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My Ideal National Library

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Abstract

This paper described a desire of a citizen for the ideal national library that it could provide lively services and become the learning centers for Thai nationals whether young or old, scholars or the general public.

Introduction

As a teenager in the mid 50's, I had many opportunities to visit the National Library. This was possible

because my house was about 15 minutes away by bus from the National Library which at the time was located close to SanamLuang, near the Grand Palace. It was also a place close to Wat Prakeaw that my parents allowed me to spend time without supervision. I still remembered the feeling that I had towards the Library. It was the only library that I knew. I felt that it was a rather solemn and sacred place because books in the Library at the time were so thick and looked so scholarly. However, I felt safe, and had a sense of peacefulness when I was in the library building. The atmosphere in the Library was so respectful. I dared not talk or dared not ask the attendants any questions for fear that I was too small a person to ask and bother the staff's time.

Several years later, my feeling towards the library had changed. When I got a chance to study in Indiana University, in the United States, I felt at home in the library. I could talk, and able to socialize with my friends and even fell asleep sometimes when I read for my classes. The atmosphere in the library was so friendly with a pleasant atmosphere and good facilities, There were so many books of all kinds, not just the books for my classes but a lot of them were to satisfy my curiosity and inspiration. The librarians amazed me, the female librarians wore mini-skirts and were so alert. They walked all over the library to find information for the users. They had impressed me ever since. They helped me learn how to find information and made several suggestions and helped when I had to write papers.

Then, fate caused a change in my career, which I considered fortunate I have got to enter the library profession started in 1970. I have opportunities to visit many libraries in the United States, a few in Europe, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore which raised expectations from the libraries in my own country. I have seen that libraries especially the National Library could offer a lot more since our country has entered the information age and the government has begun to realize that we are badly in need of the modern kind of library that should support and enrich the lifestyle of the citizens and communities in the modern society.

I, as a normal citizen of Thailand, am so proud of the great resources in many forms containing valuable Thai culture and heritage we have in our National Library. This paper attempts to suggest our National Library could offer a lot more services to Thai citizens as a few topics will be discussed below.

The National Library Home Page

The users would have been more impressed if the main page of the National Library on the Web could have been designed with more attractive graphics and illustrations showing the importance of our long history and culture including text arranged in groups; easily identified to capture the interest and curiosity of the users. Hypertext links to internal information sections and external sites of great value should be created. Availability of the National Library home page for access should be more consistent and be well maintained by expert webmasters. In fact, the National Library home page would be very effective if developed as a marketing and public relations tool of library resources and services, for fundraising, and to market special events of the Library.

The Learning Center for Information on Thailand

The National Library has an extensive collection of Thai history, literature and other valuable resources. It would be exciting to develop the Learning Center on Thai studies to bring together educational resources and services for a rich learning experience, especially on different aspects of the development of Thailand, such as on Thai culture, customs, and traditions, history, religion, anthropology, geography and industry. The collection of these materials should be reproduced in digital formats including lesson plans on these topics which could be developed under broad or specific topics. These resources would stimulate the imagination and develop the learning process of both formal and informal or lifelong learning of young students, adults, teachers and scholars. How wonderful it

would be if the National Library could build comprehensive teaching units and strategies, lesson plans, ideas and activities for the classroom, quizzes, games and guides by using Thai original or primary resources. The services should be available online via the Internet so that the citizens who live far away in different parts of the country can access the Learning Center.

The Center of Library and Information Science Resources

A comprehensive collection on Library and Information Science materials would be a great help to develop knowledge in the field to help professional librarians. Several government universities and a few private universities offer library and information science educational programs. These institutions could not afford the comprehensive resources on the subject both in Thai and in English languages. Students have to rely on lectures and limit their research activities to only a few information sources at their local universities. Therefore, there is a great need for the National Library to have a well developed and updated collection of Library and Information Science resources including the hypertext links to related web sites, with useful content within the country and other countries throughout the world. The resources in this area could also benefit and improve the National Library staff.

The Digital National Library

The National Library of Thailand should make our Thai heritage more accessible and available beyond the library walls. It would be challenging to be able to extract the pictures and the content of Thai literature, artifacts, manuscripts,

the old Thai style books, the rare books or the letters written by the previous king or famous writers so they could be seen, read, studied from every corner of the city or the country. The digital National Library has the potential to create an exciting environment for Thai people. When it is done the National library should encourage the youngsters to feel proud of our heroes and our heritage. So the digitizing of Thai culture and heritage resources should be the top priority the National Library should undertake. Another benefit the citizens will get is that the precious old manuscripts and folios could be preserved in another format.

The National Library as Information Gateways

Web sites that are useful in different subject areas, including web sites of the world national libraries and information centers, should be listed as "hot links" or "external links" for the convenience of Thai citizens. If it could be done, Thai people would enjoy using the Thai National Library more frequently and make use of the national information resources for study, research and entertainment and also using the National Library as a gateway to access and reach to other related useful resources for lifelong learning and research. Web sites of the national Library should include links to news, exhibits, programs, and fundraising, and other useful sources.

