Anythink’s WordThink:
A Revolutionary Organizational System

Vivienne Houghton
LIS 4010 The Organization of Information
Professor Xiao Hu
University of Denver
19 November 2010
Abstract

This report documents the organizational systems of the Anythink Wright Farms branch of the Rangeview Library District located in Thornton, Colorado. This report illustrates how Anythink’s user-centered mission, vision and goals are reflected in their subject-based organizational system called WordThink. Furthermore, this report illustrates how WordThink effectively connects users to information which results in increased circulation rates. This report is based on attending the two Anythink workshops at the 2010 Colorado Association of Libraries Conference and making two library visits to Anythink Wright Farms.

Keywords: Anythink, Rangeview Library District, WordThink, BISAC
INTRODUCTION

Rangeview Library District’s Anythink Libraries
Formerly known as: The Adams County Library System (prior to 2004)
Director since 2007: Pam Sandlian Smith
Flagship branch: Anythink Wright Farms
Opened: July 10, 2010
Location: 5877 East 120th Avenue, Thornton, Colorado 80602
www.anythinklibraries.org

Anythink: Welcomes Knowledge Seekers

Anythink’s Vision Statement emphasizes that “all of us in the Rangeview Library District family are working together to improve the way we serve our communities” and that together, the Director, Board, staff and administration have created “a new model of service that welcomes knowledge seekers and provides them opportunities to have positive and memorable experiences in their search for information, enlightenment, or entertainment” (Strategic Plan, 2008).

With a laser focus on being user-centered and serving the Adams County community’s needs, the Rangeview Library District completely transformed itself in just a few short years. This report focuses on:

1) How the Rangeview Library District transformed itself from the worst library in Colorado to the new revolutionary Anythink Libraries with a Director who is the 2010 Colorado Librarian of the Year
2) How Anythink’s user-centered mission, vision and goals are reflected in their organizational systems
3) How Anythink’s topic-based WordThink classification system is very effective in serving users
4) How the Anythink Wright Farms branch is specifically organized
HISTORY, MISSION, VISION AND GOALS

History: Welcome to the Revolution

On July 13, 2003, The Denver Post wrote that according to state records and library officials, “the Adams County Library System is the worst large library system in the state and has been for years” (2003). This was due in large part to lack of funding. The Adams County Library System consisted of six branches with a small budget of only $3.8 million and voters had denied the library’s requests for mill levy increases twice in a row. In terms of standards, Jamie LaRue, then president of the Colorado Public Library Association and current director of the Douglas County Libraries, described the level as, "It's pretty bad. Relative to basic standards about library service, Adams County is pretty much at the bottom of the heap" (Denver Post, 2003).

Six months later the seeds of a new library were sown which over the next five years would become a revolutionary and award-winning library system. In January 2004, the Adams County Public Library became independent of the bureaucratic controls of the Adams County government. This now autonomous entity began operating as the new Rangeview Library District (RLD) which is overseen by a five-member Library Board of Trustees appointed by the Adams County Commissioners.

In November 2006, voters in Adam’s County approved a $12 million mill levy increase to help fund their libraries. In 2007, the Board hired a dynamic new director, Pam Sandlian Smith. Together, the board and the new director led the revolution and transformation of the new RLD. In the three years between 2007 to November 2010, RLD has built four new libraries, renovated three existing libraries, launched the new Anythink brand, implemented a completely user-centered model and replaced the Dewey Decimal Classification System. Table 1 below compares RLD’s figures from before and after the Anythink brand was launched.

Table 1: Before and after launching the Anythink brand

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rangeview Library District</th>
<th>2008 “Pre-Anythink”</th>
<th>2010 “Post-Anythink”</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Libraries</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardholders</td>
<td>62,121</td>
<td>88,098</td>
<td>41.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation</td>
<td>829,266</td>
<td>1,387,652</td>
<td>67.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Square footage</td>
<td>40,000</td>
<td>100,000</td>
<td>150.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>$4 million</td>
<td>$12 million</td>
<td>200.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Sources: The Board’s Role in Revolutionizing Libraries Workshop. Colorado Association of Libraries Conference. October 9, 2010 and Steve Hansen, Communications Director, November 12, 2010).
The seven Anythink libraries are located in the communities of Bennett, Brighton, Commerce City, Northglenn, Thornton and the Perl Mack neighborhood. In addition, the Anythink in Motion Bookmobile visits schools and homebound residents outside of these areas.

