Measuring What Matters: Organisational Effectiveness by the Numbers in One Canadian Public Library

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Abstract
The presentation will concentrate on a decade of using statistics and measurement methods to manage a large urban public library (serving 650,000 with 16 locations) in a period of rapid growth and development of its services.

The Mississauga Library System doubled in ten years and yet successfully met all the challenges of growth to remain the top rated local service. Through a formal management process composed of several key activities including performance management, strategic management, organisational health, and value management, the Library identified key statistics and key quality as well as quantity performance indicators and sought to affect those positively through changes in inputs and outputs in key areas of service expansion, innovation, continuous improvement, and efficiencies.

The presentation will review the components of the Library’s formal management process and the measurement methods used as well as a multi-year approach including major service plans and their multi-year budgets. Examples of the statistics collected, the methodologies used, and performance indicators devised for each part of the process will be examined along with the Library’s evolving vision for and definition of ultimate “success” – superior service at a reasonable cost.

As well, the key Canadian library statistics – public as well as other – will be reviewed as the background to one large public library’s pursuit of effectiveness. The issues of the Canadian library scene will be covered along with current national practices and the unmet measurement needs today.

Introduction
The intent of this paper is to provide an overview of the application of statistics in practice in a major Canadian public library, the Mississauga (Ontario) Library System, over a decade of rapid expansion and extensive development as well as stable administration and governance. The specific goals and objectives of one library over the period 1987 to 2002 will be reviewed as well as the key performance indicators identified for success, and the methods employed in the ongoing and continuous improvement of that large urban library system. In order to present the process and the results to best advantage, I have taken an integrated perspective, and will endeavour to provide a holistic picture of this effort, rather than an analytical one. Consequently this paper will not be a “how to” but rather one library’s story of achieving effectiveness through the application of some specific management tools and techniques. Maybe one or two will be applicable to other libraries and other situations. So, do you want to hear an exciting story with a happy ending?

Once upon a time in Canada, as elsewhere, public libraries were not impressive. But now, after decades of support, expansion, development, and growth in most regions of the country, they are in fact thriving. They have collectively met the recent challenges of growth, expansion, and working smarter as well as the demands of the electronic revolution in innovative and productive ways resulting in increased membership, visits, use as well as demands for and expectations of service. Overall, funding has reflected the increased demands for the public library service especially in new facilities, adequate hours of operation,
expanded non-print collections, and new technological capabilities. Annual reports and survey results over the last two decades reflect new investment in collections, older facility renewal, and greater library staff figures as well as high and increasing user satisfaction, and record levels of tax support in most locations, and greater political recognition at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. The National Library of Canada was once a moribund institution with little relevance to public libraries. Under a new National Librarian, the Library undertook a leadership role in the co-ordinated development of unique national resources like a catalogue of newspaper holdings and collaborative cataloguing, resulting today in a national union catalogue the envy of many countries and a national library respected and relevant. When the information revolution arrived in Canada we were ready.

So why bother to measure for success when it is so evident? As a chief librarian with over 30 years of service in over half a dozen public libraries in five of the country’s ten provinces, in rich and poor areas, urban and rural, new and established, demanding and apathetic communities, progressive and unenlightened governments, the answer should be clear – to be ready for the inevitable decline in fortunes. To build an understanding of and support for the service needs of tomorrow among all stakeholders allows no time for complacency. Telling the library’s story requires a vocabulary, and that vocabulary, for better or for worse, increasingly requires figures – and lots of them.

Senior management’s unique duty, I feel, is to be able to answer the key questions “where are we now and where do we want to be and by when?” My personal view is that it is senior management’s job, like the scouts on the wagon trains of the old west, to ride ahead and find out where the cliffs and valleys are over the hill after next, and to come back and steer the group to the best possible location of the choices available. Like those scouts we need some savvy and some special tools. I will review what I have packed and what I have found useful for this role throughout this paper. Are we ready to ride?

