

## **GULLIVER: HEAD, SHOULDERS (AND KNEES) ABOVE THE REST?**

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### ***Abstract:***

*First, Gulliver is described and put into a Victorian Government policy context - what is it, and what does it aim to achieve?*

*Gulliver is part of Libraries Onlin, a Victorian Government program which links with the Commonwealth's Rural Libraries Online. Gulliver builds on these development initiatives by adding content to the network.*

*Gulliver is one of a group of Victorian Government information society initiatives. It will ensure that quality, easy-to-use and up-to-date information on a diverse range of topics is available to all Victorians.*

*Second, the global context – is Gulliver head, shoulders (and knees) above the rest? The Gulliver initiative will be placed in a wider context and linked to the Virtual Victorian Library.*

# GULLIVER: HEAD, SHOULDERS (AND KNEES) ABOVE THE REST?

## Introduction

Gulliver, as everyone knows, set off from England at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We used his name for our information service because of his connection in our minds with travels, voyaging, discovery. These are all concepts hospitable to and reminiscent of libraries, and the Victorian libraries Web site is styled: *Libraries Victoria – yours to explore*.

Gulliver, as we know, set off in 1699, a ship's surgeon, to find new things. His ship was wrecked, the crew lost. Gulliver drank half a pint of brandy, and managed to swim ashore at Lilliput, some hundreds of miles south-west of Singapore. He slept more soundly that night than he ever had, and the rest is history. Or perhaps not.<sup>1</sup>

Despite our boastful title, we have to admit that although we might stand head, shoulders and knees above the rest of Lilliput, some other places in this world do better. Singapore, not yet invented in Gulliver's time, is one of those places.

## 1 Where Gulliver Began: The Policy Context

### Victoria 21

In 1996, when the Victorian Coalition government was re-elected, it had as part of its platform a new communications and multimedia program. The program had originally been developed within the Office of Communications and Multimedia of the Department of Premier and Cabinet in late 1995, and was styled, Victoria 21<sup>ii</sup>. The Victorian Government proceeded to appoint Mr Alan Stockdale, whose day job was Treasurer of Victoria, as the world's first Minister for Multimedia – March 1996.

Victoria 21 had a lot packed into it. A key emphasis in the policy was on strategy 1: "Lead the development of a multimedia skilled community making the transition to an information economy."<sup>iii</sup> A clear goal was widespread community use of networked information and communications. Several programs were implemented to achieve these goals. Those administered by the State Library of Victoria were VICNET (1994), Internet in public libraries (1995), Skills.net (1996), funding of the State Library's multimedia catalogue and the Pictoria database (1996), and Libraries Online (launched in September 1998).

## **Victoria 21: the Core Rationale**

One of the mantras of the community-focused parts of Victoria 21 was the idea that for there to be widespread, ubiquitous take-up by the Victorian population of networked information and communications, there were three main preconditions:

- ◆ It should be cheap
- ◆ It should be easy
- ◆ It should be useful

In the policy, libraries were seen along with training, promotion, and community networking as part of a wide range of programs of the Victorian Government to create a situation where people want to use online services, and find it convenient and inexpensive to do so. Victoria is not unique in pursuing this direction<sup>iv</sup>, although within Australia Victoria seems to be the clear leader.

## **Global Victoria**

Global Victoria<sup>v</sup> was released in July 1999, as the successor to Victoria 21. It differed in giving an even greater emphasis to community take-up of new information and communications technology:

*“The most important element of the Victorian Government’s next steps is the development of a critical mass of online participants in use of goods and services as well as their supply.”*

In the 1999 policy, the focus was predominantly on driving “the early emergence of a critical mass of online participants.” In order to do this, a range of strategies was adopted. They included a new program to create online communities, further support for VICNET, libraries online (“public internet access through all public libraries”) and other programs.<sup>vi</sup>

