

Have you seen the new book dispensing technology?

For me, dispensing technology started with chips, chocolate, and chewing gum machines that devoured a lot of my shillings on the train platform. Shopping centres now have the DVD vending machine that accepts returns, not unlike that pop-up calendar shop on Boxing Day.

However the library world has chosen to keep its self-check and automated return sorting technology within the expensive real estate of the library. Getting a two-hour loan at 2am through something like the German precision-manufactured LibDispenser (mk Sorting Systems) might be life-saving for some students.

LibDispensers can deliver library services in areas where there is no physical building, where the branch has reduced opening hours, or where it is simply short on space.

Round the clock access can be provided to a high-use collection, because these machines hold hundreds of books, serials, and AV items – each neatly stored, dispensed, and returned to its optimum location within the unit. Such a machine is self-maintaining and, being integrated with the library catalogue, acts as a separate branch, even capable of taking reservations for specific times.

The University of Queensland has already invested in LibDispensers, and it is generally true that the first installation of a new technology is taken up by innovators who catch the vision and have the resources and persistence to comprehend and manipulate its complexities.

According to Alan Butters, the RFID guru of Australian libraries, “automating processes which have existed in manual form for many years can be difficult. It can also be challenging to find the productivity sweet-spot when thinking about the integration of work flows and technology.” (Alan Butters, accessed at www.sybis.com.au 16/11/2012)

Implementing a new virtual library and lifting the usage of library resources are the drivers of demand for the LibDispensers in Europe and North America, and Australia is never far behind. I'm just waiting for my local library to catch the vision at a train station or shopping centre, where all those bookshops used to be.

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The Future of Librarianship – A New Graduate's View

Libraries will cease to exist! Who needs libraries when we have Wikipedia? What does a librarian do? Don't you just shelve books? I just use Google. You'll be unemployed! Books are no longer popular.

I have heard it all and more. I am sure you have too. It can be discouraging, particularly in my case as I graduate next year as a librarian. Unfortunately I can't look into the future of libraries and library professionals, but I can look back and base my opinions on history. I can also base my opinions on how people use information and libraries now.

What I can say with certainty is people have always needed information, libraries are not just about books, literacy will continue to be important regardless of whether information is in print or online, students require support and help with finding reliable information, we live in an information age, and free access to information benefits communities and the underprivileged.

Most importantly for me, I am determined to stay calm about my future job prospects. Dwelling on the fact that people do highly value information and will most likely continue to value information makes me realise that libraries in some form will continue to exist. Books and information will continue to evolve and so will the technologies that support them. Therefore, I believe there will be professionals required to manage information, and consumers and students wanting to access it.

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