

Electronic Services Transition Team:
Website Report

October 2000.

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Introduction: An Electronic Branch

Many users now visit libraries through websites, to search for articles, place holds, renew materials or find out when a Branch is open. Just as a user's satisfaction with library service is shaped by their experience while inside our doors, so too is their opinion of the library influenced by their experience while visiting us electronically. The question we face in planning for the Amalgamated Library's website is: **How do we create an *Electronic Branch* of the library that is welcoming to users, easy to use and supports library service at our other locations?** When users visit the Amalgamated Library's website will they find information they are looking for? Will users from all across the new city be presented with the same range of services or will the site preserve organizational distinctions that create barriers for users?

In planning for the new library's website, it became clear that many staff share the opinion that the website provides a great opportunity for the Library to create a truly amalgamated *Electronic Branch* of the library for January 1, 2001. As well, it provides the new library with a powerful tool to communicate the coming changes to users and help them make sense of these changes. This report will outline recommendations that will enable the Amalgamated Library to take advantage of these opportunities and have an interim website in place for January 1, 2001. It will also present a long-term framework for ensuring the new library has a website that can meet future challenges.

In preparing this report the *Electronic Services Transition Team* conducted a survey of all staff. We have reviewed statistics on the current usage of our websites. We have reviewed the best practices of other library websites and have contacted other libraries to learn about how they administer their sites. While a lot of work is before us, we should begin this task with the realization that we start with strong assets: two effective websites. The challenge we face is to bring our sites together in a way that creates a welcoming *Electronic Branch* of the Amalgamated Library System that users will want to come back to.

Goals of the Libraries' Website

The *Electronic Services Transition Team* has identified several key goals for the Website. These goals reflect not just what the Libraries are currently doing, but rather what the Amalgamated Library should accomplish with its website. Performance measures for the site should point back to these goals.

The Amalgamated Library System is committed to developing a website that is consistently of high quality and is managed efficiently. A distinct advantage of the Web is not only can it help the library provide service in new ways, but also it generally provides a very cost effective ways of reaching these goals.

1. **To inform users about Library collections and services** by providing accurate and comprehensive information about library materials, policies, services, programmes, locations, and hours of operation.
2. **Enhance customer service** by providing a personalized and interactive website that enables users to complete transactions online, including: placing holds, renewing materials, providing feedback, suggesting items for purchase, asking reference questions and paying fines.
3. **Provide an easy-to-use starting point for the world of electronic information** by linking users to useful resources including databases and websites that meet their informational and recreational needs.
4. **Expand access to our collections** by making them available to users electronically, not only at all our locations, but also outside our doors. Working in partnership with schools, community groups, government and arts organizations to expand the availability of digital material that is relevant to our community and showcases the New City of Hamilton to the rest of the world.

Assumptions - Background Information

- ✦ The Web is an emerging technology, not a sub-merging technology. It is going to play an increasingly important role in delivering information and services to users.
- ✦ The Library should provide users with an integrated website by January 1, 2001 that includes information about all 26 locations.
- ✦ Dundas Public Library does not currently have a website.
- ✦ HPL and Wentworth's websites have two distinctive graphical looks that cannot be easily merged.
- ✦ HPL's site contains at least 700 html files and has many resources not available on Wentworth's site. These include: much broader coverage of recommended Internet links, resources for kids and teens, pathfinders and digital collections.
- ✦ Much less extensive with only 45 html pages, Wentworth's site contains essential library information and links and has consistent navigation.
- ✦ While the Amalgamated Library will need to review and prioritize what content should be on the site, the *Electronic Services Transition Team* assumes that we must continue to deliver what is currently available to users. A major review of resources and information on the site is not possible before January 1, 2001.
- ✦ A comprehensive redesign of the Library's website will be built on the interim changes in 2001. User feedback will be gathered to measure the effectiveness of the interim design. The new website will have a look that is consistent with the new graphical identity of the Amalgamated Library System.

Short-term Recommendations: An Interim Site

The short-term goal for the website is to combine the strengths of both sites in a way that is not going to require significant recoding of all pages, but will also provide users with a new site that is consistent, integrated and reflects the new library system.

Criteria for Developing Short Term Recommendations

One of the challenges we faced in preparing this plan was determining what could realistically be delivered to library users by the beginning of next year. Our list of short-term recommendations is intentionally brief and includes only items that passed two criteria:

- ✚ Must be clearly achievable by January 1, 2001.
- ✚ Must have a significant positive impact on how users experience the site.

