MELD STUDIOS: CO-DESIGNING THE FUTURE OF THE STATE LIBRARY OF VICTORIA (March - June 2014)

1. OVERVIEW

Established in 1854, the State Library Victoria in Melbourne is Australia's oldest public library and one of the first free public libraries in the world. The Library is charged with preserving Victoria's heritage by collecting items of historical and cultural significance for future generations, and holds over 2 million books, with 70,000 items added each year. The Library works hard to adapt and remain relevant to Library users, and reach out to new audiences. As a result, Library patronage has continued to increase, with (at 2015) more than 1.7 million physical visits to the Library each year and over 3.3 million annual online visits.

The State Library of Victoria (SLV) engaged Meld Studios to facilitate the review and redesign of their customer service model. The service model defines how services are delivered to customers who interact with the Library across various service delivery channels including; onsite in the building, and offsite/online through the website, chat and email services. The scope of the engagement included consideration of how the building is used, the rostering system, technology aids, staff capabilities, and articulated expectations of service quality.

A film of the our work at the Library can be seen at: http://www.meldstudios.com.au/slv/

The stated aim of the redesign was to design a service model that remains customer centric and meets the following key objectives:

• Support the Library's visitor experience objectives, align service delivery with customer segments, focus on building customer satisfaction and relationships, align staff skills and capabilities with meeting the needs of customers

• Deliver an approach to service delivery that emphasises the continuum of services, from self-service through to specialised assistance

• Align the service model with learning and literacy programs (onsite and online)

• Increase uptake of self-service by customers and reduces the cost of delivering onsite customer services

• Increases the mobility of staff with supporting mobile technology

• Identifies areas of priority to focus on for a phased implementation of a new service model

• Builds organisational capability in service design

2. PROCESS

Over a 12 week period an integrated, participatory design team sought to understand current state service delivery; identify opportunities for service improvement and innovation; generated, prototyped and tested concepts; and laid out a future vision for service delivery covering everything from the iconic front lawn to offsite storage 100km away in Ballarat.

AN INTEGRATED TEAM

Based on the Library's desire to build organisational capacity around service design we blended a team of 3 Meld designers with 2 Library staff, co-located in the Library. As well as delivering the objectives of the project, we gave Library staff on-the-job training in service design activities. Working with us across all activities, they were essential in the smooth running of the project and the transition from visioning to implementation.

UNDERSTANDING CURRENT SERVICE EXPERIENCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Two weeks were spent conducting observational research and intercept interviews around the Library to obtain rich insights into the experiences of customers and staff. Stakeholders were also interviewed to understand the broader context, opportunities and challenges.

ANALYSIS AND SYNTHESIS

Our research was analysed and synthesized to reveal issues, opportunities and insights. Findings were visualised in 4 current state experience maps, and used to engage the broader audience with our research.

CONCEPT GENERATION AND ELABORATION

In 3 half-day creative workshops research findings were used to frame idea generation activities for the future service model. Concepts were explored and iterated on through individual and group activities, with participants rapidly sketching, sharing, critiquing and refining ideas.

PROTOTYPING AND TESTING

Prototyping was conducted in the Library outside of opening hours, with the aim of bring our concepts to life for the 130 library staff invited to participate in a simulation and role-play of the new service model. The prototypes evolved over the course of a week, with feedback sessions run each day to find out what was working and what wasn't.

The prototyped tested the rezoning the Library, refined wayfinding systems, reimagined security, staff uniforms, reinvented service points, and mobile service delivery.

COMMUNICATING THE VISION

The full service vision was articulated in a future state service map, visualising the service experience, the rezoned library spaces, and the service delivery within each zone. The future state vision was shared with the Library board, and senior stakeholders, then presented to over 200 staff during an all-hands conference.

3. BENEFITS

The project has had a number of benefits for the customer, staff and the organisation. Primary amongst these are the following:

Note: All quotes provided by Justine Hyde, Acting CEO of the State Library of Victoria.

1. **Re-zoning the physical spaces of the State Library**: Similar and related services are more closely co-located within the physical environment of the Library, allowing staff capabilities to better match the nature of the assistance needed in any given zone. The new zoning directly addresses challenges faced when staffing service desks, tying up very experienced Reference Librarians with mundane inquiries relating to the location of utility services within the building. "*Having the service model to help inform how we redesign the building is critical to the redevelopment*".

