

## Painting with feedback

### ABSTRACT

State Library of Queensland (SLQ) is committed to providing welcoming and engaging experiences for all visitors. To meet this commitment requires understanding from our visitors' perspectives so in April 2014, State Library of Queensland implemented *Tell us*, a centralised visitor feedback database. This tool, managed by the Visitor Experience team, allows us to gather, analyse and respond to complaints, compliments, suggestions and comments from multiple channels. These channels include online forms, comment cards and verbal feedback. As a result, SLQ has greater visibility and awareness of our visitors' needs and expectations. By analysing the feedback data, we have been able to identify changes and improvements to what we do and how we do it.

This paper will report on the successful collection and analysis of data via the *Tell us* database. This case study will also include data from our slightly whimsical *Happiness* touchscreen exit poll which was available in our Reception foyer from July 2015. In particular, we explore the next stage of implementation – the reporting of collated feedback back to our visitors. In the interests of transparency and visitor engagement, the Visitor Experience team is aiming to close the feedback loop by presenting data about the feedback we receive and the changes we have undertaken in response back to our visitors. To do this, we are exploring how to communicate feedback responses via social media, traditional media channels and digital signage.

Additionally we report on our progress with making this feedback data accessible and comprehensible to visitors. It will also discuss the challenges associated with communicating responses to feedback.

## **Introduction**

State Library of Queensland (SLQ) is committed to providing welcoming and engaging experiences for all visitors. To meet our target requires understanding from our visitors' perspectives. Feedback from our visitors and clients provides unique insights and is highly valued. SLQ has adopted a centralised visitor feedback database to capture and track unsolicited comments, complaints and praise. As a result, SLQ has greater visibility and awareness of our visitors' needs and expectations. By analysing the feedback data, we have been able to identify opportunities to change and improve what we do and how we do it. This paper includes a report on the collection and analysis this data. It will discuss how feedback has been used as the inspiration for innovation and explore the next challenge – the reporting back of collated feedback back to our visitors. In the interests of transparency and visitor engagement, the Visitor Experience team is endeavouring to close the loop about the feedback we receive and the changes we have undertaken in response back to our visitors. To achieve our goal, we are experimenting with social media and investigating how to tell these stories using digital signage.

## **About State Library of Queensland**

SLQ provides information services to all Queenslanders, including more than 80,000 registered members and via state-wide library services in partnership with more than 340 public libraries and 23 Indigenous Knowledge Centres. As a physical and virtual space for sharing, learning, collaborating and creating, SLQ meets the Library Board of Queensland's legislative responsibilities to contribute to the cultural, social and intellectual development of all Queenslanders (Library Board of Queensland 2015). As a state library, SLQ provides a blend of both public library and research library

experiences for visitors. “Public library” type experiences include children’s activities in The Corner, makerspaces and learning programs in The Edge, lending from our Information Collections and spaces for social interaction, relaxation and serendipitous discovery. Research offerings include the John Oxley Library, the Australian Library of Art, the Australian Pacific Design Library, family history services and support for entrepreneurship and small business in The Business Studio.

SLQ’s Visitor Experience (VE) team have the responsibility of welcoming and serving our visitors and members at the South Bank building, leading the library in creating an inclusive place for all. The team of thirty staff who are a mix of librarians, library technicians and visitor services officers, provide concierge, information and expert reference services via face-to-face, telephone and online channels. Our goal is provide outstanding visitor experiences and interactions, with the aim of encouraging repeat visitation and engagement (Hernon & Altman 2015).