Recommendations for the Interim Site

1. *The Electronic Services Transition Team coordinate the development of an interim site and work with staff at Dundas, HPL and Wentworth to implement the recommendations outlined in this report.*
2. *Create an interim home page for the library. A new homepage provides the opportunity for the library to show to users that a 26 Branch system will be created on January 1, 2001. The homepage should help users become familiar with their new library. The new page will:*
 - Feature a map of the new City of Hamilton that shows the locations of all Branches.
 - Highlight important and useful information about the new system.
 - Include the main navigation bar outlined in recommendation 2.
 - Include links to: *Library News, Friends of the Library and Library Information.*
 - Highlight the availability of databases for home use.
3. *Implement consistent navigation on the site that includes the following elements:*

Consistent navigation is a best practice that was a feature of many of the other library sites that were suggested as models by staff. The items in this navigation bar were determined by examining the survey responses, other library sites and statistics on current usage. To make this objective attainable for January 1, 2001, we are proposing a navigation bar that will work on current HPL web pages,

so this change can be made without a major recoding effort. Also, the navigation will be developed using *Server Side Includes (SSI)* to enable it to be coded once, to ensure future changes can be easily applied throughout the site. Sections of the site such as digital collections that form unique mini-sites will not have the navigation applied to them at this time.

4. *Amalgamate Branch Information to include all locations of the new system.*
One of the main goals of the website should be to inform users about their library. By presenting this information in a consistent way the library will demonstrate to users that we are one system.
5. *Amalgamate HPL's Booklists and Pathfinders with Wentworth's Readers Service into a new category called Best Books.*
6. *Use **hpl.ca** as the new domain name for the library.* This is already registered by the library and will provide an easy to remember URL for users. This will also assist library staff with communicating to users how to get to our website. The old domain names of the libraries will automatically take people to the new domain for an extended period to ensure users who have book-marked our sites will not have difficulty locating the website for the new library.
7. *Implement a "Comments" form on the site that provides users with an opportunity to ask questions and provide direct feedback. QUIC will serve as the filter for these comments, responding where possible and forwarding to other departments when necessary. While HPL's and Wentworth's sites now allow comments, a form will be created to expand this function to enable the gathering of measurable feedback to assist with the future development of the site. This is critical because we are proposing a number of major changes before the full redesign process for the Amalgamated Library can be implemented. QUIC was selected as the department to answer questions, because our long-term goals include online reference service handled through QUIC. Online reference will not be immediately available, however, this will give the department an opportunity to become more familiar with handling these types of inquiries.*

Timeline for Short-term Objectives

- Implement draft changes in a test environment that can be accessed by all staff by November 30.
- Communicate with staff the URL and an explanation of the changes. Call for feedback by December 8.
- Respond to comments and make adjustments as necessary. Update staff and announce planned live date.
- Copy new site into production environment and go live by January 1, 2001.

Model for the Amalgamated Library's Website

The development of the Amalgamated Library's website needs to be looked at not as a one time event, but rather as an ongoing cycle of improvement. Web technology is changing rapidly, as are users' expectations of what they should be able to accomplish on a website. Improved understanding of how users' interact with websites provides an expanding body of knowledge that the library will need to continually utilize to create an *Electronic Branch* that better serves it users. The *Electronic Services Transition Team* is proposing this model to help ensure that the library not only effectively administer its site, but also effectively manage the on-going changes that it will need to respond to. These recommendations reflect a synthesis of practices used by other libraries that had model websites.

Recommendation and Overview of the Model

This model is comprised of three main elements that work together to ensure the Library has a rational system for efficiently coping with the ongoing changes in delivering a website. The *Electronic Services Transition Team* recommends this model to be used to develop a new website for the Amalgamated Library System in 2001, and that it provide an ongoing mechanism for site development. The elements of the model are:

1. *Web Planning and Editorial Team* - is a planning group that sets priorities and oversees major changes in interface.
2. *Central Technical Administration* - responsibility and accountability for delivering the site is centralized in the *Electronic and Information Services* Department.
3. *Distributed Content Responsibility* - responsibility and accountability for the content of the site is distributed to appropriate departments.

Web Planning and Editorial Team

We have suggested the website is an *Electronic Branch* of the library. It is a Tier 4 branch that serves the entire city. As Web technology becomes more pervasive, the website is playing an increasingly important role in the delivery of service, not just outside the Library, but also at all our locations. Because of its importance and impact on the overall delivery of service, it is critical that a mechanism be in place to ensure the direction the site takes truly reflects the needs of the library. While this model recommends central technical administration for delivering the site, the overall direction the site takes should not be driven by technology. We are therefore recommending the Amalgamated Library System establish an official *Web Planning and Editorial Team*.