Context

To put my experience into perspective, a little context is necessary. The Mississauga story is a short one. The current city is only 27 years old. Its component parts have existed for over a century (two of the communities have public libraries over 100 years old) but the city was created by the assembly of a dozen smaller towns, villages and then rural areas in 1974. The new city had a public referendum to select a name and that of the band of native peoples who had sold the land at the mouth of the Credit River to the British in 1802 won easily over the next choice, Sheridan. So Mississauga became a new presence with a population of fewer than 200,000. Like any amalgamation of governments the immediate task was to amalgamate the respective services. Fortunately for the public libraries in 1975, automation – remember that quaint epithet? – was on the horizon. Some scout at the time, not me, rode out and brought back “retrospective conversion,” so the Mississauga Library System, as it became known in respect of the past and the amalgamation process, became one of the first public libraries to begin to acquire bibliographic records in electronic MARC form and to begin to create one of the earliest electronic union catalogues. The benefit for users was shortly evident when, in the early 1980s on-line circulation was launched, followed by a microform catalogue, then an on-line catalogue for staff, and then later for the public. In quick sequence dial-in access and the full suite of user options followed. After its first decade, the Mississauga Library System was an impressive new major Canadian public library.
As the Library’s and the new city’s second decade began I was hired as Director. In my 15 years the city has more than doubled in size to a 2002 population of over 625,000 on its rapid way to 800,000. Growth still is a major issue, along with the evident need for a true service philosophy to support the new structure. Oh yes, and the need to prove cost effectiveness and to keep up with the electronic revolution – and immediately please. This was a city in a hurry.

The Library presently has over four million visits annually at 15 locations and a bookmobile. The staff is composed of 222 full-time employees, 50 of which are librarians, and a further 250 part-time employees, comprising about 111 FTE, for a total staff of 333 FTE. The Library depends heavily on the City to provide a full range of support services estimated at an annual value of over $5 million. The annual materials programme is intended to add about 110,000 new items each year which is intended to maintain a collection of 1.5 million, set on a standard of 2.2 items per capita approved when the population served was under 500,000. This standard is expected to be slowly reduced to two items per capita as the city population levels out at 800,000. This will represent a conscious move from “just in case” to “just in time” thinking and will take into account excellent technological access and delivery mechanisms. This change in collection philosophy will also affect staffing and space needs in the future.

The mission for the Mississauga Library System (set in 1987) was to meet the demands before it, and to ensure necessary and sufficient resources in all areas by the year 2001. That had a nice ring back then. I stand here today able to announce that the Library has achieved its stated intentions. In reporting to the Library Board earlier this year, that was the message. In 2001 use exceeded seven million for the first time and membership exceeded 250,000. Annual circulation per capita notably exceeded the national average for the first time. The annual citizen survey ranked the library as the most satisfactory local service with a six-point increase over the previous year’s survey. Two new branches were experiencing record levels of use and satisfaction. Technology issues for a time had all been addressed resulting in regular kudos from users of all stripes. The Library’s award winning web site continued to be the most visited among all city web pages. The Friends of the Library had delivered on all their promises and plans and presented a “cheque” for $1 million worth of community support last year to the City Council. Use at the Central Library at close to three million loans a year was among the highest in the country. All 14 branches were performing acceptably in terms of key input as well as output measures. The bookmobile and volunteer-run shut-in service were at record levels of use. Marketing and publicity was self-sustaining, thanks to advertising revenues and sponsorships. Revenues were maxed out with fees and fine rates among the highest and most extensive around and also some innovative endeavours like vending machines, coin operated lockers and charges for almost all library programmes. Good relations had been conscientiously built with major stakeholders and community partners resulting in regular and reliable good “report cards” back to senior governing bodies. All collections in all formats were at acceptable levels of supply and use in all locations. As we say internally, the seven B’s of library planning were all where we had planned them to be – books, bodies, bytes, bricks, bucks, bridges, and boasts.

**Measuring Success**

Key to defining success and to measuring the journey from start to finish, from 1987 to 2001, has been the basic concept that for the Mississauga Library System success is measured locally. This radical concept is not widely appreciated in my 30 years of experience. External measures are useful as are benchmarking comparisons and industry
standards, but ultimately targets for the Library must be determined and adopted locally. Measuring success then becomes measuring against this library’s intentions, not the industry’s or neighbours’ or the wealthiest or the average. This key concept had to be acknowledged before the journey to success could properly begin and in Mississauga it was in 1987. Behind the definition of success there also had to be a vision of the desired results in 2001. For the City and the Library the vision was simply and clearly stated – to offer the right services in a superior way at a reasonable cost. The more basic the service, the more satisfied the user, the lower the cost, the better. With the goal clearly before us, the need to measure the changes planned and results produced became the name of the game.