### **Why collect feedback?**

Libraries have long collected data about operations, services, inputs and expenditure (Hiller & Self 2004), as does State Library of Queensland. SLQ collects a range of data about our core business including visitation (online and onsite), circulation, membership, visitor feedback and audience research. SLQ is a client-centred organisation committed to seeking information from our visitors and using information to better satisfy their needs and build deeper relationships with them (Celuch, Robinson & Walsh 2015). Our approach of constantly measuring and matching supports an evidence-based approach to professional practice (Yerbury 2016). Comprehensive evidence assists libraries in making decisions around collection management and setting priorities for services (Yamaguchi & Howarth 2016). For service delivery, quality often means exceeding expectations and

delivery satisfaction (Cole 2014). Feedback can provide examples of qualitative evidence that support quantitative data or observations. Mangold and Faulds (2009) state that customers feel more engaged with products and an organisation when they are able to submit feedback. Feedback can include criticism and complaints, praise and accolades, suggestions and ideas. This feedback acts a channel for input into service improvement processes as clients make comments based on their experience of receiving a service at the library (Scupola & Nicolajsen 2010). Additionally, feedback contributes to a sense of community in which open communications are encouraged and customer engagement is enhanced (Mangold & Fauld 2009). Research suggests that the common reasons library clients give feedback include dissatisfaction with products and services, for example difficulty finding their way around online systems, or wishes for improvement of a particular service (Scupola & Nicolajsen 2010). Keith and Simmers (2011) argue that comment cards are usually a source of feedback at the time of the service experience and therefore a useful tool for assessing quality. Positive feedback, or comments, provide personal evidence of the value of the library's collections and services and can lead to specific courses of action (Tenopir 2013). Feedback received can be used as a diagnostic tool for improving service and encouraging return patronage (Keith & Simmers 2011). Feedback gathered via multiple channels allows Visitor Experience managers to examine how we are satisfying our visitors and members, to gauge our visitors' expectations and perceptions, to learn what they need and want and to discover what they know (Celuch et al 2015). This provides insights into service quality, which is an important measure in determining visitor satisfaction and impacting return visitation and provides a unique client perspective evaluating our everyday business practices. The higher the perception of service quality, the

greater is the intention of the visitor to return and to spread positive word-of-mouth recommendations to others (Keith & Simmers 2011). Unless library managers establish a mechanism to capture and record data, they have no way of knowing what is a major or minor issue affecting visitors' satisfaction (Hernon and Altman 2015).

## **Feedback at SLQ**

Since 2014 Visitor Experience has coordinated a whole of organisation approach to gathering and responding to feedback received via designated feedback channels via *Tell us*, a centralised visitor feedback database. Prior to the implementation of the *Tell us* database, there was no coherent organisational approach at SLQ to understanding complaints and comments. The aim of the database was to:

- develop and deliver improved client services based on evidence,
- implement a consistent SLQ response to clients in accordance with policies, procedures and brand,
- document clearer workflows in relation to client complaints, and
- ensure best practice in management of our services, facilities assets and resources.

Through the collation of feedback, it was hoped to gain a better understanding of our clients to inform the redesigning and repurposing of library spaces and services. To achieve this, SLQ configured an instance of Altarama's Reftracker software.

RefTracker was already in use to track and respond to reference enquiries and to record information desk statistics. The *Tell us* instance of Reftracker collates most feedback directly received by SLQ, with a few exceptions, social media and client evaluations for events and learning programs which use tailored survey instruments.

Feedback is received via an online form or physical comment cards which are then manually entered into the database. In most cases, the feedback lodged in *Tell Us* is unsolicited and often anonymous. At appropriate times, staff ask visitors to formally put their thoughts in writing either via the web form or comment card. VE staff also record verbal feedback by entering it into *Tell us*. Feedback is divided into four categories - complaints, compliments, suggestions and comments. Further granularity sorts each category into relevant service areas including Building/Facilities, Collections, Equipment/ICT, Events/Exhibitions, Services, Staff/Volunteers and Website. The Visitor Services Manager triages the incoming feedback, assigns each entry to a category, distributes feedback to the appropriate manager and ensures that timely responses are provided where required, within seven working days. Feedback data is reported to SLQ's Senior Management Team forum annually. Table 1 shows amount of feedback received over the first two years. More than 55% of all feedback is submitted anonymously.