Appointments to the team will be made by the CEO and be for two years. The CEO will determine the exact composition of the team, however it will include at least one

representative from: Community Development & Planning, a Branch of each Tier of the new library, Children's & Youth Services, and QUIC. The composition of the team is designed to ensure public service units which have first hand experience with users will have a voice in shaping the direction of the website. The Web manager from the *Electronic and Information Services Department* will chair the team. Reporting to the CEO, the *Web Planning and Editorial Team* will:

- Recommend goals for the website.
- Recommend and set priorities on new projects. Act as a clearinghouse for new digital projects.
- Approve major changes to the design of the website.
- Set editorial policies.
- Set policies regarding user-feedback on the site.
- Provide a forum for staff and users to have concerns related to the website discussed.
- Identify areas that need content development.

It is important to note that the team will not have responsibility for routine changes and updates to the site. Rather it will focus on the broad direction the website takes. It would meet at least bi-monthly.

Central Technical Management

As we plan for the Amalgamated Library's Website we should begin with an understanding of the technology that is used to deliver websites. There used to be an HTML page centric view of delivering Web content. People would individually create specific HTML pages that would collectively form a website. Advances in technology have replaced this with a program centric view where web pages are generated dynamically by the web-server. There are several advantages to this latter approach, including:

- Content can be entered once and delivered to users in different ways. This helps improve accuracy because unnecessary duplication is removed. This is also more cost effective; less staff time is spent on routine maintenance.
- Content submission can be simplified and decentralized while still maintaining the integrity of the site.
- Better consistency can be maintained, creating a better user experience.

There are a number of technologies readily available for the Library to utilize in the development of its website. These include technologies such as: Server Side Includes (SSI), Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), Active Server Pages (ASP), Personal Home Page (PHP) and SQL Server. The main cost and obstacle to applying these technologies is expertise. If the library is going to successfully and cost effectively utilize these technologies, the expertise that is gained working on special projects such as PIC and digital collections needs to be leveraged for broader application.

Because delivering the website is going to require more technical expertise and is going to be more dependent on programming, the *Electronic Services Transition*

Team recommends there be central technical responsibility for maintaining and delivering the site. The Manager responsible for bringing the site together will work in the *Electronic and Information Services Department* where technical expertise and support is most available. He/she will chair the *Web Planning and Editorial Team* and ensure the direction the website takes is reflective of the team's goals.

Technical Standards for the Site

The Amalgamated Library's website needs to be built on a strong technical foundation and adhere to principles of good interface design. The following lists provides an overview of standards and tools that will be applied to effectively administer the site:

- Cross-platform standard HTML and Web Accessibility Standards.
- Centrally administered *Cascading Style Sheets* (CSS) will be used to control the rendering of text on pages.
- Information and objects that are repeated will be generated by a database where possible. *Server Side Includes (SSI)* will also be used to ensure maintenance is efficient and information on the site appears accurate.
- The *Dublin Core Meta Data* standard will be adhered to and the Library will monitor ongoing developments in new standards such as XML.
- The library will actively participate in province-wide cooperative initiatives, including standards in digitization and site personalization.
- Current best practices in *Web Usability* and *Information Architecture* will be applied to the site.
- Network monitoring software; such as *Servers Alive* be used to immediately alert staff of down time.
- Link checking software, such as, *LinkBot Pro* will be used bi-weekly to clean up all bad links.

Distributed Content Responsibility

One of the main advantages of dynamically generating Web pages is the ability to make contributing content easier and more decentralized. The advantage to this approach is it enables staff with expertise in specific areas to contribute content to the site, without having to have up-to-date knowledge of Web coding.

Staff in the *Electronic and Information Services* department will be responsible for most of the mark-up and for creating the forms and templates necessary to enable content contributions from other departments. *Community and Development Planning* will have responsibility for library news and library information pages. As well *Community and Development Planning* will play a key role in ensuring the graphic look of the site adheres to corporate standards. While Subject Specialists and Information staff will not be coding pages directly, they will have responsibility for identifying recommended links, developing pathfinders and booklists. Where possible staff will complete forms and templates that the SQL database will transform into

content on Web pages. When this is not possible, support staff in *Electronic and Information Services* will do the necessary mark-up.