The Library thus moved to develop and adopt a formal management model at the start of its journey to success. This grew out of a similar model that the City had adopted but was extended, in large part because of the American Library Association’s performance measurement process. The model developed by the Library has four parts to it: the annual Performance Management Process for all 400 employees (full-time and part-time, unionised and non-unionised), including annual performance appraisals and performance ratings for both with an associated merit pay plan for the non-union group; the triennial Strategic Management Process to coincide with the term of each library board including an environmental scan activity as well as objective setting with key performance indicators for each three-year plan; the Workflow Improvement Process – a formal approach to redesigning workflows, conducted by staff in areas identified by staff to ensure continuous improvement as a way of work; and also the Organisational Health Process, another regular staff directed effort designed to take the pulse of library staff on the library’s performance and identify issues for further action through a staff designed, implemented and evaluated employee survey. In short, these four components of the Library’s Organisational Effectiveness Process all centred on a change agenda for the Library, essentially led by key stakeholders including staff. This Organisational Effectiveness Process, now in place for over a decade, has allowed stakeholders a piece of the action in creating a library service offering the right services in a superior way at a reasonable cost, the original vision. Underlying this formal management process were the measures to report the success in achieving the identified changes over the specified time. All of these had to provide answers to the initial questions – what do we want to be and how do we get there?

All this was done with close ongoing connection to the goals and objectives of the City, and the other service areas within it. In fact, the very close relationship with the City has led over the years to increasing co-operation and alignment with its departments in a number of ways, making the Mississauga Library System unique among Canadian public libraries. Although the Library is operated by an appointed board of management that meets ten times each year by law, the Board has opted for the library to be operated as far as possible as if it were another department of the City. Only the unique legal requirements of the province’s public libraries act and the collective agreement with the library union override any City policy or procedure on an operational level. As a result, about 20% of the annual operating costs of the library are carried in other departmental budgets, including costs for janitorial services, leases, security, technology, and the centralised services of human resources, legal and financial. This arrangement has the additional effect of creating greater confidence among city officials and bureaucrats in the library and its $20 million annual budget.
Organisational Effectiveness Process

I will now discuss the key issues and efforts under the four areas of the Library’s Organisational Effectiveness Process (OEP): Performance Management Process (PMP); Strategic Management Process (SMP); Workflow Improvement Process (WIP); and Organisational Health Process (OHP).

Performance Management Process
The annual Performance Management Process involves creating performance agreements every spring for each of the 40 non-union management employees. Each reflects the key objectives of the organisation that year as relevant to that business unit as well as requiring personal development objectives for that year. These are expressed as change objectives with desired results in key areas. All employees have a personal training and development profile, and individual annual objectives are thus determined with the employee and the manager to address personal improvement in specific areas. The personal training profile includes the person’s personal style as determined in a formal analysis process, a learning style, computer competency, special assignments and contributions, and professional involvement. A pay increase is determined based on the year’s performance and has varied from 0% to 7%.

For all union employees, from part-time page to full-time senior librarian, a performance appraisal is performed annually which allows for rating on several dozen job-specific points, resulting in an overall rating of outstanding/meets expectations/needs improvement. Pay for union employees is established according to annual steps on a salary grid.

Strategic Planning Process
The triennial Strategic Planning Process, which is concurrent with the term of the nine member appointed library board, involves a review of previous plans and assumptions, an environmental scan of changes in the business, a refresher on plans at the City level, a review of ten year budgets required by law, and staff input into any changed circumstances, such as facility needs or usage trends. The Library’s benchmark comparators, eight other comparable library systems, are also reviewed. The key performance indicators from standard library statistics are reviewed to see how others may be changing.

Priorities and associated costs need to be produced in accordance with the City’s budgeting schedule so the process is driven by this requirement. Recently, this process has concentrated more on the “soft side” of the service, specifically revenues, partnerships and market increases (bucks, bridges, and boasts) as the harder elements have been addressed (bodies, books, bricks, and bytes). Desired performance level measures are reconfirmed as a consequence of this review process and change strategies articulated to stakeholders. Some cycles have included focus groups and surveys of specific issues. Such efforts have historically been partnerships with other institutions and agencies.

