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Librarians are experts in the information industry, trained to analyse information needs and then meet those needs by calling on their knowledge of the information itself.

On 24 October 1986 the front cover of *inCite* (in those days it was a newsletter) carried an article by Roy Stall (WA) that had the blazing headline *Subject — the bleeding obvious*.

The article discussed financial restraints, job redundancies, and the conundrum that professional librarians somehow were not seen to be useful to business in the information gathering process. Local business people, time and again when surveyed, were found to rely on personal contact, overseas visits, and trade magazines, rather than any form of planned information gathering with on-line database resources.

Stall wrote, 'I'm starting to think that our profession needs to be much more aggressive and much more professional in its promotion of what it has to offer, and to direct part of that promotion to showing how profits will benefit by introducing sophisticated information services.'

Well, it's now nine years down the track and Stall's article is so relevant, it could have been written yesterday!

I had kept a photocopy of the article because it was issued the week we had officially opened the library I had established for the then State Bank of South Australia and its message proved to be a beacon for the library. We went on to win a multitude of survival battles, both in times of normal economic restraint and during the recent dire financial straits when the Bank resorted to a government bailout and ultimate privatisation.

So it is perhaps ironic that this article has now come to surface as I was cleaning out filing cabinets, having negotiated a redundancy

from my employer. And perhaps, even more ironic that I found great comfort in Stall's article.

I had won my battles, over and over again. Each time the library was in a position of greater strength. But then the bank was sold. The new owners moved in, my existing executive support system was decimated with a 'new broom' and I discovered I was a little like that hamster on the treadmill who paddles round and round thinking he is getting so far then realising he is right back where he started.

And this is where I found comfort in Stall's article, because its main message is that we cannot change opinion alone. I had done a wonderful job convincing my organisation of the usefulness of its library, but while I was doing that who was out there convincing the potential buyer?

I could have stayed on and I have no doubt that I would have sold the new owners on the usefulness of their library, but it had two fine staff members besides myself and I felt it was time for them to take the frontline.

And I'd like to put my energies into figuring out the success factor for impressing people with the worthiness of our profession.

A good starting point is the report *Navigating the economy of knowledge* prepared for the Libraries Working Group by the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies, Griffith University. This is the first-ever comprehensive and in-depth study we have of users and non-users of state and public libraries throughout the country. I urge all of you to read it and make use of this wonderful asset we have for acknowledging our strengths and identifying and addressing our

weaknesses. Much of the information is applicable across all library sectors. For example, the report finds that there is no quibble with the 'goodness' of libraries which are on the whole seen with high regard. However, these same respondents fail to see the 'usefulness' of libraries, as they can get what they need by other means.

We have to start selling the usefulness of libraries and surely the key to this usefulness is our library profession. I was concerned by a statement by *Sydney morning herald* columnist Padraic McGuinness recently with his viewpoint 'libraries could as easily be set up by voluntary associations'. He seems to think libraries are perhaps one step up from a bookstore or newsagency and on par with the local video library. Here is a good example of someone who has a public forum and needs a much better understanding of librarianship as a *profession*.

Librarians are *experts* in the information industry, trained to analyse information needs and then meet those needs by calling on their knowledge of the information itself.

I was pleased to attend the New Zealand Library and Information Association's conference in Masterton, New Zealand, in September because it had some very pertinent speakers to the subject of librarians seizing the opportunities that were before them.

A very impressive speaker from Berkeley, California, Professor Bob Berring, said librarians in the USA were losing out to economists and business managers. When asked to name a librarian, the public will name Katherine Hepburn in an old movie with Spencer Tracy. Professor Berring

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was not optimistic for the profession in his country, but he was adamant that Australian and New Zealand librarians still had a chance to seize the opportunities that their USA counterparts had let slip by.

Then we heard Charles Landry from the UK, whom some would know from the last ALIA public libraries conference, talk about environments. We had to have libraries that said 'yes' when you entered them. And importantly, we had to work in an environment where it was okay to fail — because that enabled us to take risks and these risks were necessary if we were to grow and progress. The secret, however, was to encourage competent failures rather than incompetent failures.

Carolyn Cohn, from Swets, gave a well researched paper on the changes that global electronic ac-

cess will mean to various serial processes in terms of access, acquisition and publishing. Carolyn and I were the only Australian delegates to the conference outside of some key trade representation from Blackwells, Baker and Taylor, DA, James Bennett and Bill Mason.

I hope to encourage more Australians to attend this conference in the future as it is an excellent opportunity to form strategic partnerships with our New Zealand colleagues. I found it a tremendously 'friendly' conference with a high calibre of speakers and thought-provoking topics.

And it seems we all have the same lament! While having a pre-dinner drink with a New Zealand delegate, she lamented that our profession did not receive its rightful esteem. 'Oh well, she said, society does not place a high value

on waiters and waitresses and in the final analysis, are we any different?... they deliver a plate of food and we deliver information.'

I think it's time we listen to Bob Berring and answer Roy Stall's nine-year-old plea and get our collective act together and start planning and *implementing* a strategy that ensures our profession is not left behind.

We've got to take Charles Landry's advice and be prepared to risk failure, because that's what's been stopping us thus far, I think.

I'll go first. I'm prepared to declare that a library is only as good as the *librarians* that are running it. They organise, they archive, they retrieve, they use, they synthesise, they educate, they know.

Librarians are experts in the information industry. Before others will believe it, you have to believe in yourself! ■

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