Info Online and On Disc 93

Pamela Lloyd *believes that it highlights the future for information specialists*

The greater accessibility of CD ROM information and a lively interest in CD ROM networking were perhaps the most obvious trends to emerge from the 6th Australasian Information Online & On Disc Conference and Exhibition, held in Sydney in January.

The proliferation of new products on CD ROM and floppy disk and the trend towards electronic publishing in these formats were greeted with obvious interest and pleasure by delegates and visitors as they explored the display. The buzz and excitement around the CD ROM Showcase reflected a growing awareness and confidence in the use of CD ROM networking by a range of professionals, from librarians to financiers.

With information networks becoming more accessible, and with the everyday use of multi-media formats such as video or CD ROM, it was clear that for many delegates attending Information Online & On Disc 93, the exclusivity of purely on-line information access is breaking down. It was interesting to see merchant bankers and financiers join the queues at the Datastream International exhibit, to explore its numeric databases which are used extensively in financial circles worldwide but are only now gaining a foothold in Australia.

The impact of these new developments became apparent through the observations of speakers such as Clifford Lynch of the University of California, Donald Hawkins of AT&T Bell, Maree Enright of Mallesons Stephen Jaques and Ione Deane of Egon Zehnder SA. It's clear that more delegates, both librarians and those in business and the legal professions, are now comfortable with the new information technologies and no longer regard them as being 'on the fringe' of their experience or competency.

The growing capabilities of librarians as information specialists are also creating a real need for greater responsibility when it comes to evaluating the quality of information. Librarians can no longer simply churn out references. Harry Collier of Infonortics and other speakers stressed the need to continually evaluate and check in order to ensure a quality product for users.

The Conference was a sellout event, attracting a record-breaking 825 delegates from Australia and overseas, while 2000 visitors to the fifty exhibition displays and CD ROM Showcase kept exhibitors so busy that it's likely the opening hours of the exhibition will be extended when the event runs again in 1995.

Equally successful was a new initiative—the free, guided 'Business Trails'. These took visitors on a tour which explained how to make use of different hosts and files relevant to business and the law.

Conference convener Lyn McCullagh, of Macquarie University Library

The CD ROM Showcase proved very popular with visitors as well as delegates. Participants enjoyed the opportunity of experimenting with the CDs without salespeople present, and the growing flexibility of the medium, allowing users to include their own information rather than be limited to the strongly bibliographical characteristics of CD ROMS of the past, proved to be a winner. The networks and technology worked extremely well, and there wasn't a single glitch over the three days of the Showcase.

The decision by the ALIA Information Science Section to run the conference and exhibition as a biennial event has resulted in such strong attendance that the accommodation at the Hilton International Sydney has now been outgrown. The 7th Australasian Information Online & On Disc Conference and Exhibition in 1995 will use the impressive Wesley Centre nearby to accommodate the plenary sessions, freeing up additional space at the Hilton. ∎