Finally, the Library has a vision document of what it will look like when the City stops growing in around 2020. This includes projections of all aspects of activity from circulation to staffing, to revenues, to volunteer hours, to donors/donations, to holdings by format, to turnover rates, to … just about everything we measure today, and some new ones we do not yet measure. It may not be the way it turns out but if we cannot foresee our future who can? And they love it at City Hall. And judging from the past, we are too conservative.

Workflow Improvement Process
The biennial Workflow Improvement Process has yielded very impressive results in efficiencies. With each cycle of this process, staff begin by identifying processes that they feel are inefficient. Senior management then reviews the suggestions
and adds others as desirable. Terms of reference are set for the approved projects, then desired results are determined in stretch targets, and task teams are created of the best and brightest currently working in that area. Since most workflows are so complex this tends to bring staff together who otherwise would not even know each other, and yet they share a common concern for the outcome of a shared workflow.

The process requires the resulting redesigned workflow to be presented to management, and any interested staff. Once it has been given the green light, the same task team is then charged with both implementing and evaluating the results against the plan and confirming the benefits in hard numbers including dollars. This approach to continuous improvement is expected to be shared and used when project staff return to their normal workplace for further benefit. The senior management group used this process to evaluate their own performance and use of time, resulting in new jobs, skills, and outcomes for the members of the team.

The current effort is focused on the lowest business units – their key customers, products and services; their costs; and their key performance measures for activities at that level. Change strategies will be set with measures against the unit’s vision and its present performance as part of the next year’s objective setting for each unit. The emphasis will be on the collection at each location as the rationalisation of the collection – and the $2.2 million annual budget – continues to be a key issue.

The other major improvement activities are the regular “fill rate” exercise as designed by the American Library Association, and the “secret shopper” exercise, an in-house invention. The former requires measurement of the success rate of users to find a title or author, something from browsing and the information they asked for; the latter involves volunteers using all locations and reporting on their experience against specific as well as general criteria. Staff take these regular evaluation exercises very seriously with training efforts then designed to improve results next time round. Over time the scores have improved and are a regular “good news story” to the Library Board as well as to all staff. Good results and improved scores are invariably the stuff of publicity articles and reports to the public, usually just before budget time! Finally, all locations actively encourage customer comments – complaints and kudos – and they flow in. Any requesting a personal reply are followed up religiously by management, and compliments go on to the Library Board and the Mayor.

Organisational Health Process
The final process used in the formal Organisational Effectiveness Process is the biennial Organisational Health Process, which alternates with the Workflow Improvement Process. This was initially started as a management tool, but in a subsequent cycle it was decided to let a volunteer group of staff compose, conduct and compile the survey and results. This has worked remarkably well. Issues of concern to staff are identified and generally incorporated in the survey instrument. Returns, which are seen only by the staff committee, are analysed by sector and job so that targeted action can be proposed, again by the project team, not management. Results over time have improved and management has been better able to put first things first in the eyes of staff.

The goal of all these ongoing efforts of the formal Organisational Effectiveness Process is positively to affect the key performance indicators, in order to demonstrate how the Library is effectively meeting the needs of its stakeholders. Where outside comparisons are useful to this end a word of caution, or rather common sense. It is not the Library’s expressed goal to be the best. It is the intention to be superior at a reasonable cost. This leads to the question of where to set the
bar. For the City, as well now as for the Library, that has been set not as the best, and not as the average, but at the 75th percentile. The Library aspires to rank 7th out of 10 or 8th out of 12 or 27th out of 36. That is the definition of success for Mississauga. Of course, exceeding this target without spending more is always acceptable. Spending more and performing less well is, as one might expect, frowned upon. Also, only significant change is treated seriously; plus or minus 10% is normally the threshold for special attention. Likewise, not all activities are equal. Observing the 80-20 rule can ensure efforts are logically put where they will do the most good. Some things must be made more important than others or the organisation may appear to be winning only to succumb to the one thing that really was more important.

