

PUBLIC LIBRARIES WORK: Helping Local Business Compete

A healthy community depends upon a vital workforce. Public libraries are increasingly boosting local workforce development by building literacy skills, offering job training, promoting networking, and purchasing the (expensive) data that lets local businesses compete.

Public Opinion:

More than two-thirds of the public (68%) said that adult literacy programs should be a high priority for their local public library, with more than half the public (51%) adding “job search assistance” to the list.

From *Long Overdue: A Fresh Look at Public and Leadership Attitudes About Libraries in the 21st Century*, Public Agenda, June 2006

Library as Economic Tool Louisville (KY) Free Public Library

SAMPLE SERVICES:	Subscription databases such as “InfoUSA” offer up-to-the-minute statistics on 12 million businesses nationwide. Business-research librarians offer individual consultations.
SIGNIFICANCE:	Each database can cost upwards of \$10,000 – too much for most small businesses. Librarians help pinpoint relevant information and consult on business processes.
PATRONS:	Local owners of a Papa Murphy’s Take ‘N’ Bake Pizza franchise used library data to capture the demographics of their clients and custom-design a marketing strategy.
IN THEIR OWN WORDS:	“I wouldn’t have thought that you could pull up that kind of information, that it was available that readily,” said Gaye Reinhardt, co-owner of the Papa Murphy’s franchise. Source: “Beyond ‘book keeping,’ <i>The Courier Journal</i> (Louisville, KY) March 27, 2006.
WEBSITE:	www.lfpl.org

Networking and Education Miller Business Resource Center, Middle Country (NY) Public Library

SAMPLE SERVICES:	In addition to offering personal reference assistance and online connections to business resources, the library hosts popular networking breakfasts and free literacy tutoring, GED and ESOL classes, and workplace readiness workshops.
SIGNIFICANCE:	The goal of the center is to support regional economic development by meeting the research and information needs of the business and workforce community.
PATRONS:	Local businesses, chamber of commerce members, and the 1,000-plus members of the Hauppauge Industrial Association through a partnership funded by NYS State Senator John J. Flanagan.
IN THEIR OWN WORDS:	“This wonderful resource can save you a great deal of time—time that can be put to better use than sitting at your computer searching the Internet” (Rose Ann Linko, <i>the Hauppauge Reporter</i> , October 2005.)
WEBSITE:	www.millerbusinesscenter.org

Other public library-based business centers of note:

NYC Small Business Resource Center at the New York Public Library
Oxnard (CA) Public Library Small Business Center
Fullerton (CA) Public Library
St. Paul (MN) Public Library Business Resource Center, Lexington Outreach Branch
High Point (NC) Public Library

See also: “The Library: Next Best Thing to an MBA” in *BusinessWeek online*, May 30, 2006
http://www.businessweek.com/smallbiz/content/may2006/sb20060525_583430.htm