Table 1: Feedback received via *Tell us* 2014-2016

<b>Feedback received</b>	<b>2014-2015</b>	<b>2015-2016</b>
Comments	188	189
Compliments	167	270
Complaints	108	214
Suggestions	56	92

When this data is analysed by theme, the largest single theme attracting feedback is Compliments about our services (14% of the total) followed by Comments about our collections (13%). Complaints tend to focus on our facilities. Noise is a recurring

issue and the slowness of internet access is another common complaint. We receive a pleasing number of unsolicited positive feedback which are often multi-part including appreciation of services, staff and spaces simultaneously. Our children's area, The Corner, remains the most commonly praised space.

The *Tell us* system is currently used to record what we call "complaints" as well as other types of client feedback such as compliments and suggestions. However a recent audit has revealed that we are using the term "complaint" in a common sense way rather than using the legislative and standard definition. For example, we characterize someone complaining about slow Wi-Fi as a "complaint" – but the same observation in a fully developed institutional Complaints Management System would probably not be called a complaint. There is a fine line but an important distinction between someone complaining that they are cold and another person pointing out that they are cold, observing that the cold has had a particular harmful effect, expressing unhappiness and asking what the organization is going to do about it. State Library recently developed a *Complaints Management Policy* and an associate procedure with specific reference to two guiding documents:

- Public Service Act 2008 – (s.219A specifically)
- Australian New Zealand Standard 10002-2014 Guidelines for complaints management in organizations

These describe the legislative requirements and best practice for developing a complaints management system. As a result of this work, SLQ is currently rethinking the way in which *Tell us* works in relation to the capture and management of complaints to respond to the stipulations of the key documents. We will continue to use the current system but some procedures, definitions and public access will



change. For example, the online client feedback form will provide specific advice about complaints and how they are managed. In addition, there is a requirement to report complaints related information more frequently to senior management and publically. We intend to make the reporting timeframes consistent for reporting on all types of client feedback, not just complaints.

While the *Tell us* process aims to gather most feedback data, it must be acknowledged that SLQ does not currently have a mechanism for incorporating feedback posted on social media sites. Like many libraries, SLQ has a presence on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and hosts blogs on Wordpress, which attract comments, praise and criticism. One of the challenges to incorporating responses on social media into the feedback process is that client expectations regarding response times is much higher than the seven day turnaround time implemented via *Tell us*. While social media allows organisations to respond to customer ideas quickly, the volume, speed and nature of these interactions (Gallaugher & Ransbotham 2010) presents a challenge to our *Tell us* model and remains a separate and parallel feedback channel at this time.

### **Validating feedback to inform decision-making**

The analysis of feedback contributes to an improved understanding, particularly of our onsite visitors. This has informed decision making around proposed changes to our facilities and services. But feedback is not the sole source of evidence used to identify and inform service improvements. Tenopir (2013) argues that multiple methods should be used to measure value, including quantitative, qualitative and a mixture of both. No one method stands alone. To validate complaints and

suggestions, the data is compared with other research collated by SLQ on an ongoing basis. This includes:

- *Visitor 360 degree audience research exit survey developed by the firm, Morris Hargreaves McIntyre*

Visitors are randomly approached as they exit by Visitor Experience staff and invited to complete the survey on an iPad using an assisted self-completion method. Data collection is distributed across each three-month quarter according to a sample frame based on visitation patterns from previous years. Data is reported quarterly and annually to SLQ. While audience research surveys are primarily designed to inform marketing and communications strategies, the richness of the information gathered via this methodology is beneficial for understanding use of spaces, services and collections with the aim of improving services.

- *The slightly whimsical Happiness exit poll*

Since July 2015, a large touch screen has been located in the Reception foyer simply asking “How satisfied were you by your visit today?”. Visitors touch the appropriate “face” icon to indicate their satisfaction level as they walk past.

Between July 2015 to November 2016 58,054 responses were submitted with 92% of visitors selecting very or somewhat satisfied. While there is little scientific value in this poll, it does inform our visitors that we are interested in their experience and their feedback. The “splash” screen which displays after an individual touches the screen promotes the online Tell us form.