### Table 2: Anythink Libraries - Opening Dates and Square Footage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anythink Location</th>
<th>Opening Date</th>
<th>Square Footage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anythink In Motion Bookmobile</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>36 feet long, home delivery to 140 individuals, 11 senior centers and 8 child-care facilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett</td>
<td>2009: May</td>
<td>7,000 sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton</td>
<td>2009: September</td>
<td>20,000 sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huron Street</td>
<td>2010: February</td>
<td>25,000 sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright Farms</td>
<td>2010: July</td>
<td>45,000 sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commerce City</td>
<td>2010: November</td>
<td>10,000 sf</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perl Mack</td>
<td>2011: Winter</td>
<td>Temporarily closed for renovations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thornton</td>
<td>2011: Winter</td>
<td>Temporarily closed for renovations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Mission: We Open Doors for Curious Minds**

Anythink’s Mission Statement is “We Open Doors to Curious Minds” and this mission drives everything the library does — their vision, goals, strategies and initiatives ([Strategic Plan, 2008](#)). At CALCON 2010, the Trustees on the Board noted that “at Anythink, we believe that anything is possible at the library and thinking big can bring libraries to life” ([Colorado Association of Libraries Conference, 2010](#)).

**Vision: Rangeview Libraries Belong to Everyone**

Anythink’s Vision Statement is “Rangeview Libraries Belong to Everyone” and that they are places and spaces that “offer opportunities for transformative experiences of the mind and spirit, making them uniquely viable centers for the community as a whole, and cherished resources for the individuals who live and work there” ([Strategic Plan, 2008](#)).
Goals: Strategic Initiatives from 2008-2010 Strategic Plan

Initiative I: Deliver Superb Customer Service, Products and Programs

Goal 1: Design libraries that are user-friendly and easy to navigate. Build in convenience services to expedite efficiencies.

Goal 2: Deliver programs and products that anticipate customer needs.

Goal 3: Create innovative ways for customers to “open doors” to intellectual adventures (listen to music, video, create media, learn life skills, read for skills as well as pleasure, connect with other people).

ORGANIZATIONAL SCHEME

Anythink Libraries: Designed for Discovery of Information

“Our libraries are designed for discovery of information, for thinking and for experimenting with ideas.” (Spark Newsletter, September 2010). Anythink has revolutionized the way libraries serve users and how users access materials. They have designed their spaces and organizational systems to be user-centered. True to their goals, Anythink has designed their libraries to be user-friendly and easy to navigate. From the signage and shelving to the spines on the books, they have developed distinct ways of organizing their collections to help patrons easily find materials on their own.

Classification System: We Dumped Dewey for BISAC/WordThink

The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) is an enumerative classification scheme with analytico-synthetic features that is used to keep books in order and also to place, locate, retrieve and return the books to shelves. It is used by 200,000 libraries globally and is the most widely used library classification system in the world (OCLC, 2010). DDC uses a simple decimal notation system to organize recorded knowledge into a hierarchy of well-defined categories: 10 main classes which are divided into 100 divisions which are further sub-divided into 1,000 sections. The DDC call number is a unique identifier comprised of both letters (for the first few letters of the author’s last name) and Arabic numbers. Together they determine the address of that book on the shelf. The call number is a subject-hierarchy going from broad to specific and is read from left to right. It starts with the main class followed by a decimal, the division followed by a decimal, and the section. The DDC can be expanded with new subjects by adding more numbers. The DDC is faceted in that each facet or decimal place indicates a more specific subject.
Unlike a typical public library that uses the DDC, Anythink has adopted word-based and topic-based grid called WordThink. There are no numbers in the WordThink system. WordThink is based on the Book Industry Standards and Communications (BISAC). BISAC is used in bookstores throughout North America. Although not the very first library to adopt a topic-based system, RLD was the first library system in 2009 to adopt one in all their libraries districtwide (Fister, B., 2009). According to Director Smith, “Customers often comment that when they visit bookstores, they can find things easily and would like that ease of use in libraries” (Fister, B. 2009). To meet that customer need, “We Dumped Dewey” and adopted a system that users have experienced in their favorite bookstores in order to “make it easier for you to find the books you want” (Anythink Brochure, 2010).