Setting Priorities

Deciding on what is important – the right services – is another exercise the Library has engaged in periodically. Initially a matrix of values was created in conjunction with other service departments of the City including recreation, parks and fire services, against which all products and services, from the professional collection to storytimes, were then scored by several internal as well as external groups. The results produced a rank order of all civic services and products, from most important to least. Each was then rated as to whether it was resourced sufficiently, under, or over. The results were presented in graph form with the most important and most needy items in the upper right quadrant and the others across the other quadrants, each requiring the appropriate action. As a result, several library services were off-loaded to more appropriate agencies, and others were actually discontinued. Those that rated highly and were also deemed to be in need of additional resources became key objectives for the next period. Subsequent iterations of this exercise reflected the improvement of key products and services, and the identification of emerging needs and new priorities for future attention. Over time, the intent was to address all key needs and move all scores to the desired quadrant. It proved to be a fun if time-consuming tool, one certain to focus the full organisation on the change agenda.

All products and services of the Library were certainly not always at such acceptable levels as they are now. The initial environmental scan and the early strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) exercises produced long lists of many competing needs. Sessions with the Library Board and the staff required much learning and discussion on the desirability of certain requirements over others, and the timing – and funding – of relative options. Somehow those early long lists became shorter as plans were turned into funded actions in a logical order over sequential strategic plans. Change takes time, in this case over 15 years.

A prime need of the young and rapidly growing City was an adequate Central Library. The facility then was smaller than the largest branch, poorly designed, crowded to the point that half the collection was stored off site, and still so popular that police had to control access to the building on Sundays – one person in for one leaving all day. The impact on staff morale and retention over that time was equally bleak. So a new Central Library capable of eventually serving 800,000 residents was determined to be the top priority. When a study of what would attract business to the emerging suburb next to Toronto indicated strongly that educational and recreational amenities – quality of life in the city – were the key determinant of businesses to relocate, the Central Library was funded over other cultural and recreational needs. From approval to opening took five years, but from the day it opened the new 300,000 square foot Central Library became the busiest lending public library in the country. And its impact unexpectedly increased membership and use at the other pre-existing branches across the city. The new facility
was a successful design around three concepts: easy orientation to the five floors, open access to the entire collection, and flexibility for future re-organisation and wiring. On the last point, between planning and opening the entire Audio Visual Department was dismantled as the film service rapidly gave way to videos and these were integrated rather than segregated. Also the rapid growth of the multilingual collection in over 25 languages switched places with the Children’s Department much to the delight of both parties. So the design served the needs of the library as planned, and has continued to do so as more and more workstations have been added and use has continued to exceed all projections. A real success story!

Also arising from early SWOT strategic planning exercises was the need to turn over the ageing computer system to meet volume demands as well as enhanced capabilities. This became evident when the Library’s rating on the annual citizen satisfaction survey continued to drop and the complaints and negative feedback continued to increase. Keeping the customer satisfied electronically became an issue. Funds and relief were provided and the annual rating zoomed to the top – and has stayed there.

As use increased, the issue of hours and associated staffing levels were identified as the key to service success. These needs were addressed in a timely way primarily through the reorganisation and downsizing of the Technical Services Division. The staff of this unit was reduced from 63 to 24 over time as modernised and streamlined processes were identified and implemented, many from the staff-led workflow analysis process. These positions and sometimes the incumbents were all transferred to public service to enhance direct service to the public. The major activity of the time was, however, finalising a branch library model to serve the mature city. Two new branch libraries were subsequently opened without any increase in full-time staff complement.

A rationalisation of existing branches determined that none was deemed to be underused. It was determined that the newer areas of the city would have fewer larger branches with more selection, more service and more hours – a trade off between “right services” and “reasonable cost.” All these changes coming as they did in a certain logical order shortened the needs list of the regular SWOT analyses. They also demanded performance or success indicators and measurement. Change agendas had been set including key measures and targets so regular reporting to the stakeholders affected was emerging as a key role of management.

This acknowledgement reinforced the need for a new management structure and three new senior manager positions were created and several more below. The senior level of management was expanded with a Manager of Branch Services, a Manager of Electronic Services, and a Manager of Administrative Services. Below this level positions of Community Development Officer, Youth Specialist, and Collection Manager were created. In the new Central Library departments, each with a manager, were also created: Circulation, Children’s, Readers’ Den (popular library), Sciences, Business, and Literature/History. As well, the outreach services were enlarged and became the new Visiting Library Services Department.

