

Adapting to change in a challenging world

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I have been a corporate information professional in Brisbane for ten years now and I still feel that surge of excitement that all librarians feel when faced with the challenge of finding an answer to an unanswerable question in an impossible time frame.

Over the past ten years the functions of a special librarian in the corporate sector have changed dramatically. Our need to know and understand electronic delivery of information and the 'good side' of the Internet has skyrocketed. Our negotiation, financial and budgeting skills have had to be honed to perfection. Our sensitivity levels to a perceived attack on our profession's integrity from both within and without have created muscular (but very attractive) shoulders.

Today, corporate librarians in large commercial firms seem to spend the majority of their days in front of a keyboard. They are either using CD-ROMs to meet their work demands or they are training their internal clients in the use of this ever-expanding information re-

source. The screen and keyboard have also become the gateway to a wonderful selection of online databases that can provide much-needed information.

If this is our 'present', then we can expect even more changes in the area of electronic delivery of information as the new millennium approaches. Most information professionals in the corporate section are riding this professional roller coaster and screaming 'yee-ha!' with huge grins on their faces. They love the change and are happy to share their learned knowledge about what is working and what is not with fellow professionals. The fact that we may be working in competition does not seem to impact on this shared knowledge base because the sharing is in the skills needed, not the actual content of the knowledge learned.

So what about the outsider's view of the changes going on in our area of the profession? I often hear non-librarians say that these technological advances will lead to the demise of librarians as we know them. The skill and

talent that a librarian possesses is the knowledge of where to find information and how to use it in the most cost-effective and efficient manner. This professionalism is what can give our employers a competitive edge and enables the smooth and timely provision of necessary data. It is why we are valued within our organisations. However, it is more than likely correct to say that librarians as we know them will soon cease to exist — our profession has proved itself adaptable to radical change and we can expect that such changes will continue as new business practices gain momentum during the approach of the new millennium.

Sadly, there have been those who have suffered under the dreaded business restructuring strategies, but happily, there are an equal number of information professionals who have found a new focus and embarked upon new career paths. Above all, corporate librarians have proved their adaptability and remain a jewel in the professional crown of librarianship. ■

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For further information please contact Deanne Barrett, national president, ALIA special libraries section, ph 08 9222 7689, dmb@doplar.wa.gov.au

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