

Library without walls

LEISURE AND CULTURAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

To support the public's self-learning and information needs, the Hong Kong Central Library (HKCL) has developed a state-of-the-art Multimedia Information System (MMIS) since it started its services in May, 2001. This system, designed by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, breaks physical barriers to make information easily accessible.

The most impressive part of the MMIS is its flexible application of information technology and its breakthrough in expanding the scope of a digital library.

Its innovative features have gained a reputation in local and international communities. The library's much-admired MMIS won the Best of E-Government and Services Award at the 2002 Asia Pacific Information and Communication Technology Awards (APICTA) in Malaysia.

The APICTA is an annual award which aims to promote the development of information and communication technologies in the Asia Pacific region. In 2002, there were 92 entries from more than 10 countries and regions, including Australia, Singapore, and Malaysia, competing for awards in 12 categories.

Senior Librarian (HKCL) Infrastructure Development, Mr Chan Cheuk-wah said: "The unprecedented MMIS is the world's first library system that integrates digitised and non-digitised materials into one single interface."

The MMIS, implemented since the library's opening, is the first and, by late 2003, the only recipient in the Asia Pacific region of the prestigious international award for distinguished library services.

Innovative features

Library users can enjoy the one-stop interactive multimedia service via the internet at <http://hkclweb.hkpl.gov.hk> or through the 600-odd workstations in the Hong Kong Central Library and 24 major and branch public libraries across the territory.

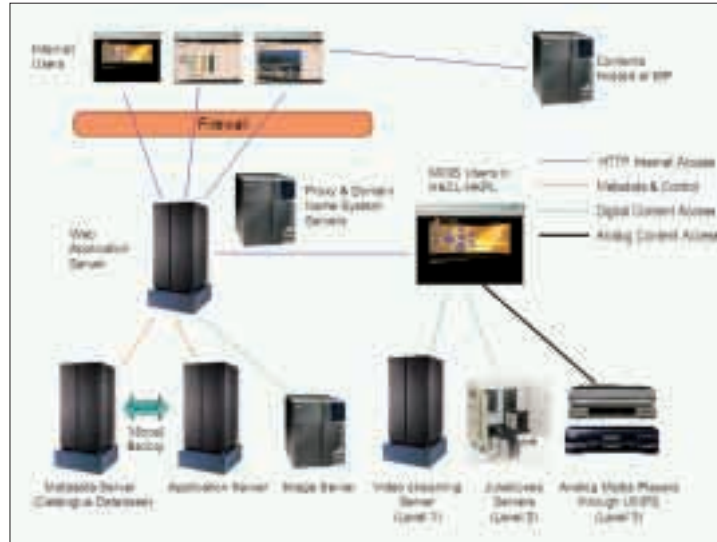
The APICTA given to Leisure and Cultural Services Department.



While the traditional digital libraries save only the digitised images, documents and audio-visual materials in the hard discs for retrieval by readers, the extraordinary MMIS provides a three-level system containing both digitised and non-digitised material, allowing readers to search, view and listen to audio-visual materials on any workstation.

By December, 2003, the first level of the MMIS contained more than 1,470 hours of audio/video programmes, 1.9 million pages of digitised books, old HK newspapers, maps, posters, clippings, house programmes, photos, manuscripts and papers of the former Urban Council and Regional Council where the

government owns the copyrights. Valuable historical information is accessible at users' fingertips. The system also provides a user-friendly image viewer with functions such as zooming, rotating and printing.



System Structure of MMIS.

“The MMIS archives more than 1.6 million pages of old newspapers published between January 4, 1864, and December 31, 1987, in Hong Kong including two Chinese newspapers, the Kung Sheung Daily News and Wah Kiu Yat Po and five English newspapers, The China Mail, Hong Kong Daily Press, Hong Kong Sunday Herald, Hong Kong Telegraph and Hong Kong Weekly Press,” Mr Chan said.

“Users can retrieve a lot of information with the aid of MMIS,” Mr Chan said, citing as examples the first commercial flight for Kai Tak Airport on March 24, 1936, and the report of Taiping Rebellion in 1884 published in The China Mail.



Old publicity items from the government urging people to disinfect culinary utensils with boiling water.

