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Organic marketplace

Every time we get serious and professional about the role of public libraries in the community, we set the table with a sumptuous spread of core business. We chew on great mouthfuls of reader guidance, support for literacy campaigns, and encouraging a culture of reading, we take slow sips of community profiles and round it off with a rich dessert of book knowledge. We sit back replete and satisfied. Or do we?

Our energy and imagination are suffering indigestion from stale old pantry supplies, stuff that's been sitting on the shelves since grandma unloaded the ox-wagon . . . dusty, fusty, musty. To stretch the metaphor just a little further, it's time to shop for some fresh organic produce, time to experiment with new recipes, ingredients and flavours.

We cannot assume that providing excellent traditional services will ensure the survival of libraries. We cannot grow our market if no one wants what we are selling.

It's not about 'us' educating 'them' about the value of our offerings. It is we who need to discover what new demands are surfacing in the market and to devise new services that fulfil those needs.

Reader guidance is relevant - but is our content useful? It needs to be revitalised, or, indeed, diversified. Our leisure reader base is shrinking even as the world records the highest number of new authors and publications, and the young mobile generation reads epic stories tailored for cell phones and tweets. Libraries should be throwing this party, not waiting for an invitation to attend.

Our colleagues at the recent Community Chest Fun Run displayed the perfect slogan: *Librarians - the original search engines.*

Expand that thought and you could rightly call libraries the original social networking sites. Now there's an interesting metaphor to savour!

General knowledge is such an underrated resource; nevertheless it provides the basis for all our interactions with users. Scanning the headlines of the whole newspaper, skimming the latest 'trends' on Twitter and absorbing hot discussion topics on radio are all prompts to raise awareness of what's currently important in our world. You don't have to be intimate with Julian Assange (legally or illegally) to know what he's about; you just need to be able to



connect his name with Wikileaks to have a clue about verifiable information.

Some sages predict that soon use will be made of light technology to store and transfer data more effectively than wireless technology. Massive amounts of data could be stored, not on the chip itself but in the light field created around it. I don't have the slightest idea what that might mean but it sounds important and exciting! I'll have to Google it to find out more. I know how to sift through 50 000 000 hits and how to assess what is fact and what is fairy dust . . . thank goodness I'm a librarian!