BISAC Subject Headings (BISAC-SH) are defined as “a list of standard subjects designed for use in the North American book trade” that consists of fifty major standard subject headings and approximately 3000 minor sub-headings that describe the topical content of a book (BISAC, 2005, p. 44). BISAC-SH were developed by U.S. and Canadian publishers, booksellers and catalogers and are maintained by the BISAC Subject Codes Committee.

The BISAC Metadata Committee has developed voluntary guidelines in Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Senders which, if followed, “will improve the accuracy of a vendor’s data throughout the supply chain and speed the processing of that data among a vendor’s trading partners” (2005). “BISAC Subject Headings” is one of thirty-one
BISAC Core Metadata Elements, sixteen of which are mandatory. Other mandatory elements include title, publication date and territorial rights. To improve the quality of the product data that they receive, “receivers of data are encouraged to use these practices to work collaboratively with their data suppliers” (Product Metadata Best Practices for Data Senders, 2005). Using this defined metadata scheme ensures consistency, accessibility and interoperability.

WordThink: A Revolutionary Organizational System

The Catalog

WordThink is a modified version of BISAC Subject Headings. RLD has customized BISAC-SH for all of Anythink’s libraries districtwide. Moreover, they have further customized it for each branch’s specific user needs at the taxonomy’s top level and second level. Each book has a label on its spine with a major subject heading like “History” and a minor subject heading like “Military”. There are up to four levels in the taxonomy.

Table 3: Anythink’s BISAC-to-WordThink Translation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BISAC</th>
<th>WordThink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BIO004000 BIOGRAPHY &amp; AUTOBIOGRAPHY Composers &amp; Musicians</td>
<td>BIOGRAPH ENTRTAIEN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Last name of subject</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUS056030 BUSINESS &amp; ECONOMICS Careers Resumes</td>
<td>BUSINESS JOB HUNT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CKB086000 COOKING Vegetarian &amp; Vegan</td>
<td>COOKING VEGET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOR023000 FOREIGN LANGUAGE STUDY Serbian &amp; Croatian</td>
<td>LANGUAGE SRBCROAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIS027040 HISTORY Military Persian Gulf War (1991)</td>
<td>HISTORY MILITARY MID EAST</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRV025120 TRAVEL United States West Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, UT, WY)</td>
<td>TRAVEL US</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(2 letter state code)*
**Figure 3. Comparison of DDC call numbers to WordThink spine labels**
Book: *The Accidental Vegan* by Devra Gartenstein

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dewey DDC</th>
<th>WordThink</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uses non-intuitive numbers along with the first few letters of author’s last name</td>
<td>is intuitive, topic-based, works well with browsing, and does not use intimidating and enigmatic numbers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Decoding Dewey
641: Food & Drink
5636: Vegetarian

641.5636 GARTENST

Source: [http://www.americanvegan.org/resources/images/t_accidental_vegan.jpg](http://www.americanvegan.org/resources/images/t_accidental_vegan.jpg)
Anythink Wright Farms: Flagship Branch

Anythink Wright Farms in Thornton is the Rangeview Library District’s flagship branch where the administrative offices are located. The grand opening of Wright Farms was held on July 10, 2010. The following sections feature how Anythink’s WordThink system is implemented at a specific branch.

The Signage

Like a bookstore, Anythink has strategically placed clear and easy-to-see signage throughout the library. These subject-based signs are part of the WordThink system and act as access points for the user to get to the books, CD’s, DVD’s and other materials that they are seeking. The signs have general topic area words that direct users to be able to easily self-navigate to their areas of interest.

Figure 4: Signage - Where is Everything?

When you walk into the Anythink Wright Farms lobby, the first thing you will see is a sign that says, “Where Is Everything?” that shows a color-coded map of the layout of the entire library with words like HEALTH & SELF-HELP, DVD’S & AUDIO BOOKS, COMPUTERS, TEENS and CHILDREN (Figure 4).
When you enter the library, you will see signs on top of the shelves that direct users to topic areas like COOKING, ANTIQUES, CRAFTS, PETS and SPORTS (Figures 5 and 6). These signs correspond to the WordThink major subject headings.

Figure 6: Signage - Major Subject Headings COOKING
Books are also clustered together and themed by subject in what are known as “Neighborhood Spaces”, for example, Math/Nature/Science/Testing (Figure 7). This clustering together encourages browsing and conforms to the principle of unity.