- *Staff observations and anecdotes*

Anecdotal data from staff observations are also considered and used to validate feedback comments. This provides the obverse perspective to client

feedback which is supplied based on receiving services. Staff are the heart and soul of libraries. It is their expertise and commitment that makes a library's services so valued to its users (British Library 2015) Staff observations provide the perspective on delivering services which can be used in tandem with client feedback to provide a holistic view of the service delivery experience.

In the future, SLQ also plans to use Beacon technology to monitor visitor movements through our spaces. Staff are currently working with Arts Queensland to use BlueTooth enabled Beacon technology to locate visitors' positions across the cultural precinct. Beacons have been implemented to help institutions understand how people interact with their facilities, for example, the Guggenheim Museum has experimented with using beacons to see how visitors move through the museum (Spina 2015). It is anticipated that Beacon data will be helpful in determining visitor patterns and length of stay.

The evidence collected via multiple tools (audience research, unsolicited feedback and exit polls) shows that visitors to SLQ are highly satisfied and have positive experiences during their visits and encounters with staff (Thorpe 2016). For service delivery, quality often means exceeding expectations and delivery satisfaction (Cole 2014). The high level of satisfaction ratings via these multiple assessment tools validates that staff are consistently providing exceptional visitor experiences. This does not mean that our service delivery is flawless and qualitative feedback comments, especially those expressing dissatisfaction, allow Visitor Experience

managers to identify opportunities for improvements and provide evidence to support requests for additional funding if required.

## **Innovations inspired by feedback**

Unsolicited feedback, such as the contributions received in Tell us, can generate ideas for innovation. Scupola and Nicolajsen (2010) suggest that client feedback is a resource which can contribute to the ideation phase of a design thinking or innovation process, although their evidence indicates these ideas are often for small incremental changes. By looking at commonalities in the qualitative feedback collected via Tell us and comparing these with some of the data from the Visitor 360 exit survey, Visitor Experience managers identified and implemented changes to improve visitor experiences. This has included changes to State Library policies, services and spaces. These include:

- Changed both the venue and time of our Music Hour initiative, during which volunteers perform instrumental music as entertainment.

As a result of ongoing mixed feedback, both praise and complaints, Music Hour was moved from inside the Level 2 reading room on Friday afternoons to outside the library entrance on Monday mornings to better suit the needs, expectations and experiences of our visitors.

*“Piano playing this afternoon 3/7/15 was lovely. It helps me study.”*

*“I am not enjoying the live piano music in the library this afternoon (3 July). Very repetitive and irritating. Please do NOT tell me to use earphones to block out the noise. Thank you.”*

- Added more client-accessible power sockets throughout the Level 3 reading room to support “bring your own device” behaviour.

This change was prompted by feedback comments, staff observations and exit survey data proving that more than half of our visitors are at the library to study, spending between 2-3 hours per visit onsite.

*“Seems like a problem due to the limited number of facilities on days like today when I couldn’t find a power point for up to 3 hours, nor a suitable table.”*

- Created a premium quiet study space for all SLQ clients in the John Oxley Library on Level 4.

This innovation was based on feedback comments about a lack of quiet study spaces and staff observations of reading room use. This evidence supported a proposal to review the Level 4 reading room to reconfigure access, with the dual aim of providing additional quiet study spaces and enhancing the space for researchers using our Queensland collections, especially rare and original materials. A benefit of this project has been broadening of the client base of the John Oxley Library for both quiet study and access to our Queensland collections. Funding was sought and granted for this project which was delivered in July 2016.