The second level of the system incorporates more than 28,000 items of audio-visual/ CD-ROM material. There are 64 jukeboxes each with 12 drives capable of serving 760 users at the same time. It will take between five and 10 seconds for the title to be played from jukebox after the request is sent from any libraries with dedicated MMIS workstations.



An extract from The China Mail on February 1, 1866, accessible through the MMIS.

The third level includes 70,000 items of audio-visual material such as CD, VCD, DVD, LD, video-cassettes, gramophone records and audio-cassettes provided as audio-on-demand and video-on-demand for workstations at the HKCL.

Always at the public's service

Since the library came into operation, the total number of MMIS users as at December 31, 2003, had reached 4 million.

“The user population is increasing and there is a trend in the growing popularity of the innovative system,” Mr Chan said.

“The system was well-received by the international community. We are very proud that our role as one of the world leaders in providing library services is globally recognised.”

This can be demonstrated by the inclusion of the MMIS at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation's Archive Portal (http://www.unesco.org/webworld/portal_archives/). The worldwide portal creates one single point for archivists and researchers to study the histories and cultures of different nations.

Delegates from prominent libraries and related organisations have visited the library to learn about the MMIS and were amazed by the innovative system.

“To further enhance the MMIS's accessibility, we have extended the service to other major and branch public libraries. At the moment, users can enjoy the system at 24 public libraries besides the HKCL.”

The online MMIS is available daily from 9am to midnight, except on Tuesdays from 9am to 9pm and Wednesdays from 1pm to 9pm.

Convenient library services encourage continuous learning

The department has been endeavouring to provide quality library services to the public. To encourage lifelong learning through user-friendly library services, the department introduced the upgraded Library Automation System (LAS) in all public libraries in early 2001.

The LAS is one of the world's largest computerised library systems with English and Chinese capabilities supporting more than 1,400 terminals; 3 million records of registered library patrons and more than 10 million records of library materials for daily operations in the 70 branch libraries.

Mr Wong Chi-ho, Senior Librarian of the LCSD said: “To better serve the general public, round-the-clock library services are available on the internet. Patrons may search the library catalogues, renew or reserve library materials or read e-books at their homes, work places or schools through the libraries' home-page which has the third highest usage rate among the government home-pages.

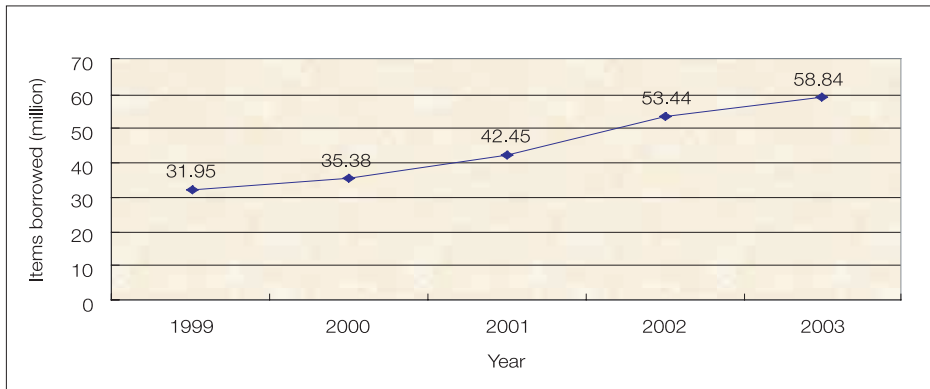
And, the LAS also offers telephone renewal and borrower record inquiry services. Registered library patrons can now borrow library materials from any of the 71 branch libraries and return the items to any branch library irrespective where they are borrowed.”



The home page of the MMIS.

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“After upgrading the LAS, items borrowed by library patrons have increased by 84% from 31.95 million in 1999 to 58.84 million in 2003,” Mr Wong said.



Items borrowed from public libraries in Hong Kong .

Library services ahead

Knowledge is wealth. The department is devoted to promoting the virtue of lifelong learning through advanced library services.

Mr Wong said: “Since last June, members of the public can select to use Smart Identity Cards issued by the Immigration Department for library services. From December 2003, library patrons are provided with an option to receive library notices through email. In the year to come, more self-charging terminals will be installed in branch libraries to allow patrons to check-out or renew library materials by themselves. We will continue to deliver quality library services for users’ convenience.”