

**Competitive Evaluation  
For Canton Public Library's Internet Branch**

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## Introduction

The Canton Public Library's Internet Branch ([www.cantonpl.org](http://www.cantonpl.org)) is intended as a resource for the community to return to, again and again. In addition to the basic functions of a library's website—catalogue, account information, etc. (the “nine boxes,” as its designer puts it), it has a great amount of extra content. Throughout the site, there are hundreds of links to other websites on a variety of topics. The Canton Public Library intends the website to act as one's homepage, the first page that one goes to in the morning and returns to throughout the day. In this way, it more closely resembles Yahoo ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com)) or MSN.com ([www.msn.com](http://www.msn.com)) than ordinary library websites.

Foremost, it is intended as a means to publicize the library and get people to use it. The site has pictures of people engaged in activities at the library, and there is a constantly updated section for news on the front page. Nonetheless, the designers would be satisfied if individuals never entered the library itself, but still utilized the Internet Branch. All of the functions of a physical branch can be performed through the website, short of having actual books delivered to one's door. One can use the site to start an account, reserve books, check out e-books, and even ask reference questions. The Internet Branch also has some distinct areas where users can find resources linked by a common theme (Help Me Make It Through the Day, Children's Library, and Teen Place).

This report examines the content and interface of other websites designed for the same purposes (“competitors”). It looks at the models that the Internet Branch may draw upon in future versions. Though the Internet Branch attempts to transcend the content of other library websites, the organization of other websites are worth noting. We will also examine a popular web portal, Yahoo, to show how another website handles the type of features that the Internet Branch incorporates into its design.

## Comparative Evaluation

The Ann Arbor District Library's website highlights their newest holdings and lets one find things in the library through the online catalogue. This site has a great deal of information and links for users to browse. In addition to allowing users to find materials at the physical locations, the site also allows for some interactions such as requesting materials and renewing.

Yahoo is a web search site on the internet. Aside from providing web search capability based on keywords, Yahoo also offers web searching based on categories that have been hand sorted by a team of Yahoo employees. Also, Yahoo provides information to the user via several topic specific and user customizable content distribution pages.

The Las Vegas-Clark County Library's website is designed with perfect combination of color, nice graphics and clean layout. Its mission is to enable the people of Las Vegas-Clark County community to pursue lifelong learning through its responsive collections, electronic resources and innovative services.

These sites were chosen as a sample of the websites that try to fill the same niche as the Internet Branch. The Ann Arbor District Library's website represents the efforts of another library that attempts to exploit technology to better serve its patrons and has the resources to do so. The Las Vegas-Clark County Library is another library system with a heavy investment in the Internet. It is a relatively new system with 24 branches serving 1.5 million people<sup>1</sup>. With this low branch to patron ratio, they have chosen to invest heavily in technology so as to provide better service to their patrons.

Yahoo may seem like the least obvious of the three competitors we have chosen. Although it is a commercial site not affiliated with any libraries, it is another site that attempts to be a web portal for a wide range of users with many interests. Yahoo has hundreds of links to sites across the Internet, and must organize those links into such a way that users will be able to find them. For this reason, we feel that it shares some of the problems that the Internet Branch must confront.

The following table provides detailed feature comparisons for Canton Public Library, Ann Arbor District Library, Las Vegas-Clark County Library and Yahoo. We will go into greater detail in the following pages.

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<sup>1</sup> Berry III, John N., "Library of the Year: Las Vegas-Clark County Library District, Las Vegas, Nevada." *Library Journal*, 6/15/2003.  
<http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=article&articleid=CA302409&publication=libraryjournal>

	<b>Canton Public Library</b>	<b>Ann Arbor District Library</b>	<b>Las Vegas-Clark County Library</b>	<b>Yahoo</b>
<b>Target Audience</b>	Canton residents	Ann Arbor residents	Las Vegas-Clark County residents	Everyone
<b>Resolution</b>	800x600	800x600	800x600	800x600

<b>Features</b>				
<b>Library information</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Branch hours &amp; locations</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Catalogue</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Teen zone</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Just for kids</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Senior</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes
<b>Exhibits</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>MiLE</b>	Yes	Yes	N/A	N/A
<b>New arrivals</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Top 10 Items</b>	Yes	Yes	No	N/A
<b>Events</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>Library Board</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Employment</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Research</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Community</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<b>My account</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>online reference</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A
<b>Help Me Make It Through The Day:</b>				
<b>Shopping</b>	No	No	No	Yes
<b>Computer Training classes</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A