In the shelves, in between books, you will see signs that correspond to the WordThink minor subject headings (Figure 8). For example, in the COOKING section, there are signs between the books for VEGETARIAN, REGIONAL and INTERNATIONAL. These signs are very intuitive and allow the user to self-navigate to the shelves and easily browse the books since they are in alphabetical order.
Figure 9: Shelves - Materials Are Arranged Alphabetically by Title

The Shelves

The materials are shelved alphabetically by title throughout the library (Figure 9).

Figure 10: Shelves - Fiction Sections are Arranged Alphabetically by Author

There are two exceptions. In the Fiction sections the materials are sorted by Author’s last name (Figure 10).

Figure 11: Shelves - Biography Sections are Arranged Alphabetically by Subject’s Last Name

In the Biography and Autobiography sections the materials are sorted by subject’s last name (Figure 11).
Anythink uses a Display Guidebook to increase the visibility and circulation of books. They use merchandising best practices from retail in-store displays and display items facing out. The staff has noted that placing books face out has been very effective at generating patron interest (Figure 12). They will place a few books face out and within a few minutes, the book will be removed from the display.

To provide the user with all the media available on a subject in one location, Anythink strategically collocates and places magazines and DVDs next to books for that particular subject. For example, in the CAR REPAIR section, issues of Motor Trend, Car & Driver and Road & Track magazines will be displayed with car care and maintenance books and DVDs (Figure 13). This conforms to the principle of unity of idea in that different items are collocated and brought together under the same subject heading.
The Results: The Elegant Simplicity of a System

In describing the effects of using WordThink, Director Pam Sandlian Smith notes that,

“The elegant simplicity of the system becomes evident immediately. People love the idea of simply finding all their favorite books together under a word heading, which is so easy to navigate” and “Librarians have visited our library and have immediately fallen in love with this organization” (Fister, B. 2009).

In the following section, this paper illustrates the concrete results of using the WordThink system at Anythink Wright Farms as evident in their increased circulation rates.

Anythink Wright Farms: Circulation

The table below shows the number of library cards issued and number of items circulated in a two month period between opening day on July 10, 2010 and September 15, 2010. Library card issues increased 1200% and items circulated increased 3500%. As evident in the figures, “patrons love this library” (Board Minutes, July 21, 2010).

Table 4: Anythink Wright Farms: Comparison of Figures from Opening Day to Two Months After

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2010</th>
<th>July 10 Grand Opening</th>
<th>July 14 One Week Later</th>
<th>September 15 Two Months after Grand Opening</th>
<th>Percent increase since Grand Opening</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cardholders</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>2,500</td>
<td>8,816</td>
<td>1159.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circulation</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>215,000</td>
<td>3483.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Board Minutes, Rangeview Library District, July 21, 2010 and September 15, 2010)
Assessment of Efficacy: *WordThink Works*

As evident in the increase in circulation rates in the above table, the WordThink system works. Because it is composed of laymen’s terms that are easy to understand, WordThink is more user-friendly, more intuitive, encourages browsing and therefore increases circulation. The clear and ample signage direct users to the sections that they are interested in without feeling intimidated by the DDC which many patrons find enigmatic. WordThink more effectively serves patrons than the DDC because it is subject-based, straightforward and easy to understand. Why do patrons have such difficulty finding items in a traditional library that uses the DDC? The results of the Online Dewey Survey below indicate many of the reasons:

**Table 5: How Patrons View the Dewey Decimal Classification System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Why Patrons Have Trouble Finding Non-Fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>Trouble understanding the online catalog</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.5%</td>
<td>Call numbers too complicated to use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>Shelving categories don’t effectively pull together the books they want to browse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63.2%</td>
<td>Want to go straight to the right shelf without having to look anything up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66.3%</td>
<td>Feel intimidated by a classification system they don’t understand very well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>Patrons very rarely have trouble finding nonfiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Online Dewey Survey, Barbara Fister, 2009)*

What is the cost of not using a subject-based classification system like WordThink? The cost is poor findability, users’ negative experiences at the library, loss of user satisfaction and a decrease in library use. Unfortunately, this could translate into less financial support for libraries at the voting booth.