*“The space is a great place to work and research but unfortunately this is often ruined by noisy conversations and phone calls occurring regularly in the supposed ‘quiet zones’.”*

*“This is a great library, with great resources. Unfortunately, not even the quiet areas are quiet, with so many people talking – Level 3.”*

## Closing the feedback loop

Changes to services and spaces often are implemented but apart from any required wayfinding signage, improvements generally go unheralded. As part of our commitment to services improvement, Visitor Experience managers want to better evaluate and measure the impact/value of changes and interventions. To do this, requires communication and feedback from our visitors. In 2016 we began to more actively communicate information about service improvements to clients beginning with social media posts (see Figures 1 and 2 below). Social media provides an opportunity to not only communicate directly to clients but also offers both a mechanism for dialogue and a means to monitor reactions to service improvements via likes, comments and shares (Gallaugher & Ransbotham 2010). The additional benefit of being able to illustrate social media posts with visual images makes it easier to communicate complex changes in an easily understood visual format (Yamaguchi & Howarth 2016). Social media also allows for an element of storytelling which can provide intuitive and instant comprehension, be memorable and create or evoke an emotional connection which leads to action (Yamaguchi & Howarth 2016; Mangold & Faulds 2009). Using social media as both a “megaphone” to broadcast changes and a “monitor” to evaluate responses (Gallaugher & Ransbotham 2010) has been useful although the irony of this feedback loop remaining outside the *Tell us* process is recognised.

Figure 1: Instagram post promoting additional power points for client use

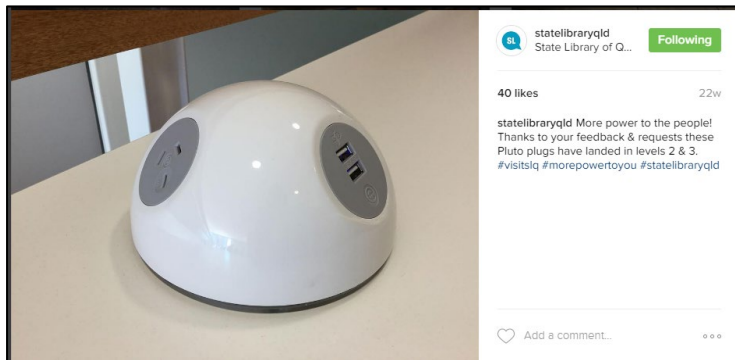


Figure 2: Facebook post promoting new quiet study area on Level 4



The next stage of communicating service improvements to clients is focussed on implementing digital signage within State Library's South Bank building. SLQ, like many multi-faceted institutions has in the past, gone down the path of creating disparate signage, wayfinding and feedback solutions developed in response to locally defined need. With the best intentions in the world, we create a bunch of odd systems that do not necessarily connect. Recently, SLQ has paused to look at digital signage systems with the potential to deliver greater returns, across the broad range of functions we want to perform. Digital signage is the use of electronic

displays to distribute digital content remotely. The benefits of using digital signage include:

- It can be attention grabbing.
- It is focused and personalised – dynamically changing to deliver focused message at a critical point.
- Users can be an active participant.
- It is dynamic and can be changed to meet the demographics of your clients (Matsheka 2014).

The ability to publish and display dynamic content to selected screens is particularly exciting when it comes to gathering and responding to valuable feedback from our clients. Imagine a screen in the Family History area providing access to family history content, seeking feedback about the quality and relevance of services and on part of the screen displaying graphically, the feedback gathered – feeding back the feedback. State Library has evaluated a number of digital signage solutions and has chosen OneLan as its digital signage provider. Testing is now underway with content concepts in development. Staff in The Edge, ICT, Visitor Experience and Marketing & Communications are collaboratively working on rolling this technology out to offer a single platform for client focussed content and interaction within our physical spaces. Aside from the technical challenges in implementing a digital signage system across the organisation, the selection and presentation of data and messages into visually appealing and persuasive message is complex (Yamaguchi & Howarth 2016). How we will measure the impact of digital signage is yet to be determined.

## **Conclusion**



Libraries must constantly meet visitor expectations through creativity, innovation and risk-taking (Hirshon 1996). At SLQ we constantly strive to provide the best visitor experience to everyone. By collecting, reviewing and analysing client feedback, we gain a clearer understanding of visitors' expectations and experiences. Quantitative feedback statistics help identify needs for service improvement while the qualitative comments collated by *Tell us* can tell a story or put a personal face on data (Tenopir, 2013). By actively seeking to communicate the responses to feedback to our clients we aim to develop a continuous loop of feedback, service improvement and innovation.

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