## **Library 21: Victorian Libraries Policy**

Gulliver has two parents. One is the community-focused online technology program of Victoria 21 (later Global Victoria). The other is a rethinking of the role of the library in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – Library 21. Both draw on the same sources – work carried out in Singapore, the United Kingdom and the United States.<sup>vii</sup>

Library 21 is a policy for the statewide library system, developed by the Library Board of Victoria (and its predecessors). The policy foreshadowed (and reflected) a number of the elements of Libraries Online<sup>viii</sup> - thinking for both was taking place at the same time. Library 21 aimed to think about where the library system was going, and had a vision of an integrated library - “a single inter-connected and cooperative library network” The policy looked to “innovative communications and computing technologies” to achieve this vision. It set out many of the ideas which were incorporated into Gulliver and later into the Virtual Victorian Library (VVL).

## Benchmarks and Context

Within Australia and overseas there has been a wide range of efforts aimed at creating an online information resource – or library – available to everyone. One of the models which initially guided the creation of Gulliver was that of the National Library of Singapore, and in particular its TIARA (Timely Information for All, Relevant and Affordable) service. TIARA provides popular access to networked information resources via the Singapore public library system.<sup>ix</sup>

Singapore, because its planning preceded that of Victoria<sup>x</sup>, and because of contacts between Singapore and Victoria at the time thinking and planning were taking place, has been an influential model. The model set out as early as 1994 drew on an IT-based model, the Intelligent Island with its National Information Infrastructure. It referred to “...massive conduits of information and knowledge to support a learning nation.” “Libraries will ... become access points, switching nodes and mediating agents to a vast network of borderless libraries.” “Library and information services will become available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, allowing users to access such services from anywhere...”<sup>xi</sup> The Singapore experience is part of a worldwide context in which lots of people were operating at the same time. Victorian libraries employed John Bertot to survey them – Bertot and McClure has been thinking along the same lines as Singapore (or vice versa) for several years.<sup>xii</sup>

## Libraries Online

The focus of Internet-related activity in Victorian libraries was, in the first few years, almost entirely on establishing network connectivity for public libraries and ensuring that the network worked effectively. Early efforts by VICNET and by public librarians were focused on this.<sup>xiii</sup>

Libraries Online (LOL) was widely canvassed in early 1998, and was known in its early stages as the library infrastructure program. As such, it was the subject of discussions between the State Library and Multimedia Victoria in 1997 and 1998. Along the way, two substantial library-related consultancies were funded – Closer Cooperation between CAVAL Ltd and the State Library of Victoria (Cutler and Company)<sup>xiv</sup> and Email for all Victorians (STM Consulting)<sup>xv</sup>.

The rationale for Libraries Online was set out in a concept paper<sup>xvi</sup>. This stated the point of the program for the Victorian Government:

*“The intended beneficial outcome of the Library Infrastructure Program is increased access to online information and communications and multimedia computers for the general Victorian community, particularly those groups who are disadvantaged in accessing new technologies.”*

The concept paper set out as a goal the creation of an information society, and saw the role of libraries in this as a fundamental one. The paper drew on the just-published Cutler report, with its vision of “an integrated library service for Victoria that is online all the time.”

Libraries Online was funded in June 1998 as a \$2.4 million program, of which approximately \$1.8 million was made available at that time, the remainder to be funded in 1999/00. A steering committee was established in July 1998, and the program was launched on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1998 at the Royal Melbourne Show, by the Minister for Multimedia, the Hon. Alan Stockdale. Libraries Online aimed to do a number of things, all of which had been foreshadowed in Library 21. They included:

- ◆ Create robust network infrastructure for the Victorian public library system, which would reduce costs sustainably.
- ◆ Ensure that every static library branch in Victoria provided free public Internet access.
- ◆ Improve the number of Internet access points (computers) in libraries.
- ◆ Provide a large volume of content available through public libraries.

