
HARRIMAN, Joy H.P. *Creating your library's business plan: a how-to-do-it manual with samples on CD-ROM.* London: Facet Publishing, 2008.

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“When you know where you are and where you want to go, then you can describe how to get there.” As a basic definition of a strategy, it couldn't be simpler, could it? But as with any journey you might make, there is a host of potential pitfalls and dangers along the way. Are you driving, flying, walking or hitch-hiking? Are you laden with baggage? Has your car been recently serviced? Do you have enough fuel? Does your route cross potentially hostile territory? And (for English readers) what's the weather forecast?

Strategy and business planning is all about charting your way ahead and it's all the more important in these times of increasing uncertainty. This book sets out to provide a clear step-by-step picture of what is involved, to enable managers of library and information services to understand the planning process and to address the issues that are an essential prerequisite of a successful plan.

A large part of the book is taken up with examples of actual plans and the various processes that these had to go through before reaching the final stage (much of this documentation is also provided on the accompanying CD-ROM). These are taken from a wide range of different library and information services worldwide (though sadly none from the UK academic sector), and it's immediately clear from them that there is no single best approach to producing the ideal business plan. Indeed, there probably isn't such a thing. Inevitably, the approach taken will vary according to the circumstances in which the plan is produced, and the individual ethos of the organisation that produces it.

However, there are several basic processes that are (or should be) common to most successful plans. Many of these are concerned with identifying and clarifying the first two prerequisites in the quotation above – finding out *where you are* and *where you want to go*. This may sound obvious, but failure to adequately address these two questions probably accounts for much of the fog that envelops many unsuccessful or poorly prepared business plans.

Having been fortunate enough earlier in my career to have participated in a full strategic planning process led by Sheila Corral, I would strongly recommend undertaking a SWOT analysis in the early stages of any plan. The process of identifying your service's Strengths and Weaknesses, and the Opportunities and Threats present in the environment in which it operates, is an invaluable first step in understanding what is needed in your plan. Too often the strengths of an organisation are repeatedly underplayed, and its endemic weaknesses brushed under the carpet, leading to unrealistic expectations of what the staff can or should be able to achieve.

The basic process involved in undertaking a SWOT analysis is covered in one chapter of the book, along with worksheets (reproduced on the CD-ROM) and

examples. If the questions suggested here (or other similar questions more pertinent to the service's particular circumstances) are addressed thoroughly and honestly, the answers they provide should lead to a better understanding of the service and its current imperatives. Other chapters deal in a similar manner with different stages of the planning process, from describing your initial service concept through to financial considerations and communicating the finished plan (as opposed to filing and forgetting it!).

Business planning can be an onerous task for any manager, and it's one that probably few of us approach with relish. I would recommend this book for anyone who seeks help with the process, or simply wants to do it better. The book does require a thorough reading, and might perhaps have benefited from the inclusion of a more simplified overview of the whole process for quick reference. But it should repay the effort invested in reading it. The examples and worksheets on the CD-ROM may save users an awful lot of work. I would caution against the temptation to follow the book's precepts too slavishly. Learn from it, and when you come to write your own business plan adapt what it has to say to your own particular circumstances. And, as with any other document, don't forget to add just a dash of inspiration.

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