

Kent District Library
Strategic Plan (2005-2009)
Section 1 – Mission/Strategy/Environment

Mission

The mission of the Kent District library is: Information. Ideas. Excitement.

Strategy

There are several overarching elements to the strategy of the Kent District Library as it goes to market:

1. Highly decentralized library system. One of the most decentralized systems in the State, KDL approaches the market by placing branches (spokes) of appropriate size in each community served within the service area, then serving them with a highly automated and organized central administration function (hub). This hub and spokes approach provides high levels of service and collections supply/resupply in an efficient and effective manner.
2. Technology leadership. KDL uses technology to provide the infrastructure, communications, administrative, patron data, information and other high speed links to enable the hub and spokes system to work most efficiently.
3. Community partnership. Building community partnerships with cities/townships or other governmental units with the host community providing the building and KDL providing staff and materials to maintain/run the Library.
4. The KDL “positioning” to the market served is “KDL provides the sophistication and resources of a big library delivered with friendly, personal service in every community we serve”.

Environment

The purpose of the environmental review or scan is to consider what elements of the environment may have an impact on the organization’s ability to accomplish the mission. These environmental elements are broken down into internal and external components. The internal elements are defined as Strengths/Weaknesses and the external elements are defined as Opportunities and Threats. The difference between these two sets of positive/negative environmental elements is the internal elements may be influenced by local (organizational) control while the external elements are subjected to forces which go beyond the power of the organization to directly influence them, but which may be still be leveraged to organizational advantage.

Priority Strengths

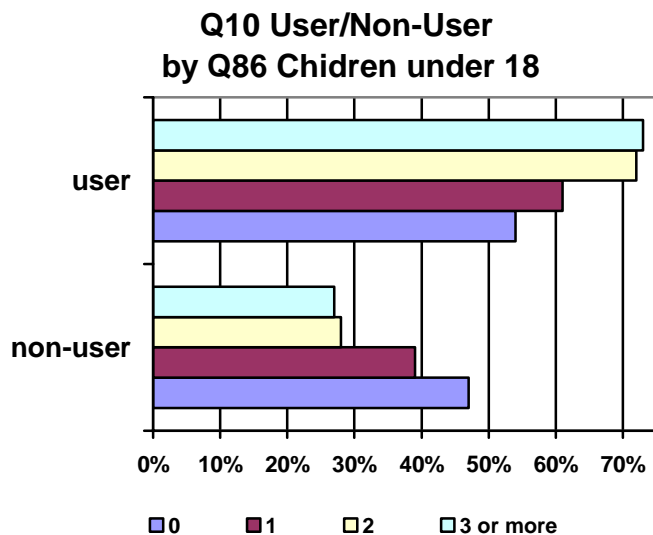
1. District system
2. Staff-customer friendly
3. Technology-speed/ease
4. Popular reading library
5. Services to kids
6. Facilities use

The strengths of the District are critical to the future success of the District. The *District System* is both a priority strength and one of the fundamental strategies KDL has adopted to “go to market”. This strategy is of critical importance as it transforms the old style dependent branch of the main library into an efficient distribution system, offering the strength of a large library collection at the equivalent of a very small branch library. It may be argued this strength not only makes KDL efficient, it separates our KDL from every other multi-branch library in America by coming to grips with the fundamental flaw in the branch library concept and addressing this flaw with a streamlined, and effective structural solution which may be described as a “hub and spokes” system.

Friendly staff are linked to the “go-to-market” approach of small community or neighborhood library branches. To be anything other than exceptionally personable in a community library setting would be incongruous. To be a genuine leveraged asset this strength must be fully institutionalized to minimize and eliminate variability in staff “friendliness” and personal service. The combination of small town branch library with consistently friendly staff presents a coherent image that is desirable and a part of the expectation matrix established by loyal users.

The **technology advantage** is another strength that is part of the fundamental strategy of using technology to make the “hub and spokes” system work most effectively. Technology advantages which further advanced the speed, security, service and enhance the “hub and spokes system” should be viewed with highest priority.

