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SWOT Analysis: Patchogue Medford Library

Objective: "The Mission of the Patchogue-Medford Library is to provide educational, cultural and recreational opportunities for the community, and to facilitate and support the informational needs of every community member. The Patchogue-Medford Library is a community resource and a center of intellectual freedom which acquires, organizes and disseminates books, non-print materials and services that help educate, enrich, entertain and inform."[i]

	Helpful **To achieving the objective**	**Harmful** **To achieving the objective**
Internal origin	*Strengths* • Computer lab • Online tutors and reference librarians • Attempt at dissemination of eBooks and audiobooks through SuffolkWave • Offers free internet access • "No more to cuts" information campaign to combat decreased funding • Attempt at helping to integrate ESL folks through citizenship classes, conversational English groups etc • Good networking with other Suffolk County public resources • Helpful staff • Well organized, administrated collections • Willingness to change	*Weaknesses* • Ineffective use of human resources • Insufficient web presence and utilization • Lackluster, out dated website • Uninspired staff, incompetent pages and clerks • Lackluster offering of community services • No real community interaction • Computer lab has limited hours • Lack of trust in community visitors = top down approach which relies heavily on professionals to offer services • Lack of creative impetus
External origin	*Opportunities* • Digitize microfilm collections • Update website • Marshall community resources	*Threats* • Lack of Web 2.0 interactivity • Greatly decreased public funding • Homeless consider library a

• Self-service? • Web 2.0 "any time, any place" library a la Wikipedia • After hours service/collaborative programs • Free wireless internet countywide program coming operational • Open access • Become a creative force in the community • Digitization of collections • Revisit staff policies, expectations and qualifications	refuge • Proximity to main street means library is used as a walkthrough to back roads • Internet is preferred by the community for information retrieval • Visitors consider staff friendly but lazy • Politics are not in favor of increased funding or attention • Local political corruption paralyzes innovation

Note: I feel that In order for this SWOT analysis to be helpful or effective it would need to be created through a process of collaboration with library staff and administrators, not by the conclusions of one researcher "on the outside looking in."

Discussion

Strengths

Patchogue Medford Library offered standard features of a community library until the last two years or so when it began to adapt to the new style of information retrieval that consumers are becoming accustomed to. Successful strides have been taken in offering digital resources such as online tutor and reference librarian access, as well as gradual digitization of old cassette audiobooks. An especially admirable and successful effort is the SuffolkWave project, a new website, slickly designed to web 2.0 standards, which offers eBooks to Suffolk County residents. SuffolkNet (free internet access to Suffolk County citizens) continues to be offered, although still as dial up. The web site is updated to include these new digital resources, and is kept relatively up to date. An attempt is being made at using the website as a portal to offer announcements about new library programs and exhibits, most of which are attempting to target the younger web 2.0-saavy generation. On the "front page" of the website right

now is an exhibit on the "Dark Knight" aka Batman, a topic which might be of some interest to the comic book-loving generation Y.

Another admirable strength of the library has been its interest in engaging the large population of Hispanic immigrants which in the recent decade have flocked to the Patchogue-Medford area. As the community composition is shifting to include a large population of Hispanics, the library is offering programs to learn and experiment with English. In this sense the Patchogue Medford library is not "out of the loop."

As the proposed 2010 Suffolk County budget threatens to decimate library funding the institution has also wisely networked with the "no more cuts" lobby program. How effective this lobbying effort has been, remains to be seen, yet the inclination and propensity to engage the public politic to ensure the security of library resources is strength in itself.

Ultimately the library functions as a decent library: the collections are adequate, maintained properly, serve the expectations of the public and the staff is helpful and at least superficially willing to address the many threats lurking overhead. While these traits may not be exceptional, they are strengths.

Weaknesses

One of the most telling issues within the library is the utilization of human resources. Pages and clerks sit idle for sizable portions of their salaried hours and are not required or expected to produce creative work. The professional staff appears uninspired, rarely interfacing the community at large.

The shift to web 2.0 interactivity and collaboration has been slow and half-assed. The website, while updated, has the look of a creation of the early to mid 1990s, and is a mess to navigate. The new digital resources of the library are gaudily and confusingly linked with no attention to order or

accessibility. While the website functions, it does not flourish, there is no passion or creativity behind it, and functions merely as an ugly page of links leading to more useful networked resources. The library has made an effort to offer something to visitors which they cannot access at Wikipedia – namely, on call professional tutors and reference librarians to aid them, but they have poorly marketed and branded this resource and few people in the community know of it. The website offers internet access, but it is essentially the same service as was offered the first day of its operation, and the same can be said of the computer lab. The lab has arbitrary time constraints on access, as the current policy mandates that a page or clerk must be present in the lab when visitors are. This coincides with a general trend present within the library: a lack of collaboration, trust and interactivity between the professional staff and the public, the way of the "old guard" which is much at odds with the new face of information retrieval and access.

In this way the library is still stifled by doctrinaire and moribund principles and has yet to fully embrace the Wikipedia world that we now inhabit.

Opportunities

Most of the opportunities for the library focus on making decisions about the nature of the library and a reallocation of resources. While there are commonly idle clerks and pages at the reference desks, we might use that labor elsewhere to help digitize the library experience, in turn increasing public awareness. First, decisions must be made to move forward toward new IR methods, and second, squandered human resources must be reassigned to appropriate those goals. In this sense the majority of the opportunities present lie in untapped resources.

The new library must be universal, collaborative and open to the public: a Wikipedia buttressed by the professional expertise of librarians. Efforts must be made at Patchogue Medford library to offer the resources to the consumer that they are looking for by increasing access. This coincides generally

with digitalization; the collections which lie unknown now might be offered to the public in a new and responsive form. Why should the consumer be forced to search through reels of outdated microfilm after clumsily asking a librarian for access when he can query an intelligent database to search through a collection of .JPEG images in real time to find key images which only are red, or only contain human faces? What does the library offer over Google? Content, with the expertise to catalog it. Opportunity lies in creating, managing and broadcasting intelligent systems in order to digitize data, while engaging the public to collaborate with these systems in a creative process.

Update:

While this research paper was being put together the library's website was completely overhauled. The initial implementation was not without glitches (broken links) but the new web presence appears to be in the spirit of new web 2.0 technology, interactivity and navigation.

Threats

The most critical threat the library faces is national economic uncertainty and local lack of funding. 2009 saw unprecedented cuts in public funding for library and educational programs. Corruption cases have become prolific and rampant in the past few years, paralyzing policy change and innovation. These issues threaten to enfeeble libraries to such a degree that they will no longer be the places known to us in our youth.

The public increasingly prefers the use of the internet for their IR needs: it is faster, fun and convenient. This trend is sounding the death knell for the traditional library model. If Patchogue Medford library does not adapt more readily, it will fail.

As the library is physically positioned on Patchogue Main Street, noise is sometimes a problem, as well as distractions caused by citizens cutting through the library grounds to reach backstreets. The

homeless problem in the area has spilled into the library: the homeless use it as a refuge, especially

during the winter months, and this may be alienating visitors.

Lastly, visitors consider the staff to be lazy due to their idling, which threatens to estrange them

from interfacing with their expertise.

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[i] http://www.pmlib.org/PmlMission.htm