

Letter

A word for cataloguers

Dear Editor,

It has come to my attention that there is a dire shortage of cataloguers in the Australian library community. This has been pointed out to me by a number of colleagues from all over the country, working in a wide variety of library situations, who are all faced with the same problem of finding staff with experience who are willing to enter the mysterious world of cataloguing.

Over the years that I have been involved with cataloguing and cataloguers, I have come to realise that this part of the profession is less well respected than other parts. I find this a little strange, as the essence of good information retrieval is efficient information storage, and that is, after all, what cataloguing is all about.

It would appear that there is a general theory around that cataloguers have become redundant as the networks spread their influence. However, the networks need cataloguers to keep up the input of data and to maintain the standards of consistent data that make a good database. Also, as more data are acquired from the large networks, cataloguers are required in the individual institutions to tailor the data to the needs of those institutions.

As more information becomes available, so the requirements to store that information and access it become more sophisticated. Cataloguing has become

a very specialised art that requires a thorough knowledge of such tools as AACR, DDC, various subject headings lists and, in the automated environment, MARC. Apart from these tools of trade, the good cataloguer needs a basic understanding in a wide variety of fields to cope with the variety of materials that pass through his or her hands. Most cataloguers who spend any length of time in a specialised area become very knowledgeable in that particular field and, if they choose, become excellent reference librarians.

To those considering a career in cataloguing or database management, I say 'go for it'. Not only is it interesting from the point of view of the variety of materials with which you will deal, but it is also challenging from the technological point of view as more and more sites become automated.

I cannot help but wonder if the shortage in this area will mean that new cataloguers will not have the same opportunity for on-the-job training as was available in the past and therefore the general standard of data consistency will fall, or if the demand will be such that institutions will have to start paying appropriately for the extra expertise they require from their cataloguing staff. I will watch with interest.

Ruthi Urbac



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- and many more.

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The venue is Liverpool City Library, on 22 November.

For more information contact: Glenys Murray (02) 427 5194 or Helen Ristuccia (02) 821 9441.

Frank Willems

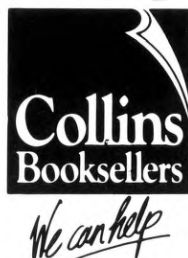
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