Your voice

Retrograde or revitalised?

I look forward to receiving my *inCite* each month. I find much to interest me, and much to use. I particularly like Kerry Webb's and Virginia Walsh's pages.

I cannot agree, however, that *inCite* is 'easy to read' (*Letters, inCite*, April 1996, p5).

My overall impression of the new design is that it is messy. Too many different styles appear on a single page (*same issue,* p3, p16-17). There are, of course, many pages that are cleaner, leaner and simpler, but those untidy ones overwhelm me!

I also think that it is a retrograde step to include *Events* in the magazine proper. They are not easy to locate and read. The submission deadlines must now be shorter, and consequently more difficult to achieve for divisional events. They are ephemeral by nature and more appropriate for the erstwhile inserts. Ditto for the job advertisements.

Dianne Costello
Canberra, ACT

On behalf of Queensland Branch Council, I am writing to congratulate the *inCite* editorial team on the new look *inCite* in 1996. We have received many enthusiastic comments on the improved quality and layout of the magazine. The higher profile for the *Events* column has also had positive results with more members taking note of our upcoming events. We are also looking forward *inCite* going full-colour from July.

As our national news magazine, *inCite* is a relevant and attractive publication that all ALIA members can be proud of.

Wendy Abbott, secretary,
Queensland Branch

Editor's note: The decision to return Events *and* ALIAppointments *into the body of the magazine was made following requests from numerous members for extra copies of* Events, ALIAppointments, *and other inserts because they had lost or mislaid them — this was especially true for members sharing* inCite *in large organisations. Additionally, the editorial team believe that members would better appreciate the breadth and depth of ALIA and related activities if* Events *were to be displayed alongside 'newsy' articles. The submission deadlines are only marginally shorter.*

IT managers

I don't know how closely other members of the library profession read the 'computers and high technology' supplement in *The Australian* newspaper each Tuesday, but maybe you, like me, have made it a habit to browse this section in an attempt to keep up-to-date with developments on subjects like the Internet, CD-ROM technology and so on.

An article in the 23 April edition (p53) however, caught my eye. It was headed 'IT managers' alienation bodes ill for an industry' and basically was lamenting the failure of some organisations to establish senior IT personnel as 'managers', up there with the very senior human resources and finance people.

The more I read through the article the more I felt like substituting the word 'librarian' for the phrase 'IT manager', as the general thrust of the article was a plea for recognition of the unique skills and abilities of senior 'tech-heads' (the author of the article's description, not mine). The author also saw the IT manager as perhaps, a 'chief information officer', answering

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to the head of an organisation or the organisation's board of management.

The writer, Graeme Philipson, argues that 'the CIO (chief information officer) revolution never happened' — at least not here in Australia. He goes on to point out that the great promises made by the IT industry were never realised, and that the substantial investments made by organisations in IT have 'failed to deliver'.

Now it is worthwhile reading the entire article as it raises a number of issues relevant to the library profession. I'm not sure if the article does not provide more questions than answers, but let me pose a few questions of my own.

Why, for example, aren't libraries and librarians featured in the article? I mean, aren't we the 'information profession'? Why didn't the article differentiate between data and information, and between number crunching and providing useful information on which organisations make important decisions? And why shouldn't senior librarians in an organisation be considered on a par with the 'finance manager' or 'HR manager' or the 'IT manager'?

Of course there are examples where the senior librarians does sit on the executive board. And I want to make it clear I am not attacking IT professionals for wanting to be recognised for their unique contribution to the range of organisations which employ them.

Maybe this is a roundabout way of saying that we as a profession still have a long way to go before we are actually seen and employed as 'information managers'. We call ourselves that, and we use the terms freely in our own communications, in our professional association, in our library schools (nay, 'information and library studies' departments) and in our own networking. But I ask you, who else out there in the real world sees us as we appear to see ourselves? Are we indulging in a huge exercise in self-deception?

I raise these issues only because I genuinely think it would be a folly to ignore them. Perhaps it is time for some 're-engineering' of our profession — for us to get down to basics, to 'core business' matters, and for some serious and productive self-analysis. But not in isolation — we need to involve the consumers of our product in the process.

OK, when shall we start the ball rolling — at the next ALIA conference?

Roy Stall, Mosman Park WA

ALIA forever in a continuous state of flux

I note from 'Frontline' (*inCite*, April 1996, p4), a comment to the effect that General Council 'did not at this stage take up a proposal to join with ACLIS and the National Library of Australia in a broad review of the future needs of the profession, feeling perhaps that our own ideas and needs should be clarified first'.

Like most members I was not present during the debate, nor have I yet seen the minutes, so my comments may be to that extent uninformed. A direct assumption which might be made from Helen Tait's comments is — to quote her — that ALIA is not clear about its own 'ideas and needs'. This is reasonable, up to a point: ALIA, like every organisation of its kind, is in a continuous state of flux, constantly evolving and refocussing in a volatile environment. It is therefore never likely to experience a stable platform of the kind which seems to be implied by General Council's decision, and thus will never be in a position to undertake the joint exercise with ACLIS and the National Library of Australia.

This, it seems to me, is a serious omission: ALIA could in no way surrender or impair its autonomy by participating in such a review now; further, the broad joint perspective which might be gained from the process would itself be invaluable in clarifying ALIA's position in the overall environment, and a useful aid in shaping its own agenda. By declining to take part, ALIA may give rise to the suspicion that it wishes to isolate itself from mainstream events: Australia is too small, the pressures on libraries are too great, for us to pretend that we can seclude ourselves from the debate in order to clear our minds about our future role. I strongly urge the president and General Council to reconsider its position, repair a potentially serious lapse and re-engage with ACLIS and the National Library of Australia in the proposed review. The opportunity to do so, if lost now, may not recur.

John Levett, Hill Farm, TAS

Corrections

In the March issue of *inCite* (p19) we incorrectly referred to Thelma Rungkat as the president of the Rural and Isolated Special Interest Group — Thelma is actually secretary of the group. In the May issue of *inCite* we wrongly identified Craig Grimison in a group photo of General Council (p29) — the man in the middle was actually Andy Smithies. Apologies to all concerned!

Your voice

Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

All letters should be addressed to the inCite editor and may be e-mailed to incite@alia.org.au, faxed to 06 282 2249, or posted to: Your voice, ALIA, PO Box E441, Queen Victoria Terrace, ACT 2600. Please include your name and postal address with your letter or e-mail.