## Ann Arbor District Library ([www.aadl.org](http://www.aadl.org))

### Product Description

The Ann Arbor District Library's website highlights their newest holdings and helps one find things in the library. It has prominent links at the top of the page to new holdings of various kinds of materials, as well as to areas such as "Research," "Events," and "Community." These links are

repeated in the menu on the left, as well as additional links (such as "Search the Catalogue") and links to timely information ("Tax Information"). Unlike the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch, it does not try to be the first page one visits on the Internet and instead focuses on information about the library and in fulfilling functions one would normally associate with a library.

### Audience Profile

As the website of a public library, [www.aadl.org](http://www.aadl.org) is intended for all of the potential users of a public library. It conceivably has anyone from childhood to old age, people of variegated skill levels, and from a variety of backgrounds using it. Many of the following descriptions detail the minimum requirements for users of the website. In this respect, it is similar to the Internet Branch.

### Location

The website is geared toward users in the Ann Arbor area, just as the Internet Branch is geared toward Canton residents.

### Technological

The site is designed to be accessible to a wide variety of users. The website works with resolutions of 800x600 and with few colors. It also works well with dial-up users.

### Web Experience

Basic experience would be helpful, as with the other web sites discussed in this report. No instruction is provided in use of websites, so clearly a degree of proficiency is assumed.

### Competition

The website operates within a niche, though online reference is available to anyone.

### Tasks

Search for directions to resources in the branches; search the catalogue; learn about events at the library; renew books; research databases of articles

### Features and Attributes

The primary features of the website are listed in a menu along the left side of the site, which stays with the user through navigation.

Features	Attributes
AADL Anytime	online reference
Search the Catalogue	Find items in the catalogue
Branch hours & locations	Information on the library
General library information	Information on the library
Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti Reads	Information about local reading program
Making of Ann Arbor	A site about Ann Arbor history
Exhibits	Information about art exhibits at library
MiLE	Search for items through Michigan Library Exchange
Library Building News	Information about the library branches
New Books/Books on Tape/VHS/DVD/Music	Highlights new additions to collection
Top 10 Items	List of 10 most requested items
Upcoming Events	Information on upcoming library events
Library Board	Information about the Board of Trustees
Employment Opportunities	Information about job opportunities
Suggestions	Can make suggestions to library
Books/Videos/Audio	Sections of the catalogue that highlight items
Research	Links to article databases to which the library subscribes
Community	Links to other community websites
My account	Lets user request books
Computer Training classes	Information about computer training classes

*Search the catalogue*

This section is the core of the library's website. Whenever you go to the library and need to search for books, this is the page that is on all the computers. It works when you know the title or author, but if you don't know either of them exactly, you're not going to find much.

*Upcoming Events*

The library has a great deal of good programming, and one can find out about it on this page. The events are arranged chronologically, so if you are trying to find out where an event is taking place on the same day, the information is immediately available. The descriptions give you the time, date, and venue up front, and then describe the event in more detail.

*Making of Ann Arbor*

If one is searching for information about local history, this website is a good resource. It is a collection of images from Ann Arbor history, but together by the AADL and by the Bentley Historical Library, a unit in the University of Michigan.

## Yahoo ([www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com))

### Product Description

Yahoo is a web search site on the Internet. Aside from offering the user search capabilities based on a keyword, Yahoo also offers web searching based on categories that have been hand sorted by a team of Yahoo employees and a series of topic specific pages that provide information compiled from various sites throughout the internet for the user. Also, Yahoo provides access to an online community through such means as mail groups, and products such as Yahoo Messenger.

Yahoo resembles the Internet Branch in some important ways. The main page has links to news and links to further pages, arranged by interest, with links to other sites as well as content native to Yahoo. These sections are clearly outlined on the main page, and the search engine can also be used to find content on Yahoo itself.

### Audience Profile

Yahoo is trying to provide a search engine that everybody can use. For this reason, it is probably not targeted toward a specific age group, but rather just to fit the average Internet consumer.

There are portions of the Yahoo site which target more specific audiences. For instance, Yahoo!igans, the children's version of the yahoo web guide, is far more oriented for a child audience than the main Yahoo site itself. Not only are the colors used more fitting for such an audience, but also the categories of search provided probably fit better for such an audience. However, everything keeps a consistent Yahoo look and feel.

