The Creative Editor: Publishing at the National Library of Australia

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Background

The Library’s Publishing Program aims to:

• ‘foster an understanding and enjoyment of the National Library and its collections’

• ‘selectively interpret and highlight the Library’s collections through publications’.
Publishing Program

The Library’s collections are the basis of its publishing program.
Why publish?

- Contributing to understanding of Australian history and culture
- Promoting knowledge and use of Library resources
- Exposing the richness & diversity of Library collections
- Supporting scholarship
- ‘Taking a piece of the Library home’
A Wide Range of Material is Published

- Corporate publications, ‘trade’ publications, e-publications, periodicals and merchandise
Corporate publications

- One of our central publishing activities
Merchandise

- Based on our collections
Trade Publications

- Distribution to more than 450 retail outlets
- Recent emphasis on gift fairs and selling direct to customer through catalogues and our online shop
Trade books: recent trends

- Unsolicited MS led to scholarly publications for niche audiences
- Goal is now to make publications, and thus collections, accessible to wider audience
- Editors taking more creative approach
Children’s books

- Children’s list started in 2006
Australian Backyard Astronomy

- MS was already written
- Editor re-wrote some sections and broke the book into ‘information chunks’
- Detailed flat plan created
- Aim was to present authoritative content in lively and interesting way
Australian Backyard Astronomy

- Creative designer added illustrative content
Australian Backyard Astronomy

- Wide ranging picture research: Library material, NASA, Aboriginal art
Australian Backyard Astronomy

- Content and design were user tested
- Reprinted within 6 months
- In ABC/Australian Geographic bookshops
- Generated much publicity
- Life after publication
Guess Who?

- Worked with the preschool
- Decided on ‘flap book’
- Drew rough concepts
Guess Who?

- Design prototypes: using our collection
- Production issues worked through
Guess Who?

- User testing with preschool
- Fact checking with RSPCA
Highlighting Library collection material

- Details of Library collection items at the back of all our children’s books
Australian Life Series

- 25,000 words, up to 100 images
- Subject would be well represented in Library’s collection
- Subject would have made significant contribution to Australia
- Library would actively commission
Australian Life Series

- **Alan Moorehead** commissioned from Ann Moyal
- **Kylie Tennant** commissioned from Jane Grant
- **Daisy Bates** commissioned from Bob Reece
Australian Life Series

• Implications for in-house editors:
  • Deeper knowledge of collection
  • Time to find the stories we want to tell
  • Develop greater understanding of what people want to read and of potential writers
Conclusion

• Offering writers opportunities & support
• Actively creating and shaping books
• Making the collections accessible to a wider audience, while still maintaining high research and production values