



## *Innovative Practice*

### ***Managing Innovation: Creating Anythink***

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Challenging assumptions is key to innovation. Historically, libraries have concentrated on the organization of knowledge. At Anythink, we focus on the interaction between people and information. We create information experiences that surprise, delight and inspire curiosity. Our libraries are catalysts for living a creative life. This has created a shift in the way we manage our libraries, our space and our staff. We now dedicate our resources to ideas and people rather than just books.

With bookstores, Google, and Starbucks as our competition, we knew we had to do something bold and dramatic to reconnect with our customers in Adams County, Colorado. Over 77 percent of our residents are under 50, computer savvy and asking the question: "Why do I need a library if I can find everything on the Internet?"

#### **Designing spaces for people**

Instead of building libraries that organized space around materials, we designed spaces that fit the needs of people. People need space to think; collaborate; talk; invent; and seek, find and produce information. That requires a flexible space with multiple, simultaneous uses. Our libraries are designed with an intuitive logic and a sense of hospitality. We want people to feel smart, not intimidated.

Our spaces are organized like bookstores. Materials are organized by words instead of numbers, so you can find travel books under travel, and cooking in the cookbook section. We converted our classification system from Dewey Decimal to a word-based system, which we call WordThink, an adaptation of the Book Industry Standards and

Communications (BISAC) classification. In a popular browsing collection, navigation that is subject-oriented and word-based creates an ease of use that empowers customers. All they need to know is the topic that they are looking for, and then they can either browse or look for a title that is shelved alphabetically by title within the subject range.

There is no shushing allowed in our libraries because today people learn by collaborating. From babies to grandparents, we have spaces for all ages to explore, read, learn, listen to music, and watch videos.

No institutional grey can be found in our libraries. Instead, you will find comfortable places to relax surrounded by fireplaces and gardens with beautiful furnishings.

We changed the name and brand of our libraries to better reflect our new philosophy. Anythink is a new style of library—a place of unlimited imagination and ideas, where play inspires creativity and lifelong learning. Anythink is centered on each individual customer. The customers craft the kind of library that they need, whether it's a place for research, innovation, quiet, interaction, discovery, play, inspiration, or just a place to sit and be a part of a community.

Anythink should feel like your kitchen, a place of true hospitality. This is the place where everyone wants to gather and connect with friends and family. It is a place where everyone is universally welcome. It is a place where ideas and creativity are nurtured, where you go to find the spark and fuel to keep you going. Anythink is a place where anything and everything is possible.

### **Creating an Anythink culture**

Ideas are at the center of Anythink. Playing with ideas, creating a place to think, discover and honor one's inherent sense of creativity also required rethinking our staff roles and responsibilities. Our internal manifesto indicates a responsibility very different from merely organizing information:

You are not just an employee, volunteer or board member. You do not merely catalog books, organize periodicals and manage resources. You are the gateway into the mind of the idea people who come to our facilities to find or fuel a spark.

### **Part Wizard, Part Genius, Part Explorer**

It is your calling to trespass into the unknown and come back with a concrete piece someone can hold onto, turn over, and use to fuel their mind and soul.

Our job descriptions followed this inspiration, and our new job titles depict the new expectations and roles: guides, concierges and wranglers. We see our professional role as a guide or partner in discovering information. Our concierges are experts at connect-

ing the dots for people, whether getting a library card, locating materials, registering for a program or navigating the library. Our wranglers keep everything in order and beautifully displayed.

### **An information expedition**

Charting this course was risky but rewarding as we see the results. When you walk into our library, it feels like a metaphorical hug. Instead of feeling intimidated, we want people to feel smart and in control of their destiny. People of all ages are astonished at encountering a library that feels as comfortable as a slipper, filled with a cacophony of ideas and possibilities. At Anythink, every day is an expedition into uncharted territory. Like Lewis and Clark, we have forged a path that takes our customers to a new level of adventure. Anythink is a partner in creating a life filled with choices. Anythink is a place where anything is possible.

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