### Location

Yahoo seems to want to be fit into a large portion of the population's web experience. They seem to want to create a popular tool that almost anyone would come to in their quest for good content on the Internet. Because of the large variety of services offered by Yahoo, it is clear that Yahoo does not fit into a niche, but instead tries to serve everyone,

regardless of niche. They compete with other web portals, like Google, or Alta Vista, but Yahoo seems to fill a larger niche than Google or Alta Vista because the Yahoo site does not simply provide web searching, but also a sense of community through their email and mailing lists services, for example. In this way, AOL is a closer competitor than other search engines.

### **Technological**

Yahoo has a design that, while cluttered, seems to scale well to fit all computers that might visit the site, from an up to date computer to one that is obsolete. The simplicity of the design means there is very little for the computer to have to download, so even a dialup connection should be fine with the Yahoo site.

### **Web Experience**

The site seems to assume basic proficiency with the Internet (such as knowledge of hyperlinks and an understanding of what search engines are).

<b>Feature</b>	<b>Attribute</b>
Web search	A boolean search of the web based on key words sorted by human defined categories.
Personalize	Allows the user to create a custom Yahoo page that displays information they would like to see upon opening the page.
Finance	Financial information
Shop	Takes the user to a page where they can search for things to buy from a large number of categories. From this general category, the user clicks on a more specific category until they find a product that they want, and can then compare prices for that product among sellers.
Mail	Email for Yahoo members
Messenger	Yahoo Messenger

#### *Web Search:*

The main objective of Yahoo is to help users find content on the web. The Boolean search does this by searching through web documents based on key words entered by the user. One could argue that this task is the primary need that Yahoo serves to fill. This is a service not provided by the Canton Public Library site, which tends to provide information or send users to another site which can provide that content.

#### *Personalize*

Much like the Canton Public Library, Yahoo is not just a web search site, and aside from allowing users to merely search for content Yahoo is also an information distributor. Much like the Canton Public library, Yahoo pulls information from various sources and presents it to users in the manner that they want. In this way, Canton Public Library and Yahoo try to provide a wide demographic with the content they want in a convenient format. Canton Public Library unlike Yahoo does not allow users to personalize this

information for their own needs, but rather provides information in a consistent static format for all users.

### *Finance*

Both Canton Public Library and Yahoo provide a number of different information pages for their users, among those for Yahoo is the Financial page. Again, Yahoo is not just a web search engine, but rather a community resource for individuals. It serves largely to allow users to find the information they want on the web and in many cases compiles this information in one place for easy access. Ironically enough, Canton Public Library provides financial content through a link to Yahoo's financial page.

### *Shop*

Yahoo allows the user to enter an item that they are searching for and provides access to a number of sellers for that item. In this way users can compare prices from a variety of sellers and make sure they are receiving a fair price for this product. Unlike Yahoo, Canton Public library does not provide this service. Canton Public Library does not seem to try to create a community on the web similar to Yahoo, but rather uses the web to supplement the existing physical communities that exist at the library.

### *Mail*

Not only does Yahoo provide information for its users, but in many ways serves to create a community of users. It facilitates their coming together and sharing ideas and content that perhaps might not have been accessible via the web. Yahoo mail does this by providing the user with a means with which to access other users, either via direct mail or via mailing lists. Again, Canton Public Library web site does not provide this information as it does not fit with the physical library's goals.

### *Messenger*

Another way in which Yahoo provides a sense of community and access to the information that community provides is through messenger. This is another way in which Yahoo is more like America Online than a typical web search site. Canton Public Library, while a content provider similar in nature to Yahoo and American Online, does not provide a strong online community, but instead uses their web site to facilitate the library's existing community.

