 Strengths

Kent County Council currently has a large borrower base with nearly 300,000 borrowers across the county. It has a successful online catalogue that has seen increased usage over the past twelve months. Furthermore, the authority is ranked seventh out of twenty-three authorities for unique visits to the on-line library services. The Council also has a very good reputation having obtained the maximum four star rating as a result of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (*Councils top performance league, 2007*).

2.2 Opportunities

There is a growth in new technologies to support reading. Amazon's recently launched e-book reader, Kindle, sold out within hours of its release (*Amazon Kindle sells out on debut*, 2007). The interest generated by a new competitor in the market suggests potential for growth and an opportunity to develop new services in response to this growth. There is also an opportunity to build on the success of the online catalogue. Large numbers of borrowers are already using this service and are familiar with how the service operates. There is an opportunity to utilise this base to develop more services for the public.

2.3 Weaknesses

There has been a general trend away from using library services. Borrowing and library visits have been generally declining across the service (CIPFA Stats, 2007 - see Appendix 4). The service is also heavily reliant on funding and projects need to be approved by councillors before it can get the go ahead. Furthermore, the public have a negative perception of libraries due to a failure to market the service competitively. Borrowing figures are also one of the lowest of all the authorities, currently thirty-second out of thirty-four (CIPFA Stats, 2007 - see Appendix 4).

2.4 Threats

Cheap books are widely available now due to increased competition. Books can be bought from supermarkets and outlets such as Amazon with huge discounts attached. There are also threats in terms of future funding. The authority's priorities could shift at any time, particularly in response to the priorities of the national government. The growth in internet usage also poses a threat to the library service. As internet usage increases, and computer literacy improves, users could see the library provision as irrelevant as they can find the information they need at home.

3 The Proposal

3.1 E-books

E-books are books that can be downloaded onto a computer, or a specially designed electronic device (an e-reader), and read from the screen. They offer a number of advantages compared to the standard paper book. For example, the size of the text can be adjusted by the user to ensure it is easier to read. This would particularly benefit readers that suffer difficulties with their vision. Also, as the books are held electronically, there is no need for a member of the public to physically enter a library in order to borrow a book. They can simply access the on-line catalogue from their home and borrow whatever book they want without having to leave their front door.

3.2 Aims and Objectives

The introduction of e-books would play an important role in meeting the aims set out in the mission statement. Members of the public who are unable to visit the library will be able to access a range of texts via the online catalogue. Furthermore, given that paper books are heavily discounted by retailers, the public library would be offering a service that is not currently offered by competitors. With the steady improvements in new technology, the eventual conversion to e-books is inevitable.

3.3 Customer Demand

The feasibility of e-books in a public library setting has already been examined by Essex Libraries. Despite there being no great demand for e-books within the authority, they have been well received in general. One user commented:

‘...the e-books site is wonderful: it’s what the internet was invented for – I’m recommending it to all my friends, and a neighbour, who is blind, has started to use e-books as a result’ (Berube, 2002).

The above comment came from an elderly, housebound man. E-books can offer a solution to the problem of connecting isolated members of the public to their local library service, ensuring that we can 'enhance their quality of life'.

There is also a growing trend for future generations to conduct more aspects of living online (Berube, 2002). Younger generations already spend a great deal of their time online, socialising on network sites such as Facebook and MySpace, and computers have become an integral part of their social lives (Berube, 2002). For this generation, the availability of e-books will become an expectation of their library service.

3.4 Access Models

There are two main access models that are available to the public library setting. They are the one book, one user access model and the multi-user, simultaneous access model (Garrod & Weller, 2005).

3.4.1 One book, one user access model

This model is similar to the basic lending model. Essentially, one book is loaned to one borrower. If that one book is on loan, the borrower will have to be held in a queue until the book is once more available. This has obvious disadvantages in the public library setting as it requires the purchase of multiple copies if borrower demand is to be met.

3.4.2 Multi-user, simultaneous access model

This model provides borrowers with access to a range of e-books without the restrictions placed on the one book, one user model. Much like the current online resources offered by Kent County Council, multiple users can access the e-book at the same time, without the inconvenience of waiting for a copy to be 'returned' to the library.

3.4.3 Conclusion

Taking into account the two possible models, the option of a multi-user, simultaneous access model would be preferable as it would allow several borrowers to borrow the same text at the same time. The alternative would lead to long list of borrowers waiting to borrow the same book and thus lead to dissatisfaction with the service.