The **Popular Reading Library** reflects an understanding of the type of collection most demanded by profile users. Small community or neighborhood library are not normally viewed as central repositories of reference work, genealogy or in-depth collections of what the profile user demands, KDL will be reinforcing its niche and delivering against expectations in each neighborhood/community branch library.

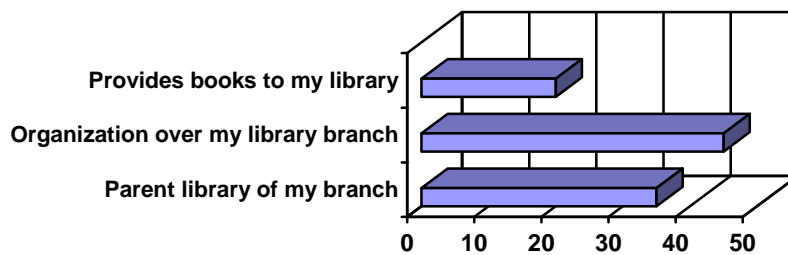


Services to Kids reflects a key element of the profile demographic. The heavy user of KDL is a woman with three children under the age of 18. The evidence suggests women with children are 4-5 times more likely to visit the library weekly than any other group of user. Satisfying and building brand loyalty with this user will continue to be a priority task.

Priority Weaknesses

1. Identity confusion
2. User unfriendly
3. Lack of stimulation
4. Not enough popular books
5. Non-users
6. Staffing level
7. Stable funding

Q9 What does Kent District Library have to do with your local library?



Identity confusion reflects a major finding in the KDL AAU study conducted in 2003. The research suggested users were unsure about the relationship between their branch library and KDL. While some recognized some relationship existed, there was not good clarity and little understanding of the “hub and spokes” concept which sets KDL apart from other branch library

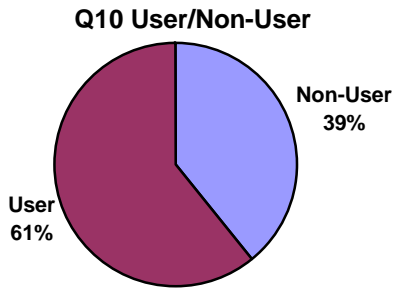
systems. This significant weakness is an obstacle to KDL patrons understanding and appreciating the significant advantage they benefit from in the KDL system and may prevent patrons from supporting KDL in a millage election due to that confusion/lack of awareness.

The existence of *user unfriendly* systems within KDL inhibits what is designed to be a powerful advantage of the KDL concept. The “hub and spokes” concept, powered by infrastructure design and enabled by technology is designed to be presented in a highly desirable format via small, comfortable facilities run by friendly accommodating staff. When the system balks or is user unfriendly, it upsets the goal of the strategy and the carefully crafted infrastructure and external communications environment.

KDL, as many libraries, is relatively passive in responding to customers and outside influences. This *“lack of stimulation”* is a weakness that inhibits the exploration of the Library capabilities by even loyal users. As the Library enhances its message delivery and increases marketing/promotion to be more assertive users, infrequent visitors and non-users will be encouraged to visit and/or visit other areas or collections of the Library missed to date.

The weakness of *“not enough popular books”* has the potential to undermine the concept of the “large” library resources available at the “small” town branch concept. As KDL is identified as a popular reading library, it is critical the collection be robust enough to reassure patrons they are not missing any reading opportunity due to the size of their branch.

Non-users represent a significant threat to the viability of KDL as they are community residents who do not use or find value in the services provided. As a result these residents are much less likely to support KDL either politically or financially. And, from a Library standpoint, KDL is unable to share the valuable resources of the Library with an important group of residents KDL would prefer to have as valued customers.



