

Australia's future — IFTN

In July 1988, the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce (DITAC) allocated \$50 000 to IFTN to survey the information services provided to business and industry by State libraries, and to investigate the links, both actual and potential, between these libraries and the National Industries Extension Service (NIES) in each State.

(NIES is a joint Federal/State Government initiative that began in South Australia in 1986, and in other States in 1987. It now has offices in all States and Territories. It aims to improve the efficiency of companies, particularly those likely to be involved in export, and to make Australian industry more competitive internationally.)

The eighty-page report of the survey's findings is now finished and is expected to be available for purchase later in the year. A twenty-page summary, *Australia's future ... information*,* was launched at the first national forum on library promotion in August.

The survey was carefully and thoroughly carried out using a format devised by Elizabeth Swan, formerly of the ACI Information Service. It was trialled with the State libraries and NIES offices in Victoria and New South Wales by Elizabeth and Sue Phillips — then Assistant Executive Director of ALIA and the IFTN Campaign Director. Sue carried out the remainder of the survey, visiting all States between September 1988 and March 1989. Before they were handed over to DITAC, drafts of both the full report and the summary were submitted to the participating libraries and NIES offices for response.

Issues explored with State library staff were:

- the role of the State library in pro-

viding library and information services to business and industry

- staff and organisation involved
- volume of requests
- access — physical and remote
- charging policy
- products and services
- types of clients
- information sources used
- delivery methods
- examples of how information is presented to clients
- turnaround time
- promotion
- directory entries for business information services.

Issues explored with NIES officers were:

- the role of NIES
- target companies and industries
- information sources
- current use of libraries
- paying for information
- turnaround time
- information needs
- links between NIES and the State library.

Both groups were asked to identify four clients who were willing to be interviewed about their information needs and how these were being met.

The survey revealed that problem areas for State libraries have been:

- currency of information
- turnaround time — sometimes up to 6 weeks, when business clients want hours and at most days
- the 'image' of libraries — physical as well as stereotypical
- cancellations of serials
- staff ceilings
- lack of promotion of areas of expertise, e.g. newspaper and periodical collections, standards collections, di-

rectories, access to online services

- almost no service outside capital cities.

It is concluded that State libraries could develop better links with NIES and State and Federal Government departments in assistance to small business areas. They could link with NIES in targeting particular industry sectors to promote their services, offer specialist services and run information sources and management seminars. They could build up their resources in areas related to business, and particularly small business, e.g. computer-aided design, finance, business management, marketing and quality control. They could offer fast-track services.

Recent developments in at least two States reveal that the State libraries themselves are aware of the potential market for their services in this area. To allow this market to be fully exploited, two of the principles on which our profession is based may need to be revised; i.e., the belief that information from publicly funded libraries should be provided free of cost, and the belief that librarians should not interpret the information they present.

Undoubtedly, Australia's future does depend on information. It is up to us to ensure that the library and information industry fulfils a major role in the provision of that information.

Anne Hazell

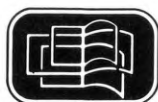
Convener, IFTN Campaign

* *Australia's future ... information*, Canberra, ALIA Press, 1989. Cost: IFTN sponsors, free; ALIA members, \$10; non-members, \$15 (plus \$2 postage). Enquiries: ALIA Head Office, PO Box E441, Queen Victoria Terrace, Canberra ACT 2600.

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