

Front Line



Bev Kirby

Vice President

One of my colleagues recently said to me 'when the powers that be are forced to make severe budget cuts and to prune their operation there is little you can do about it'.

Of course we need to have done something about it long before the first sniff of economic downturn. It is little consolation to say that the signs should have been there and that even if they weren't libraries should not have waited to listen to the first ominous rumblings of budget cuts, economic re-deployment and what has now become, 'if it doesn't move, retrench it'.

We hear of library closures daily but

of greater threat is the steady chipping away at budgets and staffing at a time when our politicians are trying to promote the clever country. This has the effect of downgrading our collections, cutting back the time we have to provide our services and leaving us with little to market at a time when marketing our services and our professionalism is our only hope.

While we are marketing our libraries and their services we have to be promoting our skills as professionals in the information sector.

What does this all mean for libraries and what can we do about it? Some of us may be protected from the spectre of libraries disappearing overnight. The disappearing ones tend to be in business or government or hidden by a blanket of

amalgamation. Some of us have little to do with budgets and funding cuts and our issues may be how to make our jobs more interesting and challenging. For how long I wonder.

I don't have the answers. But I do know that this can't be fought by individuals. There are libraries out there who have raised their profile through being able to identify their role in the information marketplace.

ALIA can provide the focus for sharing achievements, ideas, strategies and techniques so that members can have the support they need to fire up their marketing programs. We have *inCite* and we have our Branches, Sections and Interest Groups. I would like to see *inCite* full of this kind of information.

On a visit to Melbourne in 1990, Darlene Weingard from the School of Library and Information Studies, University of Wisconsin talked to ALIA members about marketing. Her comments were, 'We must show them that they can't afford to not to use our services. We librarians must be able to put a price on our services and cost their failure to use them. We must prove that we are indispensable in economic terms'.

Identifying the real targets for our

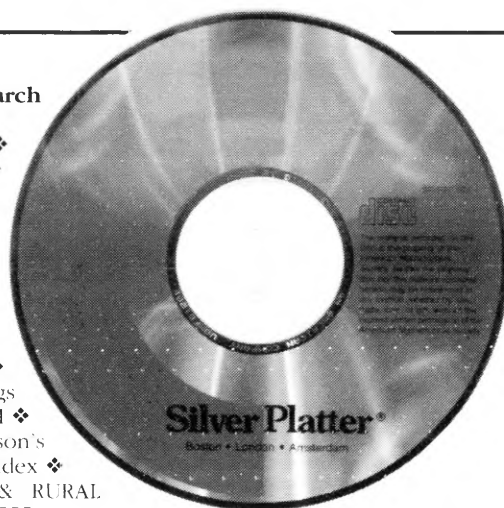
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marketing efforts continues to be a problem. Who do we target? In education libraries we may find ourselves doing our best marketing to the students and academics but not winning finance managers or councils who take the make or break decisions.

Marketing must be about the library and about us. While we are marketing our libraries and their services we have to be promoting our skills as professionals in the information sector. After all we are the group who make it all possible. Without being able to identify our professionalism they can find someone cheaper and more flexible in the multi-skilling arena. Effective marketing of our libraries has to focus on people skills and competencies and to show how important they are to the clever country.

In 1990 ALIA sought support from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to carry out an occupational skills analysis

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to cover people working in libraries. The project was approved by DEET but subsequent policy changes have moved the project to Arts Training, the

National Industry Training Council. ALIA has been given the opportunity to continue working on the project. The level of that involvement will be decided at the ALIA November General Council Meeting in Canberra.

ALIA must not stand by and watch. We are the only ones who through our long association with education and training of library staff can bring together the kind of information that really identifies our skills and competencies. The DEET funded project will form the basis for input to the Occupational Skills Register which is to be developed by the National Training Board. ALIA is the only knowledgeable group which does not undervalue our members.

Please take an interest in this project. Please share your good news in marketing stories with your colleagues through ALIA. Tomorrow it may be just a little too late. □

Direct Line



Sue Kosse
Executive Director

Groups. If you would like to find out more about the papers or meeting, please contact either your General Councillor or myself.

Chinese information professionals visit Australia

During October, the Association worked with the National Library of Australia to host a visiting delegation of Information Professionals from the China Society of Scientific and Technical Information. This delegation reciprocated the delegation of Australian librarians led by Warren Horton, Director-General of the National Library of Australia, to China earlier this year.

The delegation was keenly interested in the application of information technology in Australian libraries and the way in which we worked with industry in delivering information services. Their very busy itinerary took them to Melbourne, Canberra and Sydney, and provided them with the opportunity to see first hand some of the IT innovations at, among other places, RMIT, CAVAL, CSIRO, CIRCIT, AARNet, the National Library of Australia, the Australian Defence Force Academy and the State Library of New South Wales. The delegation also visited ALIA House to view the National Office operations of the Association.

Their program was not all work. The Victorian and New South Wales Branches and individual members, the Asia Pacific Special Interest Group and the National Office and your President John Levert

ensured that our Chinese visitors were also able to sample Australian hospitality.

Many thanks to all those who helped the Association and the National Library to successfully host this delegation to Australia.

Competency standards

Many members have been keenly reading Tom McKeon's Picket Line and watching with interest the developments with skills audits around the country, and in particular, the Association's efforts to undertake an occupational skills analysis for the library sector. Tom's departure temporarily stopped this project, however it is now back on the agenda.

The Association has not been able to establish a task force to undertake an occupational skills analysis for the library sector, mainly due to the unions not being prepared to become involved with yet another project group. Such task forces, as many will already know, must have tripartite representation: employers, employees and government.

DEET have now ensured that the Association will not establish a project outside of an industry training council to undertake this work. They have taken this decision since some other projects which have been funded and operated outside of an industry training council have not produced the goods expected.

The Association must now work with the Arts Training Australia, the industry training council assigned responsibility for

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General Council's last meeting for 1991

As I write this Direct Line, another set of General Council papers are being produced on the office photocopier. Four hundred and eighty pages of policy and administrative papers and reports. The revision to the strategic plan comes as an attachment to the main agenda papers. Eighty five copies of the papers are provided to General Councillors, Branches, Regional Groups and National Sections, with an agenda to the State Sectional Groups and Special Interest