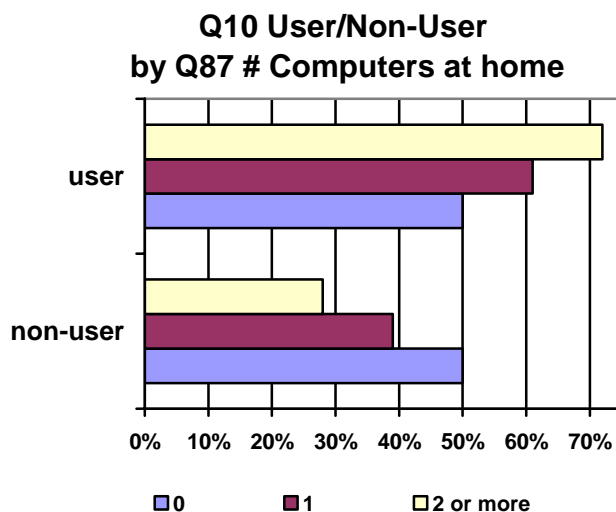
Staffing levels and stable funding represent potential problems in the future as usage of KDL grows and the funding environment becomes more challenging. While each of these weaknesses represent significant concerns, the larger impact will be in the future if and when these issues are not resolved.

Priority Opportunities

1. Goodwill
2. Technology
3. HH computer penetration
4. 0-5 Literacy

The community “*goodwill*” is a significant opportunity which will not change in the short run and is available to be leveraged through communications, programs and services designed to reinforce residents’ belief and support in KDL.

Technology is a prime mover in the ability of the KDL concept to be realized and executed with effectiveness. KDL may continue to drive the strength of its fundamental strategy through new applications of technology to the KDL processes and infrastructure.



HH computer penetration is rapidly growing as computer prices drop and more households find Internet access convenient and affordable. This opportunity allows KDL’s strategy of technology use to be applied to build relationships, provide enhanced programs and services and further brand loyalty to households which increasingly depend on computers and internet access for information and entertainment.

Residential household computer penetration - User vs. Non-User of KDL

A major education thrust within education ranks and politically within the State of Michigan has to do with *0-5 literacy*. This phenomena will continue to grow as all efforts to increase educational outcome will look for stronger starts at younger ages. Libraries overall and especially KDL are appropriately positioned to take advantage of this interest and may increase visibility and political capital through the development of programs and other support of this major educational initiative.

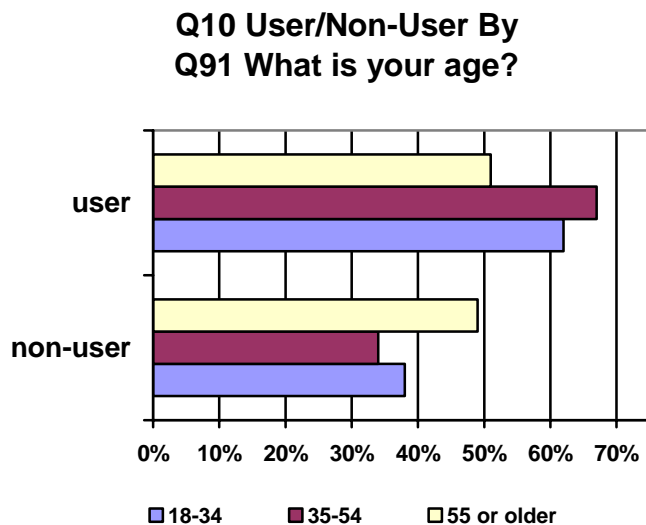
Priority Threats

1. Competition
2. Numerous millages
3. Technology
4. Seniors

Competition remains a tremendous threat to KDL as television, the internet and video games continue to dominate target audience time and attention. Additionally, increasing numbers of library users and non-users are spending time at bookstores purchasing books instead of borrowing. As the number of residents who claim they have “no time” to visit the library grows, the potential for KDL to be seen as irrelevant grows as well threatening its viability and funding base of support.

Numerous millages offer a significant threat in the form of taxpayer burnout. As residents feel overwhelmed by the number of “good causes” and become unable or unwilling to sort out the most deserving the potential for a mass rejection of all tax appeals may catch KDL in an anti-tax fervor.