Within the Libraries Online project, the last goal was to be worked out through Gulliver. We chose the name Gulliver in March 1999, with the advice of the Multimedia Victoria marketing staff. It links into the travelling or voyaging analogy in the *Libraries Victoria* Web site established the year before by Victorian public libraries. The slogan, “Libraries Victoria, yours to explore” was used in a series of advertisements promoting public libraries.

However, long before we chose the name, we had started to implement Gulliver.

## **2 Establishing Gulliver and Getting it Moving**

### **Starting Gulliver: Objectives**

Gulliver is an electronic resources service for the Victorian people, made available through their public libraries. Gulliver has access to over 1000 full-text electronic journals, which are available in all 45 public library services and in all 246 static branches across Victoria.<sup>xvii</sup> Through Gulliver, Victorians are now able to access quality, easy-to-use and up-date information on a diverse range of topics.

The service was preceded by a trial through the public library system of an Ebsco product, World Magazine Bank. During the period of the trial in 1997 over 20,000 full text online articles were used in Victorian public libraries.

Planning for Gulliver started in August 1998 with the establishment of a reference group, and the appointment of a project officer, Rebecca Toohey. The outcomes stated for Gulliver, as they now stand, were:

- Increase the use of the Victorian library network by Victorians.
- Promote equitable access to information through the library network.
- Develop original Victorian digital content and provide access to it.
- Reduce the library system reliance on costly inter-library loans.
- Develop a content purchasing consortium facility in Victoria so that Victorian libraries by aggregating demand can acquire information cost-effectively.

- Ensure progressive adoption of standards which make possible seamless reciprocal access to the catalogues and collections of libraries.
- Develop new library services which are independent of time and distance.

Initial issues involved in establishing Gulliver included issues of branding and identity, determining the content of the service and the means of selecting it, training and promotion, authentication, and costing/pricing issues.

Gulliver was established in March 1999, and has been operating since then.

### **How to access Gulliver?**

A simple-to-use Gulliver Interface has been developed, a basic web page, which is bookmarked or accessible via a desktop shortcut on all Internet PCs in Victorian public libraries.<sup>xviii</sup> There are over 400 of these PCs across Victoria, which will significantly increase by 2000.

### **What information is available via Gulliver?**

Four full-text databases were selected for the Gulliver program: Ebsco Publishing's *World Magazine Bank*, Infosenial's *Electric Library*, and two products from the Gale Group - *Custom* and *Health Reference Center*. The first three of these databases are general and cover information across the disciplines and the *Health Reference Center* database, covers the subject Health in detail, which is a vital subject area for public libraries.

### **Selection of databases**

The databases on Gulliver were chosen by a group of librarians from Victorian public libraries and the State Library of Victoria, the Gulliver Reference Group. This group was built on the SWAGGER group, set up in 1997 for the Ebsco trial, who then arranged a number of other product trials. The extended trial of World Magazine Bank led into the Gulliver project, when the Victorian Government provided *Libraries Online* funding through Multimedia Victoria in June 1998. The Gulliver Reference Group called for Expressions of Interest from a number of vendors, and the successful products were chosen from a priority list of content needs and a list of specifications.

The factors used in the selection of the successful databases were:

- Cost competitiveness
- Relevant subject coverage
- Full-text accessibility
- Internet delivery
- Ease of use
- Technical considerations (incl. speed)
- Training/ support/ online help

Two criteria originally considered were abandoned. One was Australian content: all of the vendors expressed regret at the amount of Australian content that was currently available via their services, and given that the criteria would need to be assessed against claims by vendors relating to future plans which may not eventuate, this seemed an unclear factor. It should be noted however, that Australian content was broadly considered via the “relevant subject coverage” category. And although we originally looked at assured long-term access as a criterion, in the end we felt that this was also likely to be unclear, and was more relevant to academic and research libraries. The related issue of cancelling hard copy was not considered relevant for the same reason.

*World Magazine Bank*, *Electric Library* and *Health Reference Center* come as pre-packaged databases. The *Custom* database is one where you select journals from a large master list. A number of librarians from the Reference Group chose a subset of 150 journals, which was purchased for the Gulliver program. In doing this, we were able to tailor this database to the needs of the Victorian community and complement resources already selected in other databases.

