

Technology in the Territory:

Three library technicians discuss what impact information technology has had on their jobs

Kaye Bartlett, Northern Territory University

The Northern Territory Open Education Centre provides secondary education for a wide range of students including school age, mature age and students from remote aboriginal communities. Pam McKeen has been the library technician at the Centre for ten years and has seen many changes in the workplace as the result of the information explosion; particularly the impact that technology has had on the provision of library services to students.

Formerly the Northern Territory Secondary Correspondence School, the school changed its name in 1998 to reflect the changing nature of the school's environment, and the various technologies used in the delivery of education and support services. All staff now communicate via e-mail, access the world wide web, and use multimedia resources to organise and store information.

The Centre has residential schools for junior, senior and Aboriginal community students throughout the year. Classes are held to introduce students to the benefits of making good use of the library's resources, in the hope that they will leave feeling comfortable enough to communicate with library staff in the future either by telephone, fax, internet or through their teachers. The library staff make a special effort to set-up library displays. One such display related to the International United Nations theme. Competitions and quizzes prepared by library staff are also

published in the residential school student newsletters.

Visiting students are introduced to the library website [<http://www.ntoec.nt.edu.au/~library/index.html>] created by the teacher-librarian. Future developments planned for the website include new book lists, the annual Children's Book Week events and eventually the library catalogue. The students can access educational and recreational CD-ROMs and the internet during their visit, and electronic indexes have proved to be a vital resource for them.

Like technicians everywhere, technology is encompassing more and more of Pam's daily work. The introduction of the new Northern Territory Library and Information Service networked library system has been a challenge to her and she constantly reminds herself that in the near future her daily work will be easier because of it. However, with all changes, it takes time to digest and keep the library functioning without disadvantaging the clients.

Joy Passmore and Marilyn Que Noy are library technicians at Casuarina Senior College Library who wonder whatever happened to the theory that technology saves work. They are quite confident that their jobs are safe from being made redundant through lack of work for some years yet, especially since the new library system has been introduced.

Some areas, including circulation

and catalogues, have been improved over the years by the introduction of technology. Who remembers typing and filing large piles of catalogue cards, then finding a typing error and having to do it all over again? Or maybe not finding a title because the card was filed incorrectly? Circulation was a nightmare: entering details on a card from the card of the book, filing it away in date order and then having to retrieve it again when the book was returned. Now a barcode scanner is waved over a barcode and the system not only checks out an item but will also generate an overdue notice if the item is not returned on time.

Technology does not, however, remove the repetitious tasks. Joy and Marilyn are currently rediscovering the enjoyment of loading the faculty text books onto to Dobis Libis a number of years ago. Those items that did not transfer across from Dobis to the new system now need to be entered manually.

After several months on the new library system Joy and Marilyn have developed their skills and acquired some new ones in the areas of problem-solving, conflict resolution, teamwork, and wine drinking, and along the way acquired some free computer training. And both can now fortuitously blame any mistakes they make, and cover up their incompetence, by saying 'We are having difficulties with our new computer system'.

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