



## **Library in a Laptop: Bundling E-content for Kids with Low-Cost Computers**

Richard Van Orden, Program Director, OCLC Members Council 2/1/2008

### **IDEA**

The innovative idea for a **Library in a Laptop Program** is to consolidate multiple language library e-content in a variety of low-cost computers like One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) at <http://www.laptop.org/en/children> and to co-brand libraries and OCLC in providing needed information and support to young students in developing and developed nations. For example, OCLC Europe, the Middle East, and Africa in partnership with SABINET, the network, and libraries in South Africa could establish a library extension service powered by content servers and wireless, solar-driven laptops to make a basic package of education and information materials available through the National Library of South Africa. According to OCLC WorldMap, South Africa has 1,082 member libraries and more than 1,500,000 holdings set in WorldCat.

In addition to SABINET staff such as Rosalind Hattingh, working perhaps with Members Council Alternate John Tsebe, National Librarian of South Africa and Delegate Ellen Tise (OCLC EMEA), Vice President/ President-Elect of IFLA, OCLC also could draw on the expertise of former South African delegates Norma Read, Hennie Viljoen, and Dianne Man to build a core of local consultants and sponsors. Thus, the process could start in Sub-Saharan Africa's most southern and advanced country and, if successful, move northward on the African continent and then elsewhere around the world. Similar to the One Library Per Child Project globally and the Tata Motors \$4,000 automobile in India, the key to success is to identify a one-time price for the bundled e-content between \$50 - \$100 U.S. dollars and massively innovate to provide needed complementary services.

### **Origin of the Idea**

Beginning with Chew Leng Beh's (OCLC Asia Pacific) clarion call three years ago for development of a "Library in A Box," the Members Council Small and Rural Libraries Discussion Group continued to re-emphasize its interest in OCLC expanding the availability of library content to users via government or non-government cell phone or wireless networks around the world. Through services such as WorldCat.org and FirstSearch, the idea of coupling e-content with low-cost laptops excites many individuals both inside and outside the library community. Global Discussion Group Chair Jeff Baskin (Amigos), delegates Steve Podgojny (NELINET), Lyn McKinney (OCLC Western), George Bishop (MOLC) and Board member Bruce Newell are among many other delegates with a missionary zeal for extending access to information and enhancing the critical services provided by small, rural, and school libraries. Nicholas Negroponte's One Laptop Per Child Project, now producing millions of the \$179 XO laptops in Taiwan, includes bundled educational and information content to support student learning in purchasing countries.

### **Potential Partners**

In addition to the possible partners in South Africa identified above, several non-profit groups like Room-to-Read, led by former Microsoft executive John Wood, the Lubuto Library Project headed by a librarian in the Washington, D.C. area and possibly assisted by delegate Eleanor Frierson (FEDLINK), the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation with whom OCLC currently works, or Librarians Without Borders sponsored by the University of Western Ontario School of Library and Information Science, and others are potential partners for the **OCLC Library in a Laptop Program**. Libraries worldwide can contribute local or global content!

### **Extended Services**

Extending OCLC WorldCat access to more content, images, audio, and media beyond the citations, such services as QuestionPoint where librarians help one another provide virtual reference services, a basic NetLibrary package including a variety of formats and translation-on-demand, and WebJunction devoted to training and building collaborative communities among librarians could initially or later be added to enhance the **Library in a Laptop Program** to better serve young and older students in learning and education.

### **What's Next?**

As recommended in the October 2008 MC Significant Issues and the R2 Distribution Report, the quick establishment of a Small and Rural Libraries Advisory Committee to prepare a business plan including **A Library in a Laptop** in the spirit of high-performing/high-impact non-profits such as Teaching for America seems like the productive next step to assist in accomplishing the visionary goals of the World Summit on the Information Society!