## **Set-up and Training**

Information such as IP numbers and proxy numbers for each library was sent to each vendor. Some libraries also matched local catalogue holdings with journals on some of the databases. A Gulliver Information Kit was sent to each library branch. This kit had information such as User Guides on each product and contact information. An Information Session was held in May 1999, and this launched the training phase of the Gulliver program. By November 1999, staff from all 45 Victorian public library services will have been trained onsite at their premises.

Training public library staff in the use of the Gulliver databases onsite has been one of the most successful elements of the Libraries Online project. Onsite training allowed us to bookmark or add desktop shortcuts on staff and public PCs. This guarantees the ongoing visibility of Gulliver after we leave the library. Posters and publicity material also assist this cause. Training created the opportunity to check Internet skills, and staff access to PCs, as well as checking the speed of the Internet connection, browser and plug-in version numbers. For those libraries, which use passwords to access Gulliver, we were able to check that their passwords were working. It was extremely useful to go to such places as Horsham, where we noted that the Internet connection was quite slow. The Horsham Library (part of the Wimmera Library Service) is now on a priority list for improving Internet connections, which will be achieved through the Rural Libraries Online Project, which is a Commonwealth Government (Networking the Nation) project.

Onsite training also allowed us to check local procedures for using the Internet, and the proximity of the PCs to the reference/ information desk; both of these factors may impact on “effective” use of Gulliver. Training onsite enabled us to contextualise our training; placing the Gulliver resources within the context of existing electronic and traditional information resources in each individual library. We were able to maximise the number of staff who attended training, often by visiting libraries on

their closed days, which ensured that country and remote library staff attended training. In a centralised training approach, this is difficult because of distance, and the problem of cost-shifting; where the cost of training is deferred to the public library. Visiting staff onsite allowed us to meet local IT support staff and generally develop relationships with library staff.

Local training is a costly operation; costs include lease cars, petrol, and in the case of remote visits, motel rooms and living expenses. We were fortunate that at the same time Gulliver training was being undertaken, staff were also visiting all country public libraries as (another) part of the Libraries Online project, to carry out a full Network Audit. We coordinated visits within the project, so that Gulliver Training combined as much as possible with Network Audit visits, and we travelled where possible with other State Library staff.

### **What lessons did we learn?**

As many libraries use their ISP's proxy server, these libraries were unable to authenticate via IP addressing, which allows for direct access to resources, without the need for passwords. The Libraries Online Project has purchased a proxy server specifically for Victorian Libraries, and this will be set up in late 1999. This will ensure that those libraries which have a fixed IP number from their ISP will be able to seamlessly access the Gulliver products (ie they will not need to use passwords).

We also learned that one of the major competitors for Gulliver is the use of email in public libraries. The limited number of public Internet terminals in Victorian public libraries (about 450-500 in late 1999) were heavily used for Web-based email traffic, squeezing out more traditional library activities like Gulliver. This was one of the factors in a clarification of the State's library service policy, with the cooperation and support of VICLINK (Victorian public library managers) and the Local Government branch of the Department of Infrastructure, so that Victorian public libraries may charge for email.

Another major problem has been "getting on a PC." Even with over 450 public PCs across Victorian libraries, it is often difficult to find a "free" PC. Our two strategies for alleviating this problem are:

1. To increase the number of public PCs in libraries significantly. (This will be achieved as part of the Libraries Online project).
2. To provide remote access to the Gulliver products to enable public library patrons to use Gulliver from home.

Access to databases is very new for most public libraries. Some libraries had previous subscriptions to World Magazine Bank and Electric Library, but they were a small minority. Access to this type and amount of content is very new to most public library staff. Therefore ongoing training will continue through the end of 1999 and into 2000, to ensure all staff have the skills they need to access the Gulliver products. Cost was the main factor in libraries not previously having access to database content. These libraries would often call on the resources of the State Library through services such as VISION (a reference service for public libraries). Libraries are now able to

provide more information content than ever before, instantaneously to their patrons. Public libraries will continue to use the services of the State Library for more complex enquiries.

