

Reaching our communities digitally through the Kete Hamilton Project

Smita Biswas - Digital Access Manager and Rae McCormick - Digital Access Librarian,
Hamilton City Libraries

Abstract:

It describes Hamilton City Libraries journey in reaching its large multi ethnic community through the Kete Hamilton website, launched in December 2008 as part of the Aotearoa People's Network Project. Within a time span of eight months and little full time staff resources devoted to it, Kete Hamilton has been widely accepted by the Hamilton community. After the initial publicity, Kete Hamilton has slowly become self sustaining with communities taking ownership of this project and themselves approaching the Library to participate and contribute their stories. This article shares some of the interesting stories of how Hamilton City Libraries got their communities involved as well as giving a few tips on making their site self managing and less reliant on staff members.

According to the Centre for Digital Storytelling "Every community has a memory of itself. Neither an archive nor an authoritative record...but a living history, an awareness of a collective identity woven of a thousand stories".

Inspired by Kete Horowhenua, Hamilton embarked on its journey of collecting memories of its communities when the Kete software was offered as part of the Aotearoa Peoples Network (APN) project.

During the last eight months, Kete has accumulated 127 topics, 900 images showcasing the Hamilton's diverse community including rare historic images, fantastic born digital video clips and oral histories to name a few. The site continues to grow every week.

Early on, Hamilton City Libraries were very excited by the Kete project, not only because it was a new way of reaching the community, but also staff could start putting forward some of the valuable historic photographs online. According to Mark Caunter, Information and Heritage Manager "We can not only showcase our collections of historic photographs, ephemera and archives, but also create a historical context for those images and add value to them. In the absence of a database, which prevents us

from contributing directly to such projects as Matapihi, Kete allows us to take part in digital initiatives such as 'Coming Home' ".

Staff have had opportunities to meet some very interesting community groups and individuals, such as Ta Phat-Thanh from Vietnam. 'Mr Pat' as he likes to be known, came to NZ after the Vietnam War where he shook off the refugee status and is now a Justice of the Peace and a familiar face around the city and also the Central Library where he spends many hours studying.

Hearing the story of an Iraqi refugee, a former soldier in Saddam's army, was extremely moving for library staff. While he didn't want his name to appear anywhere as he still had family members in Iraq and concerned for their safety, he was very happy to share the story of his trials and tribulations in the UN refugee camp, his escape and finally his new life in Hamilton.

Joe Di Maio's journey from a young lad in war time Italy to becoming a City Councillor is also a fascinating read. There is a recorded audio and video story of his community and local business driven project about the construction of one of the largest artificial Christmas trees in New Zealand, in Garden Place, Hamilton. Erected in 2009, it had 10,000 individual branches, over 3,500 coloured baubles and 120,000 LCD lights.

A young contributor submitted some valuable live footage of the 'Tamahere Cool Store fire' and the 'Waipa Delta' a paddle boat which took trips on the Waikato River for 23 years, but left Hamilton permanently for Auckland earlier this year.

Despite having little dedicated staff hours and hi-tech resources, staff involved learnt very quickly about being savvy with the digital camera and the little digital voice recorder to capture the moment and the overall look and feel of the story.

Tips for getting your community involved:

As per Joann Ransom, the creator of Kete Horowhenua's advice, use every opportunity to talk to your community about your Kete.

- Get your Council's ethnic coordinator or community group leaders involved. Hamilton City Libraries have fantastic support from Philip Yeung, Hamilton City Councils Ethnic Advisor, who invites staff to all ethnic community meetings or event he attends he gives staff a few minutes to talk about and often demonstrate the Kete website for a real time experience. Staff have found after the initial publicity that word spread quickly and community groups are making the first step to become contributors.
- Keep track of your city/ town's events through your local newspapers and contact the organisers. Many are quite happy to get the extra publicity for their event. Hamilton City Libraries record all city events such as the balloon festival, V8 Super Car Street Race, Christmas parade, farmers market etc.
- Get your museum and Council archives involved. Offer them free web space to have permanent virtual exhibition of their past exhibitions and digitised copy of their archival materials.
- Contact local hobby and art groups or PC and computer clubs. Many of the local artists will love to have a chance to display and publish their work. Local Hamilton poet, Paula has used Kete to record activities of the Charitable Trust that she runs to promote literacy as well as publish some of her poems.
- Get into partnership with your local/ regional newspaper. Libraries have developed a partnership with the Waikato Times, who have given permission to link to any articles they have published about an event or a contributor to Kete, making Kete items a complete resource.
- Talk to the History/ Media dept of your local University or Polytechnic. Hamilton recently offered the Kete as a platform to the University of Waikato history students to submit their digital history project based on Hamilton.

Challenges:

- While there has been a quick uptake by the local multi ethnic community, the rate at which Maaori communities add content has been slow. Despite efforts by Whetu Marama te Ua, the libraries Kaiwhakahaere Ratonga Maaori she says “Most have shown an early interest, however some are worried about the legalities and copyright issues and need to talk further with their own communities before committing to being a Kete contributor”.
- Lack of full time library resource devoted to the project.
- Kete software, although these are good, there needs to be further development in making the software more flexible, especially the ability for library sites to customise the look and feel of the overall package.
- The embedding of images, audio and video files needs to be made easier for those contributors who are not web savvy. The search needs to be made more accurate.

Conclusion:

Kete Hamilton has been able to bridge the gap of language and ethnicity in the Hamilton community it has brought in community members who were less aware or lacked confidence in using the library and its rich resources. Libraries have already seen the benefits for some of these communities with individual members coming forward to assist with the building of the libraries collections in some of the more difficult to source world language areas. More recently we have been contacted by an author wanting to use the Iraqi refugee story as a resource for his book. Kete Hamilton is on its way to becoming a useful source for historians in the future.

References:

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