

The importance of information literacy

An issue that is high on the agenda for the Records Management Association of Australia is developing strategic alliances with like Associations. A number of discussions have been held with ALIA and I feel honoured that as part of the spirit of working closer together, I have been given this opportunity to write this guest 'Frontline'.

Chris Fripp

Federal president RMAA

Developing the information skills of users has always been a key area of librarianship, and I think the other professions could learn from this. I think the key here is that 'library and information services professionals embrace a responsibility to develop the information literacy of their clients.'

From a records management perspective, I think the RMAA does not take a huge role in this area. It is generally left to the individual records managers to develop information literacy (although ours is probably specifically concerned with records) within their organisations. This might be done through raising awareness of records management and providing systems training to users.

Developing true information literacy within an organisation can be hampered by professional barriers. A collaboration between records managers, librarians, archivists and IT professionals would assist in this regard.

The technological tools of the information age — computer networks, telecommunications systems and databases — have made available an unprecedented volume of information. Yet how aware are we of what is available, when to use it, and how to find out about it?

I recently ran in-house training courses for a new

version of a customer request management system, complete with a portal that had access to most information from the one screen. Vital information, such as policies and decisions which had been collected, indexed and stored within a set directory structure, was now available with the push of a button. It was interesting to note that less than twenty per cent of the staff trained were aware that this information existed prior to the training, with most commenting on how much time it would have saved them if they had known of its existence.

With the introduction of electronic document management and knowledge management, there has been an ever increasing need for all information professionals to work together. The example above, of providing sophisticated searches in a simple format for clients, was made possible through the collaboration of information professionals. The previous situation where vital information was stored in a directory where only a few people knew about it, was the result of one group of professionals doing their own thing.

I do not think records managers, as a rule, are proactive in encouraging people to use information resources to their best advantage. A lot of time is spent on the processing level — receipting, storing, retrieving, disposing — without getting into the value-added services that could be provided (for example, teaching people how to do sophisticated searches, linking to non-records information resources).

Professional barriers have for a long time compartmentalised information into four distinct groups — librarians, records managers, archivists, and IT professionals — with clients not having the ability to locate all information from one group. The challenge I would like to issue is for librarians to begin collaborating with other professional groups to develop information literacy programs for their respective organisations.

I think this is where the RMAA is proactive and perhaps a greater understanding between the professions will see overall improvements. ■

Thanks for your contribution...

As an outcome of the first ALIA National Policy Congress, our Association is now going through an unprecedented process of restructuring. This major initiative is being looked at with considerable interest by library and other associations faced with the similar challenge of renewal.

However we are moving forward to meet ALIA's objects, and Australia's need for improved library and information services, very much by capitalising on the ideas, energies, and commitment of members manifested through their participation in the former structure. Personally, and on behalf of your Board of Directors, I would therefore like to express appreciation to you and your committee colleagues for your special contribution to ALIA made through that structure.

Dr Alan Bundy, president