2. **A Warmer Welcome**: The new Library design puts a much warmer face to the physical environment, relocating the Security barriers – and Security personnel – further back into the building. This creates a much more natural and inviting flow into the space, and removes the uncertainty that can afflict new visitors to the Library when they first pass through the doors. Visitors now flow through the foyer, into the dedicated co-working space, or up the heritage marble staircases towards the Collections and gallery spaces.
"*We've used the principles from the service model to validate and help us make decisions about the best use of our spaces.*"

3. **Process-level efficiency**: The new design addresses efficiency at the process level for the Library's most commonly-used services. These re-defined processes cover areas such as self-serve kiosks, registration, computer use, print/copy/scan services, collection requests, research inquiries, promoting & developing staff expertise, and digitisation on demand. These process improvements helped address the dual concerns of service quality and efficiency.

4. **A new preparedness for Digital Disruption**: The State Library of Victoria is in the midst of a major shift as it re-adjusts to a world of eBooks, blogs, and youtube. The new service design directly addresses the tensions at play within the Library, introducing new ways for Collections to be digitised and shared electronically and allowing the work of the Library to be more broadly shared without increasing costs. New digital signage allow this content to be previewed to visitors in new ways, raising awareness of the richness of the collection.

4. EFFECTS

4.1 KEY IMPACTS ON THE ORGANISATION

"The project was revolutionary for this institution. The work has fundamentally changed the way we approach the design of our services. It's created a lot of momentum around that way of working, opened up possibilities, and new ways of thinking. It's given a much more holistic view of the library and the interdependencies between the services we provide."

- **Creating funding opportunities:** The project assisted the Library in obtaining AU$81 Million in funding from State Government to bring the service vision to life over 3 years.

- **Creating partnerships:** Sponsorship has been received for the first time for our Family History programming, and is being sourced for Disability Services. Enhancements to events and programming spaces creates opportunities for partnership arrangements.

- **Driving collaboration:** The Library formed a new division to manage service delivery in a unified and cohesive way, led by one of the project's team members. Cross-team project work is being done regularly within the Library, including developing an Automated roster, mobile devices for staff, and creation of wikis for service areas.
  "Staff learnt a lot more about the library and how it works, more about how other teams work and the challenges they face."

- **Embedding design processes:** The Library has adopted many design techniques including workshopping of ideas and generative ideation, a greater focus on customer feedback and needs, and greater awareness of how customers interact with Library services.
  "We are more willing to prototype ideas, test them, potentially fail, start again, and learn. We used to try to get things perfect, but now we're more willing to try things out."

4.2 KEY IMPACTS ON STAFF
"The really positive thing to come out of the project, other than the work itself, was the staff engagement - it's a real stepping stone for us in terms of cultural change"

- **Service delivery restructuring:** New division created with the sole focus of managing service delivery, previously coordinated by three separate parts of the library. Restructure of customer service teams from four teams into two with a shift in focus from primarily collection access to customer service.

- **Automated staff rostering**: All rosters consolidated into a single automated roster treating front of house service as a unified service.

- **Reduction in mundane enquiries:** Consolidation of service points, clearer zoning, and refined wayfinding systems and signage is reducing the 80% of Librarian time spent answering directional or equipment queries. Mobile devices introduced to support mobile service delivery.

- **Automation of library registration:** Project initiated to automate library card registration, saving in excess of $100,000 per year in staff time.

4.3 KEY IMPACTS ON CUSTOMERS

"*By creating zones we're hoping to make sure everyone gets the best experience of the library's services*"

- **A more welcoming experience for customers**: Changes to the library welcoming experience is increasing use, and reducing customer and staff tensions. Relaxed security rules have led to fewer arguments between security staff and customers at the entrance to the library. Refurbishments to the entrance hall have created a vibrant and welcoming space which uses exhibition artefacts as teasers to draw people further into the library

- **Improving access for families**: Dedicated children's space in the library every day until 4pm. Improved flow at entrance points and around family areas has made pram access easier and made parents more welcome, increasing use of the library by families.

- **Increased library membership:** Streamlined membership and renewals process, shifting to email renewal notices, eliminating 20,000 letters sent every year, and increasing membership and renewals. Also increases access for outer metropolitan and rural Victorians who no longer be required to visit the library in person, or wait 3-4 days for their card to arrive via post.

- **Increased self service:** Self-service computer bookings for all PCs in the library, reducing arguments between customers and reducing need of staff to manage. Project initiated to roll out self service kiosks throughout the library.

- **Simplifying collection requests:** Text messages to alert people that requested items are ready to collect. Project initiated to simplify mediation steps so make it easier for people to request items.