



Nora Stewart
Training and Development Officer

In August seven hundred souls gathered to listen, discuss, enjoy and learn from each other at the Specials, Law and Health Conference on the Gold Coast. A significant-sized meeting for a significant group of professionals, mostly with one thing in common—isolation. The ALIA definition encompasses people who are professionally isolated as well as those who are geographically remote. All have an increasing number of ways to keep up-to-date professionally.

What are the possibilities?

The network of ALIA divisions including State Branches, Regional groups, Sections and special interest groups covers a wide range of territory and active people. Many groups have local newsletters which members automatically receive, giving them interesting information on events, gossip and offering them the chance to contribute.

The level of grassroots ALIA activity is extensive. The Northern Territory branch have instituted a program of Professional Development for Isolated Library Staff involving a series of events given by visiting speakers on a variety of topics. These are being videoed and made available to groups through State Branch T&D Officers. Anyone interested in giving a lively presentation when visiting the Top End is encouraged to consider offering their services in exchange for 'hot sweaty hospitality'.

Conferences are valuable if you can get to them—if not, the proceedings are most often available to non-attendees. The Association plans that as many Conference events as possible will be recorded. Some ALIA groups

also organise local or international guest speakers to present and discuss their papers from Conferences. Trade Exhibitions held in conjunction with conferences are extremely popular and can be as much of a learning experience as the sessions. An alternative to attending can be to arrange that the trade exhibitors visit you with the latest in technology and techniques—done recently by the Riverina Group, with a presentation by booksellers on how to buy books in the country.

New multimedia avenues for learning are becoming more easily accessible and affordable, giving an added bonus for isolated users. The buzz word 'interactive' is generally associated with computing but can also apply to meetings that take place by extraordinary technology.

Teleconferencing is a great alternative to gatherings, brainstorming sessions and some distance education courses, and is readily arranged by the telephone operator. Being well-prepared is vital. Ensure all participants are well informed in advance of the intended discussion. Telecom offer a Conference organising service called Conferlink—call 008 011 441 for more details. I have more information and advice on how to get organised if you are interested in doing this for a group you are involved with.

Video-conferencing

For those who are primarily visual learners, the age of visual reality is with us, with the help of some clever computer software. Video-conferencing is the latest excitement, using video cameras and software attached by telephone lines to a standard personal computer. The cost of a video conference has reduced dramati-

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cally—this equipment retails for around \$3 000, avoiding expensive studio and satellite time which is around \$5 000–\$10 000 per hour. ALIA is investigating the potential of this technology and more information will follow soon.

Speaking of software—computer assisted learning (CAL) or computer based training (CBT) have stunning potential. These programs are designed mostly for one-to-one use; like the ALIA self-education courses on *Marketing* and *Automating A Small Library*. The difference is that these courses are self-paced, meaning that you can go as slowly as you like or skip modules if you can answer the assessment questions correctly.

This flexibility makes them excellent for beginners and for those wanting to refresh or update knowledge. As with any learning exercise, education expertise as well as subject knowledge is needed for comprehensive and stimulating coverage.

The University of Canberra is currently putting together a six-module CAL program on the AACR2 cataloguing rules to be trialed at the November ALIA Cataloguing Conference in Perth. A beginners guide to using CD-ROMS (Silver Platter) is currently being piloted by Ballarat University College with the market potential obviously being for library users but also for library staff either wanting to learn or teach search techniques.

The best thing about most of these multimedia activities is that they are kiddie-proof—they don't usually require any particular skill at using the technology. This helps to keep the focus on learning and lets people like me have a go. ■