## **Usage report**

A report on levels of usage will be available in early 2000.

## **3 The Future: Gulliver Becomes the VVL**

### **The Future of Gulliver**

There are a number of future initiatives linked to Gulliver. They include:

- Virtual Victorian Library<sup>xix</sup>
- Ongoing Gulliver Training
- Digitising
- Obtaining further funding and/or moving to a consortium model.

### *Virtual Victorian Library*

By the end of 1999 we hope to make Gulliver available remotely, as well, in an exciting new initiative called “Virtual Victorian Library”(VVL) Remote customer access to Gulliver will be made possible by public library users entering their Library barcode number. This number will be cross-checked with other information for authentication purposes. This authentication process will be further developed in 2000 and 2001 to allow full patron record authentication using the Z39.70 protocol.

Remote access to Gulliver is a key to the long-term viability of the project and increase in use of the databases. Even with growth in the number of PCs in libraries, the PCs are multi-purpose; they are used for web searching, email, and other activities. Hence there are many competitors for Gulliver. To maximise use by Victorian public library users, it is necessary to facilitate remote access. This will be achieved by about the end of 1999, when the first stage of the Virtual Victorian Library will be launched.

The Virtual Victorian Library will be designed as *the* portal for Victoria’s public library system. Many public libraries have homepages; a significant number do not. Part of the project will be to develop and host library websites for those libraries which do not currently have one. These websites will be based on a template that will gather content from the Victorian Virtual Library and will also highlight local content including the local library catalogue.

The Victorian Virtual Library, like other portals, will have links to all the content within the site from the homepage, and there will actually be significant amounts of content hosted on the site - it will be more than just another links page!!!! The content on the site will include:

### **Stage 1:**

- Remote access to Gulliver. Remote access to Gulliver will be made possible with the use of patron authentication via public library card barcodes.
- Links to existing catalogues and cross searching of catalogues. The Virtual Victorian Library will highlight access to existing public library catalogues, some of which can already be cross-searched (via Liblink and Murraylink).
- Hot Topics. Hot Topics is an existing public library project at <http://www.hottopics.info.au> Hot Topics provides access to current information on the Web on “hot issues.” Sites are selected according to their quality and appropriateness. Hot Topics is a collaborative enterprise, and several public libraries contribute; over time, more librarians will be encouraged to contribute. As it develops, specific content from the Gulliver databases will be linked via Hot Topics.

### **Stage 2:**

- Ask a Librarian service. A cooperative reference service, which will be accessible via email or IRC (chat). The service will be run by a group of volunteers from Victorian public libraries.
- FAQ database. A database will be created from the Ask a Librarian questions and answers, which will be fully searchable.
- Ready Reference site. A ready reference site will be created to point to quality reference material available on the Internet. A cross-search across the FAQ database, Hot Topics and the Ready Reference site will be set-up to enable users to find any relevant information, independent of its location.
- Increase number of catalogues that can be cross-searched. The Virtual Victorian Library will build on the number of catalogues that are able to be cross-searched.
- Improve security of remote access to Gulliver. Authentication to Gulliver will be enhanced using the z39.70 protocol (ie patron record authentication).