The branch library renewal programme then began with several inadequate leased spaces being enlarged and/or relocated and the older stand-alone facilities being modernised. Eventually, in the wake of the successful new Central Library, the first of five planned new large branch libraries opened in 2000 and another in 2001, with the rest funded and planned for 2003, 2004 and 2006, thus completing the ultimate branch model plan ahead of schedule. From the approval of the Central Library in 1987 to the planned opening of the 16th and final branch in 2006, adequate space and convenient access has been the top priority for funds and management. Membership,
visits, use, circulation and satisfaction – all output measures – have all increased with the provision of new and improved library facilities to all areas of the city. Such clear and evident success stories of planned and completed change then made the other issues more saleable. And there were more issues.

A growing one was the quality of the Library’s ever more important bibliographic database. The goal was for the Library’s growing bibliographic database to be accurate, complete, and up to date. This was to be the definition of success and the basis of saving users’ time. Virtual services and visits were becoming the new measure of excellence for public libraries. It raised the question of how would customers rate satisfaction in 2020 and how would we get there? The user demographics are about to change dramatically as the two most influential trends hit simultaneously – the retirement of the baby boomers, and the critical mass of the computer educated generation. The library is expected to do more than before and also do better than before in this area. Output measurement gained new prominence in the Library’s planning process in an effort to maintain the Library’s premiere position among local services with the new user in the future.

**Measurement Tools**

The foregoing was intended to indicate a series of priorities which occupied management’s attention over time and the key performance indicators used to measure the before and the after of the change agenda. The Mississauga Library System has relied on the following ten major measurement tools over this decade of growth and development:

1. The City’s annual customer satisfaction survey that addresses the needs of all the key stakeholders – the community, the politicians, the bureaucrats, the library board and staff
2. Annual fill rate surveys of the ALA that provide local level data for planning, collection development, and training
3. The Library’s own secret shopper survey which is also a successful partnership
4. The annual performance appraisals on all staff which allows for reward and recognition as well as training and development of staff, a key to success
5. Annual output data on visits, loans, and members
6. Semi-annual collection turnover rates for all formats in all locations
7. Ongoing holds per copy reports to respond to demand effectively
8. Annual acquisition rates for all formats in all locations to ensure an adequate supply of material to maintain the collections and recognise changing usage
9. Annual statistics on the various activities of the Friends of the Library including partnerships, members, and revenues
10. Staffing/use ratios to enable a constant rationalisation of staff at appropriate levels across all locations, new and old

The absence of statistics on electronic services is noteworthy.

Service standards for the Library currently include the following: 0.26 SF per capita; a staffing ratio of 1/2000 population; annual turnover rate of 4; collection duplication ratio of 1:5. There are no standards currently for the print/non-print ratio in the collection, or for electronic workstations. In terms of revenue generation, an annual planning priority, donations are expected to total 1% of the annual materials budget and volunteer effort 10% of the staffing component. New facilities are expected to focus on revenues, donations and volunteer efforts as important aspects of a library presence in a community. With about 2,000 members of the Friends of the Library group, that is one statistic that looks impressive, although
increased membership is a major objective each year.

The City’s annual customer satisfaction survey polls 900 residents randomly selected by phone. The City is also included in a quarterly phone survey of 1,000 Ontario citizens which looks at higher level concerns and trends among citizens. The City gets the highest overall satisfaction ratings of any city, with 87% last year. It has been conducted for six consecutive years. The Library has consistently been rated the best local service along with Fire. The Library is also rated among the best ways to find out about the community. About 20% of respondents report using the Library’s Internet workstations. Seventy-five per cent of those polled believe spending on the library is about right, versus 65% for fire and recreation.

Public libraries are notorious for the wealth of statistics they keep. This can be a blessing and also a curse. Two of the key questions that need to be asked are: Who wants all these numbers? And is the effort to produce them then worth the value they bring to the organisation? A quick and dirty effort may be all that is required for the task at hand, not bulging files of regular spreadsheets. Measures have become more plentiful and easier to gather with advances in technology. They have become more standardised and more timely as well. And, also through time trackable in most organisations. In Canada public libraries can and do use the statistics produced every May on the 75 largest public library systems that voluntarily participate (CALUPL, 2002), the annual statistics produced by each province usually a year late, and the corresponding American public library statistics in which many larger Canadian public libraries participate (Public Library Association, 2001). Most reports still focus on input measures with some key output measures and the rare ratios or rankings. The annual statistics produced by the large public libraries group are modelled on the American counterpart but with some notable additions. They have a section of ranking tables on a variety of topics such as statistics on holdings as well as measures such as holdings per capita. They also contain a section on materials expenditures both by format and also by source and country of source. These are unique library indicators useful to a number of sectors. The library statistics from the National Library of Canada are merely a summary report on total numbers in a few core areas of interest such as staff, holdings, locations etc. The intent of this irregular report is to provide a recent snapshot of library activity and impact, especially economic, for the entire country. It is voluntary and consistency from report to report is a basic weakness of the data collected. In sum, public libraries in Canada have among the most comprehensive and current statistics available to them for their respective planning purposes and have had for well over a decade. These are easily and efficiently gathered and distributed each year and are intended for the widest possible audience.