Technology, as much as a benefit can be a curse and threat. As technology provides more residents with internet access, cheap wireless networks, TiVo and more “capture” of more sources of information and entertainment, the potential for the Library to be left behind is real.



Seniors are a surprisingly underdeveloped market for libraries. KDL is not exception with a disproportionately high number of seniors not utilizing library services. As non-users but voters, Seniors represent a potential “no” vote in any millage election as their unique economic circumstances (fixed income for many) encourage members of this group to not increase taxes for almost any reason...and especially if they don’t use the service. Seniors are disproportionately non-users of Library Services in KDL Service Area.

Summary

The environmental assessment paints an interesting landscape of opportunities and potential problems. Several high priority strengths strongly link with fundamental KDL strategies and the approach to the market. Key weaknesses are often directly positioned against the strategies and are accurately assessed as being major obstacles to the successful implementation of the strategy. The opportunities reflect signal moments within time which may be successfully leveraged to heighten KDL visibility and relevance within the community. The Threats clearly demonstrate KDL cannot stand still...to do so would invite obsolescence by competition and technology, not to mention the clutter of multiple millage campaigns and a significant voting group that does not have libraries on their radar screen.

Kent District Library Strategic Plan (2005-2009)

Section 2- Long Range Objectives

The long range objectives are those objectives which may not normally be accomplished within the framework of one planning or budget cycle (12-18 months) but may instead take from 36-60 months or even longer to realize. These objectives are sought after as part of a long range plan as they represent a leapfrog effort to encompass large meaningful goals which may have some of the greatest impact in terms of creating the future for the organization. Additionally, these goals are the ones often not pursued by organizations because of the resource, time and attention commitment required. By incorporating these goals into a long range plan the resources may be allocated over time to allow for flexibility, control and accountability.

KDL Long Range Objectives

Based on the group's assessment of the environment, and in consideration of the Mission along with previous goals achieved by the organization, the Stakeholder team identified a list of prioritized long range objectives. Based on the group's review of the potential objectives and considering the environment from an obstacles and "assists" standpoint, the objectives were prioritized and ranked 1-7.

Given the relative cost (in both dollars and staff resources) of undertaking a major objective for an organization the size of the Kent District Library, it was agreed no more than 7 identified objectives would be pursued. A total of 7 objectives were identified and prioritized and of those 7 the group agreed to pursue that number given that some of the objectives may be accomplished in less than a multiple year framework.

KDL Long Range Objectives

- 1. Library millage in perpetuity**
- 2. Know the customer (real time)**
- 3. 75% understand relationship between KDL/Branch**
- 4. All branches have "easy find" system**
- 5. 50% checkout self-service**
- 6. Acceptable substitute**
- 7. 25% increase in user base**

1. Library millage in perpetuity

The KDL millage in perpetuity aims to address several key elements of the KDL environment. These include:

- W-7 Stable funding
- O-2 Goodwill
- T-2 Numerous Millages

Additionally, a permanent millage would allow for better financial planning, the ability to commit to longer term investments in order to optimize growth, and the elimination of waste and the repeated enormous effort to pass a millage on a periodic basis.

This goal is perceived to be the highest priority goal due to the environment noted above and several elements discussed earlier, including competitive threat, the increase in HH computer penetration and the continuing march forward of technology and other factors. All of these require KDL to have the funding base necessary to take advantage of market opportunities, anticipate the application of new technology, maintain a competitive wage and merit increase system to sustain the employee base and provide the resources necessary to build greater usage among users and convert non-users to users benefiting from the community investment in a strong library system.

2. Know the customer (real time)

The ability of any organization to wow customers is at least partially dependent upon understanding who and what customers are like. This understanding includes what customer expectations may exist, understanding customer behavior to suggest opportunities for new or different programs or services, customer likes and dislikes, and other customer knowledge that enables organizations to evolve with their customers over time.