**The Las Vegas-Clark County Library (http://www.lvccld.org/)**

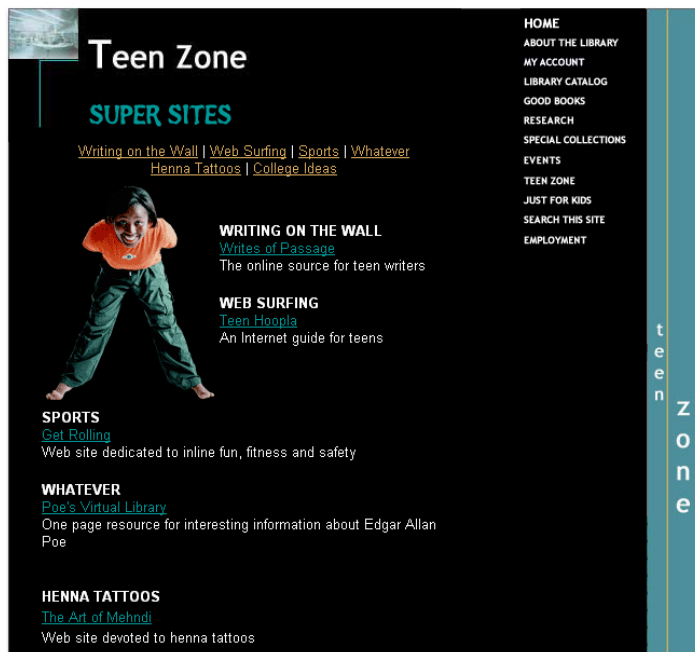
**Product Description**

The Las Vegas-Clark County Library’s website is designed with an uncluttered interface and sparse use of color. Its mission is to enable the people of Las Vegas-Clark County community to pursue lifelong learning through its responsive collections, electronic resources and innovative services.

The menu along the right side of the screen is present throughout the user’s visit to the site, allowing one to go to any part of the site from any other part. The site maintains a consistent look throughout its pages. Its content primarily looks inward, toward the library, rather than outward toward



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other sites. Some areas, such as Teen Zone, have the framework for a larger site with many links to other websites, but does not fill that framework with content (for example, this screenshot from Teen Zone shows links to anchors on the same page, but five of the six anchors are visible when the site first loads).

**Audience Profile**

This website serves the residents of Las Vegas and Clark County; like the Ann Arbor District Library website, Yahoo, and the Canton Public Library Internet Branch, it is meant for a wide demographic.

**Technological**

Like the other sites discussed in this paper, this website was designed for accessibility. It only requires an 800x600 resolution and should work for dial-up users. However, the site has many graphics, and may be slower than the other two competitors.

### Web Experience

Although the site is designed for a wide demographic with many experience levels, it is apparent that a minimal amount of web savvy would be helpful in the navigation of the site.

### Navigation

User can navigate the site through main vertical menu list on the right side of each page. For pages within each of the main menu items, horizontal menu bar on the bottom of the page help direct user to other pages in each category. Navigation method and design are consistent and easy to follow.

Feature	Attribute
About the library	Information on the library
My account	Patron library account management
Library catalog	Search in library holdings
Good books	eBooks, new books, book clubs
Research	Library databases
Special collections	Collections in several categories
Events	Events in all branch libraries
Teen zone	Information for teenagers
Just for kids	Information for kids
Senior	Information for seniors
New residents	Information for new residents
Español	Spanish version of the website

### *Special features*

Search this site, Spanish version of the web site and seniors section are features Canton Public Library internet branch doesn't have. Although whether to have Spanish version depends on demographics in Canton area.

### *Catalog*

There are several nice features such as request a title, summary, review and cover image for each title and display related subjects that Canton Public Library internet branch could incorporate into its catalog.

### **Doesn't have**

Compared with Canton Public Library internet branch, The Las Vegas-Clark County Library's website focuses mainly on traditional library services. It lacks features such as weather, news, Site of Day and community information.

## Conclusions

It is clear that the Canton Public Library's Internet Branch attempts to do something that the other two library websites do not do: Provide outward-looking content, rather than simply information about the library itself. To pursue this goal, the examination of other libraries' websites may prove useless. It would be more valuable to look at what works and what does not work on other sites such as Yahoo.

Yahoo lacks the library functionality that the Internet Branch has, but it does serve as a web portal that one could conceivably set one's homepage to. Yahoo, as a commercial site, has an interest in making its content easy for users to find. It allows the user to search within the site, and attempts to organize its subject areas in a clear manner. Clearly, Yahoo provides an interesting model for the Internet Branch's extra-library content.

On the other hand, the Ann Arbor District Library and the Las Vegas-Clark County Library District's websites can also be useful models. Their content is largely restricted to the basic library functions that the Internet Branch's designers intended to transcend, but they attempt to make their organization clear and navigation smooth. It may be worthwhile to draw upon these efforts toward simplicity when working on the Internet Branch.