

Technology in the workplace and the role of the serials technician

Pat Whalan, Northern Territory Library and Information Service

We are witnessing a revolution in the workplace, wrought substantially by the introduction of technology, the consequence of which is that the very nature of work is changing. Jobs are either being transformed or made obsolete. At a library technician level, some workers may find that technology makes their jobs more complex and satisfying whilst others may find themselves bewildered and suddenly incompetent. Still others may find that their work has become less challenging and that the expertise and artistry they have acquired over the years no longer matters. Some may pay the ultimate price of job loss.

Serials management encompasses all aspects of processing serials. It is one of the most time-consuming tasks in a library, and therefore, perfectly suited to automation. Integrated library management systems are now the goal and ideal of most libraries. These integrated systems allow all of the software functions to be linked into one system. Users can move from one function to another without changing machines or software. Bibliographic data is shared among the various applications. Most integrated systems include acquisitions,

serial control, cataloguing, authority control, online public access and circulation.

Serials management within my library takes place in a single serial section. The serial section is responsible for serial acquisitions, serials cataloguing, check-in, microfilming and claiming. This 'centralised' system allows for the proper attention to be given to each process. Costly mistakes are reduced because serial staff understand more of the 'big picture'. One overwhelming advantage of having a centralised serials section is that serials do not fit easily into the other routines of the library.

To obtain overall control on the management of serials, employing technology is imperative. With technology, internal workflows are improved, and cataloguing data and standards such as MARC can be shared with other libraries. Technology allows serial technicians to access other collections and online services for bibliographic and other information. The means of locating and obtaining documents would be unattainable without the use of technology in allowing links to holdings and full-text databases. The new integrated systems allow for the

direct connection through a bibliographic MARC record to the relevant http site on the internet. Not all libraries are situated at the same site, thus technology in the form of a communication tool is critical in maintaining a high level of service from serials staff.

The advent of online claiming facilities by some subscription agents assist in achieving smooth workflows by allowing technicians constant access to the agent regarding problem titles. Whilst this online service also allows technicians to order serial titles, the advent of the fully-integrated system will be able to do this many other functions relevant to managing serials. An integrated system will be able to keep track of spending for budget control which, when a serial section could be handling up to ten different service centres, will be of major importance.

New management systems have had to be implemented along with new methods of searching for information and cataloguing — particularly with USMARC format. Technical and policy challenges have become part of normal routine for the technician, particularly in achieving online, real-time interaction between computers distributed over wide- and local-area networks.

In less than three months we celebrate the new millennium. Only twenty years ago scientists got the idea to connect computers in a network, and already we have the creation of a new virtual universe called the world wide web. The use of the web has gone beyond its original intent. Everyday people are able to connect to anywhere in the world — they are able to send each other electronic mail, which is now widely-acclaimed as a means of communication. Newspapers and journals can be read online and information down-loaded if required without the necessity of having to leave your home.

Workplace environments have undergone a number of processes from re-engineering to downsizing, to reclassifying and employee retraining. Technology is great, technology is the future but where will it lead us? Computers can help library staff do work faster and more accurately, but what will be the future role of the library technician? ■

A very generous donation

Leonie Atkins, TAFE Tasmania

The Library and Information Studies Section of the TAFE Tasmania (South) would like to congratulate Sarah Crosswell for her achievement as the most-outstanding first-year student in the Diploma of Library and Information Studies. Sarah, a full-time student in the course, has achieved consistently excellent results in all modules. As a reward she received an ALIA membership pack.

The section was also fortunate to receive a substantial donation of course resource materials from Twila Herr. Twila was a senior lecturer in the degree course of the Library and Information Studies Department at the University of Tasmania for a number of years before the course closed in the early-1990s. She has also been a very active member of the library scene in Hobart, and is responsible for influencing many students to undertake further study and employment in the library sector. Twila's substantial library comprises some very valuable library tools and we pass on our heartfelt. Students of the course will benefit from the collection, and in these years of dwindling resources, Twila's library is a very real contribution to the continuing study of library and information science in Southern Tasmania. Twila's collection will be incorporated into the working resources of the library technician's collection and will be available for loan to any member of TAFE throughout Tasmania. Thank you, Twila! ■