While the AAU research study has provided significant information on the profile customer, the survey instrument was too general in scope to provide all of the detailed information needed to genuinely understand the customer in depth. In fact, no one survey instrument will be able to provide the spectrum of information necessary to build a comprehensive understanding of the customer needed to achieve the objective of truly knowing the customer, especially in a real time environment. That is, using technology, tools and infrastructure to be able to anticipate, react and follow up with customers in a real time fashion that demonstrates a true customer/library engagement.

3. 75% understand relationship between KDL/Branch

This goal emphasizes the need for 3/4 of the residents of the KDL service area to recognize and (implicitly) value the unique relationship, which is fundamental to the way KDL goes to market.

Importantly, this understanding is applied in two ways. First, it puts responsibility and ownership where it belongs. Instead of believing the branch library is a local phenomenon customers/residents need to recognize their library is part of a system that is regional, not local. Secondly, it is important that not that customers and residents understand the mechanics of how things work.

What is critical is customers understand that because things work the way they do they are benefiting from a unique and successful approach to market. This approach embodies a sophisticated distribution concept which is far more effective and efficient than the traditional branch library system.

As a result, KDL branch libraries are much better stocked, staffed and wired. More books are on the shelf or available and more materials are in circulation more of the time than in any other similar decentralized system. An appreciation for that system allows for the development of a loyalty and support, both politically and at the right time financially. This appreciation recognizes the efficiency, stewardship and the big picture of the KDL system.

4. All branches have “easy find” system

The concept of “easy find” goes to the heart of a traditional formal “officialness” of libraries that was off-putting to customers and held the power of how to find what was sought in the hands of library staff and experts.

Addressing the “easy find” solution goes beyond filing or shelving. It goes to the heart of information and materials accessibility. As materials are easier to locate and are there as opposed to lost or not shelved, customers access more materials, check more materials out and receive more value for each visit. The concept of making materials easy to find makes finding materials attractive and more desirable. As customers find more they use more. All of which leads to a more effective/efficient system, better utilization of the collection and more satisfied, brand loyal customers.

5. 50% checkout self-service

Technology is a key part of the fundamental approach to market for KDL. It is not surprising therefore, technology plays a role in enhancing customer value, reducing costs and making the system function more effectively. While the path may take time, resources and expertise, this goal is exceptionally clear and unambiguous.

6. Acceptable Substitute

A key issue with KDL is the customer dissatisfaction...or at least disappointment which occurs when a book or other part of the collection sought by a customer is not available. Whether the book is in circulation, has not been reshelved, is lost, or is on loan, it is not available for the customer who desires it. Other elements of the strategic plan are devoted to minimizing the downtime between when a book is returned and when it is reshelved. Still other elements of the KDL budget continue to be devoted to collections enhancement. No matter how effective those efforts, there will still be times when a book, especially a new book or very popular book is not available.

This objective is designed to address this problem through the provision of acceptable alternatives that satisfy the customer by responding to their goals to the greatest extent possible. While in some cases a substitute may not be acceptable, in many cases the opportunity to provide as good or better solution is a function of understanding client needs, being aware of the full spectrum of the collection and reconciling customer desires with available materials or other solutions.

7. 25% increase in user base

This objective goes directly to the non-user portion of the community served. While KDL has a higher than average user rate among the residents of its service area, over 30% of the adult residents in the service area are non-users. To the extent non-users feel they derive no value from the Library and have no interest in supporting the Library (politically or financially), this group presents a threat to the continued viability and growth of KDL.

Additionally and importantly, KDL was created to serve the entire community. To the extent outreach and promotion of the Library has not been done there is a portion of the community that has not been adequately communicated with regarding the programs and services available at KDL.

Libraries have, to a great extent, been relatively passive in their marketing efforts. To insure the entire community feels welcome, is aware of the materials/collections available and that services/programs and support are available in a meaningful and relevant fashion the effort to convert non-users will be a legitimate part of the KDL marketing platform.