### **Ongoing Gulliver Training**

In addition to the Virtual Victorian Library project, more Gulliver training will be rolled out in late 1999, and through the year 2000. The training may cover areas such as:

- Gulliver products
- General database searching skills
- Internet searching skills
- Reference Interview skills
- Internet trouble-shooting
- Contextualising Gulliver – knowing when to use Gulliver, when to use the catalogue etc

### Digitising

We held a Digitising Forum in November 1998, which aimed to be an introduction, awareness-raising, idea-sharing, network-building forum on digitising for public libraries, and related institutions. It was a great success, and further forums are being arranged for the year 2000, in conjunction with Museums Australia. We are also applying for a Federation grant, with Museums Australia, to buy equipment and generally facilitate future digitising projects in public libraries. The mailing list *vicdig* was set-up after the first forum and is a wonderful way for libraries to continue to share ideas about digitising.<sup>xx</sup>

### Obtaining further funding and/or moving to a consortium model

The funding for Gulliver extends to March 2001. After that time, it is envisaged that the Victorian public libraries will continue to deliver some of the products on Gulliver, through further funding or via a consortium purchasing arrangement. Consortium purchasing arrangements for electronic databases are becoming increasingly common in the United States, and in Australia similar arrangements are being explored through the CAUL dataset trials and other statewide schemes for public libraries.

Further development should also see extension in the number and range of databases available and possibly a broadening of the consortia to include other libraries.

### **Looking ahead**

Gulliver is one of a number of initiatives to create a public library service, which exists as both virtual and analog. The Virtual Victorian Library aims to achieve, in the near future, a wide range of virtual library initiatives, with only two qualifications. The first is that although the virtual library must have real people in it, we will not have real people 24 hours in the next phase. The second is that some of the finer points of interoperability will not have been achieved in the next stage.

Gulliver is a landmark. Most public library branches do not have large collections of periodical back issues; if they do, they are often lent, and access cannot be guaranteed. Gulliver gives them about a thousand titles, full text, available at every library branch in the state.

The Gulliver experiment, like its sibling projects in other places, is a model of where library services will go.

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<sup>ii</sup> *Victoria 21: directions for the global information age*. Melbourne: Office of Communications and Multimedia, 1995.

<sup>iii</sup> *Victoria: a global centre for the information age*. Melbourne: Multimedia Victoria, 1998. P.9

<sup>iv</sup> Sowards, Tanya, *International Government Approaches to Stimulating the Uptake of New Online Services*. Melbourne: CIRCIT, 1998. (CIRCIT Research Report. 17)

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- <sup>v</sup> Global Victoria: Victorian Government information technology and multimedia policy. Melbourne: Multimedia Victoria, 1999.
- <sup>vi</sup> Global Victoria, pp. 3,5.
- <sup>vii</sup> 2000 Review Committee. Library 2000: Investing in a Learning Nation. Singapore: SNP Publishers, 1994. Library and Information Commission. New Library: the People's Network. London: LIC, July 1997. Benton Foundation. Buildings, Books and Bytes – libraries and communities in the digital age. The Foundation, November 1996.
- <sup>viii</sup> Library 21: Victorian libraries policy 1998 – defining and reinventing the library of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Melbourne: Library Board of Victoria, 1998.
- <sup>ix</sup> <http://www.lib.gov.sg>
- <sup>x</sup> Library 2000 Review Committee, Library 2000: Investing in a Learning Nation. Singapore: SNP Publishers Pte, 1994. This was the report of a cross-sectoral committee looking at the future of the Singapore library system, and its role in the IT2000 plan.
- <sup>xi</sup> Ibid, pp.58-59.
- <sup>xii</sup> McClure, Charles, and others, Policy Initiatives and Strategies for Enhancing the Role of Public Libraries in the National Information Infrastructure (NII). 1995.  
<http://istweb.syr.edu/Project/Faculty/McClurePaper1.html>
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- <sup>xvi</sup> Multimedia Victoria, Library Infrastructure Program: Concept Paper. Melbourne: MMV, 1998 [unpublished].
- <sup>xvii</sup> <http://www.librariesvictoria.vicnet.net.au/gulliver>
- <sup>xviii</sup> <http://www.librariesvictoria.vicnet.net.au/gulliver/interface.htm>  
<http://www.librariesvictoria.vicnet.net.au/gulliver/bayside.htm>
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- <sup>xx</sup> <http://www.slv.vic.gov.au/slv/libonline/digitise/#dlist>