3.5 E-book Service Providers

There are numerous service providers who are able to provide an e-book service for public libraries. These providers include:

- E-library
- Digi-books
- Online
- E-Cat

Of these providers, only Digi-books and E-library offer the multi-user, simultaneous access model.

3.5.1 Digi-books

Digi-books offers 30,000 e-books that can be added directly into the on-line catalogue. Pricing is based on the amount of books that are added to the catalogue.

For example:

50 books at a cost of £700

100 books at a cost of £1,200

500 books at a cost of £5,500

These prices are a one-off payment that will not need to be made in subsequent years. However, if further books are required, then the appropriate fee must be paid. The books to be added to the catalogue are chosen and Digi-books then add those directly

onto the on-line catalogue. Furthermore, the costs associated with the addition of books to the catalogue, also includes training and promotional material.

3.5.2 E-lib

E-lib books are offered on a cost per book basis. Books are individually priced by E-lib which are then individually purchased by the library authority. Books are priced at an average £7.99 for fiction and £13.99 for non-fiction. Again, the payment is only paid once, but further additions will incur a charge depending on the cost of the book. However, training and promotional material is charged at an additional cost of £1,000.

3.5.3 Conclusion

The service offered by Digi-books is the more attractive option as the cost of adding to the on-line catalogue also includes training and promotional material. The addition of 100 books to the on-line catalogue, including training and promotional material) would cost £1,200 with Digi-books. The addition of 100 books with E-lib would cost approximately £1,799 for fiction (including the additional cost for training and promotional materials) and £2,399 for non-fiction.

Given the costs and the fact that it is an untested service, an initial addition of 100 books would be preferable in order to test the market before considering further expansion of the service. The service would be reviewed at the end of the financial year and an assessment made regarding the needs of the service.

4 Marketing

4.1 Market Research

Research would need to be conducted before confirming the new service to determine what books borrowers would wish to use on the catalogue. The results of the survey would then be used to determine what stock would be bought in (fiction or non-fiction).

4.2 Size of Market

According to the latest figures, the authority's website received over 450,000 unique visits during the period 2006/7. This put the authority seventh out of 23 authorities and in the upper quartile. The nearest comparable authority, Essex libraries, has the highest level of unique visitors amongst all authorities. Currently, Essex received 1,457,476 unique visits during the same period. Essex has a resident population of 1,340,000, compared to Kent's population of 1,369,900 (CIPFA Stats, 2007).

4.3 Market Growth

With 300,000 borrowers currently using Kent libraries and an online presence that is already well used, there is potential for growth in the market. As the e-book service is run independently from the normal library service and it does not require extra capacity to run, there is no reason why the service cannot cope with a large growth in usage, particularly with the multi-user, simultaneous access model.

4.4 Potential Customers

The introduction of an e-book service will attract a variety of customers. Those who already use the electronic resources available to them through the website will make use of the new service. It also has the potential to attract those who are otherwise unable to use the library service at present. The ability to adjust the size of the text will appeal to library users who have problems with their vision. The availability of texts remotely also enables housebound borrowers to be able to use the service without needing to physically enter the library.

4.5 Competition

While there is no obvious competition from the high street, there is some competition, particularly from university libraries. Students who use the online resources available from their university are unlikely to see the need for using e-books in a public library.

4.6 Risk Assessment

There are a number of areas of risk for the authority.

4.6.1 Borrower Perception

A shift in funds from buying in paper stock to e-books could cause a degree of customer dissatisfaction. This could lead to a negative perception of the library provision as a proportion of the stock will be unseen.

4.6.2 Council's Reputation

Should the project be unsuccessful, the county's reputation as one of the best performing councils in the country (*Councils top performance league, 2007*) and could lead to the loss of its four star rating.

4.6.3 Political Change

The possibility of a change of political priorities, or cuts to the library budget, could have serious ramifications for the provision of library services.

4.7 Promotion

Digi-books will provide a range of publicity materials as part of the contract which will include the provision of posters for all of the libraries across Kent.

For further publicity material, orders can be placed with County Print and Design. An initial order of 50,000 leaflets would be placed, providing approximately 500 leaflets per library. County Print and Design would print these leaflets at a cost of £1,000 for the initial print run. It will take three weeks to print the leaflets and a further week to distribute across the county.

