

FRONTLINE

Libraries and librarians in the frontline

by Dr Hans-Peter Geh



Travelling around the globe as President of IFLA, I am quite often confronted with the question: 'Why are libraries and librarians only mentioned in the "back-line"?' Are we really unimportant or are we too shy, hiding our light under a bushel? Libraries to my mind have an exceptional role to play, today, and in the future, because they are important channels for the access to information.

Access to information is, without doubt, vital for all nations around the world in this age of interdependence, where it is unlikely that one country considers itself self-sufficient. For information, the communicable form of knowledge, has come to be recognised as an indispensable resource, both for the national economic, political, scientific and social development and for international relations. The arriving information age will also have a socio-economic impact in virtually all fields of human activity. And one of the fields chiefly affected is that of librarianship and information activity.

Today the output of information continues to rise exceptionally fast. More and more

books printed, function as mediators and preservers of knowledge and cultural values. And at the same time they serve the development of nations as well as the enrichment of individual human life. On the other hand new media -especially the electronic ones - transmit data throughout the world.

As we enter the information society, an expression coined by John Naisbitt, libraries are becoming value-added information and knowledge centres. They have now, and, in the future, the obligation to play a leading role in the information field. The new issue is whether they can open it up for use and turn it into practice. If they can, they will become, as information centres, one of the main gateways for information transfer and supply.

In this connection it is, however, of utmost importance that librarians will have a more active role to play in this rapidly changing knowledge-centered society. Librarians, or whatever one might call them in the future, will have a dominant place in planning strategies for selecting, implementing and evaluating various types of services at appropriate levels according to their clients' needs. The librarian therefore must not only have skills but be an active, progressive, self-motivating, flexible person, willing to accept change and capable of functioning in an, at times, hostile and often unstable environment. What we therefore need are people with the force of character and personality to communicate to policy and decision makers the value and importance of library and information services. And, the consequent need to make adequate resources available.

We therefore have to provide information specialists who are capable of dealing with the new challenges in our information socie-

ties. If we achieve this goal it seems to me that there is a bright future for our profession. And - as a result - I am quite sure that we will then also appear . . . in the frontline.

Hans-Peter Geh,
IFLA President

LAA Summit representatives

The LAA's representatives for the Australian Libraries Summit are planning to meet prior to the Summit to discuss the LAA's position in relation to the items on the agenda.

These representatives are:

- Alan Bundy, President c/- SACAE Library, Holbrooks Road, Underdale, SA 5032, (08) 354 6260;
- Averill Edwards, Vice-President c/- National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT 2600, (062) 62 1200;
- John Levett, Editor, ALJ c/- School of Librarianship, University of Tasmania, GPO Box 252C, Hobart, Tasmania 7001, (002) 20 2271;
- Sue Kosse, Executive Director, Library Association of Australia, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo. NSW 2007, (02) 692 9233 or (008) 22 1481.
- Sue Phillips, National Director, Information for the Nation Campaign, c/- Library Association of Australia, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo. NSW 2007, (02) 692 9233 or (008) 22 1481.

If you would like to discuss any of the items on the Summit agenda, please contact your nearest representative.

Sue Kosse
Executive Director

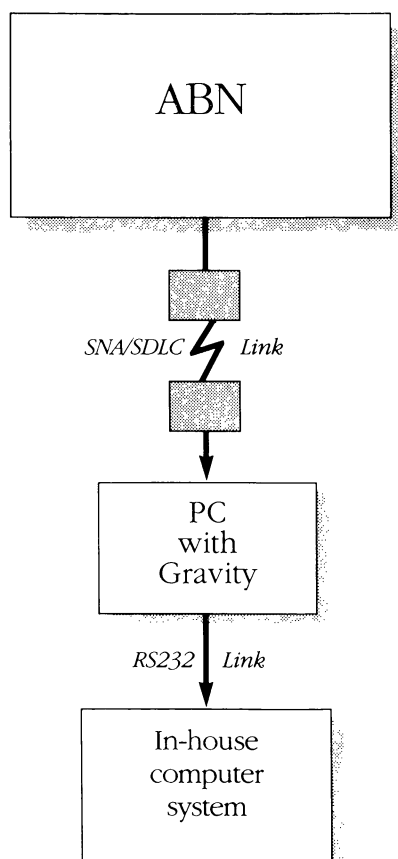
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