**Future Developments**

In the coming period the Mississauga Library System will need to refocus, this time on cost effectiveness. This will require closer scrutiny of operations and measures for smaller units of service within the system. With the ageing of many facilities there will be a need for funds for renewal. Growth, although much slower already and continuing to slow, will be an evident pressure in some areas as neighbourhoods fill in and families expand once again and grow into the school age years. Ironically, the school age population for the entire city will decline for the first time in the next decade, as will immigration. The seniors population will see the largest growth in the next period. Their use of and support for the services of the library may prove to be pivotal in the tight money times ahead. Marketing and promotion of the high value and low cost of the library will be a key
activity for the Library starting this year. The Friends of the Library, already a success story after ten years, must become even more of a community presence as many other groups also begin to woo seniors. The future of magazines and their electronic counterpart needs to be monitored. As funders become increasingly obsessed with outcomes public libraries will need to get back to why we exist and what we do for that public good, that quality of life. User fees have not become a successful alternative because they are not a viable alternative. We have used the phrase “You can tell a lot about a city by its library” with senior government successfully. Sure we have costs and they are increasing, but no other public service has the value we have. We must now use our expertise at statistics to communicate that key message.

In all these efforts, it will be increasingly necessary to identify qualitative as well as strictly quantitative measures. One that is a current preoccupation with us is the age of the collection in each branch. The older locations have not seen the avalanche of new materials that the expanded and new locations have. This will be examined this year and next and some older locations will get additional funds to refresh their collections. The task at this time is to design a process with measures to evaluate and compare the age of disparate collections. And of course in some areas the age of materials may be a plus, as with the classics, although condition as well should be a measure of a collection’s quality.

Part of repositioning the library will need to include stopping some activities and services. Over time this process has served the library well. Customers must be informed and respected as their favourite activity is phased out or possibly reinvented through other delivery means with other partners. The information industry, or perhaps more appropriately the publishing industry, will be in trouble in the period ahead and libraries will pay the price whether through higher prices, less product, or poorer service and delivery. Technology will not ride to the rescue, freely providing everyone with everything as promised. But, like radio, television, movies, newspapers, live theatre – each of which has had its obituary published – we will survive.

Of course there is another perspective, the one that sees public libraries disappearing as more and more becomes available through a terminal at home school or office. And this view also sees librarians and other library workers disappearing as the population goes surfing more and more confidently and comfortably for whatever, wherever, whenever. This may become the future but rather than worry about it I like to tell my Board and Council that the good news is we will have lots of warning because bookstores will all close before we do. So do not start clearing out your desk next week.

In Canada there are issues looming before public libraries everywhere. As of this morning, these include the spectre of amalgamations into larger units of service (which created Mississauga over 30 years ago), access and delivery issues replacing availability and ownership issues, push technologies that will go to the user, a need to watch Canadian content in all our libraries as the world changes, the creation of locally relevant e-content through digitisation of local information, and a keen interest at higher levels on best practices among comparable libraries which will lead to more homogeneity among our institutions over time. Obviously, we can further ensure our continued role by becoming more useful in a wired world. As a scout I believe there’s gold in them there URLs. We all need to head that way as fast as our on-line catalogues will allow. Having lived through defending paperbacks, then phonographs, then eight track tapes, and cassettes and videos and DVDs and CD-ROMs, all in one career, I am ready for all these challenges. As a result of changing with the times, public library use and support today is at an
all-time high. In Mississauga, this success has come as a result of planning the work and working the plan. And today we have the numbers to prove it because we measured what mattered.

References