The *Electronic Services Transition Team* recommends that the responsibility for the content of the site be distributed. As part of the redesign of the site in 2001, the *Web Planning and Editorial Team* will review content responsibilities in detail and report to the CEO a plan for dividing these responsibilities.

Appendix I: Website Questionnaire

The *Electronic Resources Transition Team* is currently developing recommendations on a website for the Amalgamated Library System. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather individual staff input to help with this process.

1. What do you like most about HPL/Wentworth Libraries' current website? _____

2. What do you like least about HPL/Wentworth Libraries' current website? _____

3. What could be done to help make you more aware of the website and its content?

4. Think about your past use of the Library's website. How successful have you been at using it to locate information? Please check the statement that most applies to you:
 - I always find what I am looking for on the Library's website.
 - I usually find what I am looking for on the Library's website.
 - I sometimes find what I am looking for on the Library's website.
 - I rarely find what I am looking for on the Library's website.
 - I never find what I am looking for on the Library's website.
 - I do not use the Library's website.
5. What in your opinion will be most important features of the new website for the Amalgamated Library?

6. Think about websites you currently use and like. List the URL of any website that you think could serve as a model or prototype for the Amalgamated Library System.

7. Additional comments or suggestions.

*Dundas Public Library staff were given a questionnaire that included questions 5-7.

Appendix II - Website Questionnaire and Contents: Summary of Findings

The Website subcommittee of the Electronic Resources Transition Team distributed a questionnaire to staff of the Dundas Library, Wentworth Libraries and the Hamilton Public Library to gather individual staff input to help develop recommendations on a website for the Amalgamated Library System.

There were a total of sixty-seven responses received (Dundas, 7; Wentworth Libraries, 27; Hamilton Public Library, 33). The comments were collated and examined for similar trends. They predominantly referred to ease of use; content; the catalogue; and, response time. Question #3 also generated a number of creative suggestions for publicity and promotion of the website and staff training. Respondents also provided URL's for a wide variety of model websites.

Ease of use was referred to repeatedly as a quality most admired or desired in the current website, model websites, and the website for the Amalgamated Library System. Comments in this category focused heavily on improvements to navigation, the graphic look of the site (consistency, simplicity, large and clean icons) and language (no library jargon, plain English).

The content of the website was evaluated and appraised by respondents. Internet and government links, the site index, Wentworth's reference page, search engines, Special Collections and the Kid's page/Kidstuff were elements staff liked in the current websites. Specific types of content were cited as desirable elements of the new website for the Amalgamated library. Most important are detailed and clear information on Library locations and hours, Library services, Amalgamated system information (changes to policies, etc.), Internet and government links and reference resources.

The catalogue was also a concern for staff. Although the catalogue is considered important, staff felt it could be more user-friendly and offer better Help information.

Response time was criticized as slow. Quicker access was recommended for both the website and catalogue for the Amalgamated system.

Question 3 of the questionnaire asked, "What could be done to help make you more aware of the Website and it's content?" Staff recommended enhancing ease of use (navigation, graphic look); new content (Where to Find It Guides, Help Screens, Tutorials); and, staff input. Publicity received a great deal of attention and included: ads on current database subscriptions, posters, signage, brochures, handouts, on-line contests and HPL's URL on business cards and all publicity. Time was also given as a priority. Staff felt if they took the time or were given time then they would become more familiar with the Website. Training was only considered by a handful of staff, as a solution to becoming more aware of the Website and it's content.

Staff recommended a variety of model websites. The list follows for the library websites. After reviewing the recommended sites, the team contacted the following libraries to get background information as to how the sites were administered: Chicago Public Library, Oakville Public Library, Ottawa Public Library, Richmond Public Library, Toronto Public Library and Vancouver Public Library.

Library Websites

www.bpl.org Boston Public Library
www.bl.uk - The British Library
www.library.cambridge.on.ca Cambridge Public Library
www.somd.lib.md.us/CHAS/Libraries/ Charles County, Maryland
cpl.lib.uic.edu/ Chicago Public Library
www.detroit.lib.mi.us/ Detroit Public Library
www.chebucto.ns.ca/Libraries/HCRL/HalifaxLibraryHome.html Halifax Regional Library
www.hpl.hamilton.on.ca/ Hamilton Public Library
www.hhpl.on.ca Halton Hills Public Library
www.hpl.lib.tx.us/hpl/ Houston Public Library
www.kfpl.library.on.ca Kingston-Frontenac
www.lapl.org/ Los Angeles Public Library
www.nypl.org/ NY Public Library
www.opl.on.ca Oakville Public Library
www.rpl.richmond.bc.ca/ Richmond Public Library
sunecat.co.sarasota.fl.us/ Sarasota Public Library
sfpl.lib.ca.us/ San Francisco Public Library
www.library.utoronto.ca/canpoetry
www.vpl.vancouver.bc.ca/ Vancouver Public Library
www.lib.washington.edu University of Washington Library
www.webrary.org/ Morton Grove Public Library
www.wentworth.library.on.ca/ Wentworth Libraries
<http://wiltonlibrary.org/innovate.html> List of Innovation Applications in Libraries