The information team would also place adverts promoting the service on the website. With nearly 500,000 unique visits last year, web based advertising should capture a large proportion of those that would use the service.

5 Location/Premises

As the service will be provided remotely by Digi-books, a new premises is not required.

6 Equipment and Supplies

No extra equipment will be required as the service is remote.

7 Personnel

7.1 Existing Staff

The current Information team, based at their office in Springfield library, would liaise with Digi-books, as they are responsible for the maintenance of the library's on-line presence. Any issues with the service would be dealt with through the Information team.

7.2 Extra Support

To provide support for borrowers, and to promote the service, posters would be placed in every library to recruit one volunteer for each District (see Appendix 5). Any volunteers recruited would need to have a high standard of computer skills (preferably with a qualification) and should already have experience of using e-books.

The volunteers would introduce borrowers to the service and provide support. Volunteers would be recruited to work for 3-4 hours on a specific day during the week. Interested borrowers would book a time slot at the library and the volunteer would help them to use the service. Volunteers would also actively promote the service to library users. This support would be monitored through the completion of a

attendance sheet which would require the volunteer to write in the amount of hours worked and the number of members of the public that were helped at each library (see Appendix 6).

As volunteers would be utilised, there would be no additional salary costs.

7.3 Training

Digi-books have offered to train the Information Team as part of the contract as they will be their main contacts. One member of the team will be trained at Springfield library by a representative of Digi-books for one day, for no additional cost.

However, a member of the Information Team will be required to train staff across the county. This would be achieved by sending one member of staff from each district to the training centre at Kings Hill, West Malling. After this training session, members of staff would feed back to their district and give informal training on using the e-book service to all frontline staff. The volunteers that will be supporting the public in the libraries should already be familiar with using e-books.

8 Timetable

Once market research has been conducted with borrowers, the aim is to have the service up and running within four months. This would allow time for preparing promotional materials, training Champions, District teams, recruit volunteers and launch the service on the on-line catalogue (see Appendix 7).

9 Financial Projections

9.1 Initial Costs

The initial costs for the first year would be as follows:

Addition of 100 books to online catalogue=**£1,200**

Cost of additional promotional material=**£1,000**

Cost of additional staff training=**£390.80** (see Appendix 8)

Cost of posters for recruiting volunteers=£18.02 (see Appendix 9)

Total initial start-up cost=£2,518.70

The cost of training is on the basis that one member of staff from each District would attend a training session held at Kings Hill, led by a member of the Information Team. The cost of additional promotional material is based on a quote from County Print and Design for 50,000 leaflets.

9.2 End of Year One

At the end of year one, an assessment would be made on the performance of the service before determining whether any further additions to the on-line catalogue could be made.

10 Financial Requirements

10.1 Funding

In order to fund the service, a bid will be put forward to the Museum, Libraries and Archives Council. Should the Council reject the bid for funding, cuts could be made to the funding of non-fiction stock in order to fund the new service. Currently, the authority spends £389 per 1,000 people on non-fiction stock per year, which equates to £532,891 per year (CIPFA Stats, 2007 – see Appendix 10). A redistribution of £3,000 would cover the costs of the new service over the initial year.

11 Evaluation

11.1 Monitoring Usage

In order to evaluate the success of the new service, the number of books downloaded can be tracked over the course of the year. Essex libraries currently issue around 50 books per month and the aim would be to match those figures by the end of the first year (Waugh, 2007 - see Appendix 11). As Essex is the nearest comparable authority, this target should be achievable.

Appendices

Appendix 1: General Statistics: Population - Resident Population (Number). CIPFA Stats (2007).

Appendix 2: Mission Statement

Appendix 3: Virtual Visits - Estimated Number of visits to website in 2005-06. CIPFA Stats (2007).

Appendix 4: Service Points Open to the Public at 31 March 2006: Busiest Library: Most issues per annum - Number of issues per annum (Number). CIPFA Stats (2007).

Appendix 5: Recruitment Poster for Volunteers.

Appendix 6: Volunteer attendance sheet.

Appendix 7: Timetable for introduction of e-books

Appendix 8: Costs for staff training.

Appendix 9: Cost of recruitment posters for volunteers

Appendix 10: Financial Information (2006-07 Estimates): Revenue Expenditure (per 1,000 Population): Supplies and Services: Books and Pamphlets - Adult Non-fiction (£). CIPFA Stats (2007).

Appendix 11: E-book issues in Essex.

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