The National Library Physical Space

The traditional National Library is still in great demand especially a research library for scholars and the general public. However, it seems that the National Library must arrange the reading

room in a more lively and positive way. Renovation and design of library spaces and furniture according to the modern idea is also needed. especially in the area the National Library intends to provide to general public users who enjoy easy reading and lifestyle materials.

Additional provision of space suitable for comfortable viewing and listening to information or entertainment resources such as music, movies, radio on VCD, DVD, and audio-CD should be provided. Space for an Internet cafe is also needed a touch-up. In addition, the coffee and light snack corners could be added where suitable for convenience for the readers when they need a break from reading or need to socialize with each other.

Children Library in Main and Branches

The main Children's library and its branches seems to be in great demand at present. Parents in central or in its suburbs areas and in cities and towns in the country which are badly in need of public places that are safe, having cool air which contain spaces and edutainment material such as children's books, Internet stations, and toys for their children. it would be of great benefit if the National Library could plan to offer such services at the main library and at the branches. However, it would be best if the Library could yet support from the government and friends of the Library to gain access to the shopping mall, so that the National Library could open up the small corner as the library for children and adults who do not make an effort to go to the regular Library. This idea should be one of the best option since the majority of people in Thailand always carry their children along to the shopping mall because they have no better places to go. We can see that several children sit

around the book store floor reading books or participating in the activities the book stores offer for children. However, many book stores are not happy to see the customer; reading the materials and untidy the book shelves, without purchasing any books.

Staff Characteristics and Roles

In time of shrinking budgets and changing emphases, library personnel may be transferred around, or have their job descriptions altered. The customer service should never be a casualty of the National Library organization. Librarians, whether working in the technical or customer (public) services need to be motivated in giving consistently excellent and accurate service. The truly satisfying library work should offer more and more on a personal level. Therefore, librarians must adapt their roles and their competencies for the changing environment. Librarians in the 21st century may probably have at least some of the characteristics and competencies in the following list.

1. Excellent communicators and facilitators with the ability to build and manage relationships to an exemplary standard
2. Flexibility and ability to work as part of a team in a changing environment
3. Able to exercise sound judgement.
4. Possess a talent for engaging with a broad range of issues and people.
5. A desire to generate creative and new ideas and able to create solutions to problems promptly.
6. Possess practical experience and interest in using information technologies, including the Internet.
7. Have cultural awareness and understanding of the diversified users' levels of information needs.

8. Be aware of the importance of information skills and able to create and provide information literacy educational programs online and offline to users.

9. Be able to use a client focused approach and possess excellent communication and interpersonal skills.

10. Possess knowledge of the issues and priorities in education as they relate to the information resources that support educational curricula in the country.

11. Understand the role and function of the National Library and its services to Thai citizens.

Electronic Reference Services

In addition to regular on-site reference services, the National Library would make a great contribution to satisfying the information needs and curiosity of Thai citizens at the right time without any limitation of time, or place. A Hotline for teenagers or people with problems which people could call in or access electronically, for consultation and advice given by librarians, would be very useful indeed.

Library Services for Handicap People

It should be possible for the National Library to provide services for disadvantaged people such as the physically handicap—the blind, dyslexic children, people with low self-esteem.

Facilities such as a ramp for wheel chairs, a keyboard for the OPAC services that the disabled could make use of easily. The talking books, and newspapers, for example, would be very useful for ensuring that such material is available to these people. Librarians of the National Library should show genuine care and concern so that these people will not feel that they are rejected or ignored.

The Center for Information Resources for Business and Economic

In the fast changing world of business, up-to-the-minute information is essential. The National Library could expand its resources to cover a wide variety of business information and services to the business sectors, students and general public.

Obviously, when students enter the world of business, they will have to contend with a plethora of information from many sources. They will have to classify, categorize, process and summarize business data and be able to make sense of it. A library and its facilities can help them develop these useful skills.

The Autonomy of the National Library

In order to expand the learning capacity of the nation so as to enhancing and promoting the national competitiveness, the National Library could have moved through the changing environment faster if its administration could be performed as an autonomous institution. The administrative staff could likely composed of the National Library Board consisting of a group of trustee including a respectable and knowledgeable figure chosen by the authority as a chairman of the board. The other important position would be the National Librarian and Directors of different Departments and Services.

Conclusion

Obviously, as Thailand enter the Information Age, there will be a constant and Increasing demand for knowledge and information. It is the responsibility of National Library to provide much of this. Libraries are no longer merely providers of books—they must embrace the new technology and

cater fully for the needs of the general Thai public.

The National Library could be a challenging and stimulating learning center which is committed to ensuring that all the citizens could benefit from using the Library when all the citizens see it as a source for their relevant information needs. I wish that in a fairly short time, the National Library could

make all these services mentioned earlier available to us all.

Library authorities should also strive to make libraries pleasant and friendly places, where youngsters and even very young children can come and develop a taste for one of life's greatest pleasures — reading a great book.