Contributions made by the respondents to this questionnaire have been indispensable to the development of recommendations for the website for the Amalgamated Library System. Many thanks for the efforts made on the new system's behalf.

Appendix III: Web Statistics

Hamilton Public Library and Wentworth Libraries Statistics
25 Most Viewed Pages Aug 1st, 2000 to Oct 24th, 2000.

HPL - 3250 Average Daily Page Views				Wentworth - 680 Average Daily Page Views			
HPL Pages viewed the most	Total for Period	Average for Period	% of Total	Wentworth Pages viewed the most	Total for Period	Average for Period	% of Total
/default.htm	36681	431.54	13.28	/header.htm	9504	111.81	16.44
/catalog/catalog.htm	25551	300.60	9.25	/default.htm	9246	108.78	16.00
/lasnet/agree.htm	23277	273.85	8.43	/home.html	8162	96.02	14.12
/net/internet.htm	12448	146.45	4.51	/catalogue.htm	6176	72.66	10.69
/children/children.htm	7370	86.71	2.67	/sa/default.htm	4440	52.24	7.68
/net/net.htm	6430	75.65	2.33	/sa/sa-home.html	2845	33.47	4.92
/catalog/dynix.htm	3214	37.81	1.16	/sa/sa-header.htm	2840	33.41	4.91
/teens/teens.htm	3030	35.65	1.10	/sa/sa-index.html	2836	33.36	4.91
/info/general.htm	3028	35.62	1.10	/reference.htm	1230	14.47	2.13
/webindex.htm	2956	34.78	1.07	/reference.html	1221	14.36	2.11
/children/funsites.htm	2900	34.12	1.05	/libraries.html	1052	12.38	1.82
/location/location.htm	2811	33.07	1.02	/sa/sa-reference.html	979	11.52	1.69
/local/spcoll/speccol.htm	2679	31.52	0.97	/libraries.htm	928	10.92	1.61
/children/booklist.htm	2236	26.31	0.81	/read/index.html	789	9.28	1.37
/catalog/instruct.htm	1742	20.49	0.63	/read.htm	781	9.19	1.35
/teens/careers/careers.htm	1374	16.16	0.50	/teens.htm	665	7.82	1.15
/collections/collections.htm	1298	15.27	0.47	/teens.html	654	7.69	1.13
/info/joining.htm	1255	14.76	0.45	/went_ugframes.html	352	4.14	0.61
/local/spcoll/1846.htm	1218	14.33	0.44	/catalogfaq.htm	297	3.49	0.51
/local/spcoll/war1812.htm	1090	12.82	0.39	/kids.htm	241	2.84	0.42
/collections/parkex/index.htm	1023	12.04	0.37	/local.html	226	2.66	0.39
/children/homework.htm	947	11.14	0.34	/kids/index.html	215	2.53	0.37
/local/spcoll/genea.htm	905	10.65	0.33	/librarycard.html	147	1.73	0.25
/local/spcoll/fam.htm	856	10.07	0.31	/branches/ancaster.html	138	1.62	0.24
/net/careers/career.htm	856	10.07	0.31	/aboutwentworth.html	131	1.54	0.23
Total for Period (2369 items)	276236	116.60	n/a	Total for Period (61 items)	57793	947.43	n/a

Appendix IV: Draft Navigation Headers

Selection # 1




HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

— SITE INDEX —

HOME CATALOGUE HOURS INTERNET RESEARCH BEST BOOKS KIDS TEENS

Selection #2




HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

HOME | CATALOGUE | HOURS | INTERNET RESEARCH | BEST BOOKS | KIDS | TEENS

SITE INDEX

October 25, 2000

Section #3




THE HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

October 18, 2000

— SITE MAP —

HOME CATALOGUE HOURS INTERNET RESOURCES BOOK LOVERS KIDS TEENS

Selection #4



THE HAMILTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

October 18, 2000 - Site Map -

HOME CATALOGUE HOURS INTERNET RESOURCES BOOK LOVERS KIDS TEENS