Further evidence that Anythink’s user-centered systems work is the recent recognition of Director Pam Sandlian Smith by the Colorado Association of Libraries (CAL). CAL selected Smith as the recipient of the 2010 Colorado Librarian of the Year Award. Smith was recognized for her exceptional leadership in directing RLD’s transformation.
The Online Catalog: Searching Options

Anythink’s online catalog uses WordThink to help users easily locate and retrieve materials. Users can choose between three different levels of search: Basic, Advanced and Power. There is also a Search History feature available that saves your search queries. Anythink’s search functions combine disambiguous controlled-vocabularies with search boxes. The search functions cater to search-box dominant “searchers” versus link-dominant “browsers” that use orienteering methods (Marshall, 2005, p. 121). The figures below show that users need to both select from a drop-down list of search terms and type words into search boxes.

Figure 14: Basic Search

In a Basic Search, you can search by either keyword (general, title, author, subject series) or browse (by title, author, subject, genre subject, non-musical sound recording, large print, video, DVD, VHS) (Figure 14).

Figure 15: Advanced Search

In an Advanced Search, in addition to the Basic Search features, you can enter the ISBN number (Figure 15). You can further refine your search by using the drop-down controlled vocabulary lists for both location and collection. In addition, you can set user-defined limits by type, Boolean operator and value. Lastly, you can sort by author, media, publication date and title.
In a Power Search, in addition to the Advanced Search features in four Search boxes with drop-down menus and you can set user-defined limits by using Boolean operators: AND, OR, NOT, XOR (Figure 16).

Lastly, users also have the option of searching via an AquaBrowser Library (Figure 17). AquaBrowser “offers visual search results in a word cloud to help you expand your subject searches and visually navigate Anthink’s catalog” (Anythink website, n.d.). The search results show color-coded associations, spelling variations, translations and the discovery trail.
The Search Results

When I typed in “kind diet” in my search query for the vegan cookbook entitled *The Kind Diet* by Alicia Silverstone, the results showed that the book is available at Wright Farms under “HEALTH DIET” and at Huron Street under both “COOKING VEGET” and “HEALTH DIET” (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Search Results for “kind diet”**
Efficacy and Ease of Findability

During my library visits, I found the WordThink system to be intuitive and very easy to understand. When I looked out at the tops of shelves and read the topic area signage, I could easily locate the areas I was interested in. Anythink even provides maps of the library layout. Once I was at the shelves, I was easily able to find books, CD’s and DVD’s since they were arranged alphabetically. Even checkout is very easy at the self check-out stations. Another unique feature is that Anythink has strategically placed the parenting books section in the children’s area. This helps make it much easier for parents to access parenting books while the children are close by.

Suggestions

If I could make suggestions to help improve the user-experience at Anythink, it would be regarding finding aids and their LibraryThing for Libraries Enhancements.

1) I would suggest that Anything feature the following two finding aids on their website to help users more efficiently locate pages within the website:
   a. A hyperlinked A to Z web index with topics listed alphabetically will be helpful in assisting users to easily locate information like in an index in the back of a book. The hyperlinks would quickly take users directly to the web page or even the exact section of the web page that they are seeking.
   b. A search box would assist “search dominant” users in finding information quickly and easily. In addition, featuring a controlled vocabulary drop-down list of search terms on the search box would further assist users by decreasing both ambiguity and misspellings.

2) Anythink has integrated the Catalog Enhancements and Review Enhancements features offered by LibraryThing for Libraries in their online catalog. These features allows patrons to participate in the Web 2.0 experience of social cataloging that is available on LibraryThing.com right on Anythink’s website. To further engage users, I would suggest that:
   a. Anythink add the Shelf Browse Enhancement so users can view the book cover pages on the online catalog
   b. Anythink add the Library Anywhere mobile app enhancement that allows smartphone users to access Anythink’s mobile catalog.
CONCLUSION

The Adams County community had a need for spaces and places that fostered “opportunities to interact, to engage, to think, to connect” (Spark Newsletter, September 2010). The Rangeview Library District designed the Anythink libraries to respond to these exact needs. According to the Director Pam Sandlian Smith, “When you walk in the door, it should be filled with great books, movies, and music. It should also be easy to find the things that you are looking for, as well as surprising when you find new things you didn’t even know existed. We do everything possible to help you feel smart in our libraries, not intimidated” (Strategic Plan, 2008).

Anythink’s WordThink system is a revolutionary organizational system that caters to the findability needs of users both at the physical libraries and online. This is evident in the substantial increases in both cardholders and circulation rates. By having a laser focus on being user-centered, the Rangeview Library District has gone beyond just connecting users to information. By implementing WordThink, they have engaged their users.
References


