

Who needs corporate libraries?

Bill Martin, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology

Much is made these days not only of the so-called computer-on-a-chip, but also of the library-in-a-box. And as if this was not enough, developments in cyberspace promise to make the world one vast virtual library, accessible in real-time by anybody anywhere who has a computer and a modem. If one listens to people such as Nicholas Negroponte, director of the MIT media lab, as the 'digital age' approaches, the end of the intermediary is in sight. We shall all become end users, interacting directly with digital services in education, information, entertainment, business — whatever. If one can access multimedia information on any subject directly without going through an intermediary, then why bother to do so? Hence runs the argument, who needs libraries, corporate or otherwise?

Some would see the corporate librarian strategically placed to exploit both familiar on-line information sources and cyberspace. Indeed, far from being made redundant by the growing panoply of networks and search engines, digitisation could well provide a range of opportunities for traditional information professionals, including the provision of customised Web pages, organising resources by subject, navigating through the networks for clients, information broking and training end users in the intricacies of searching and 'surfing'. Two further sources of comfort for library and information professionals could well lie in the concepts of information quality and core competencies. Marvellous as it can be, accessing information by means of news groups and bulletin boards on the web still leaves a fair

amount to chance as regards the quality and reliability of the information found there. A search conducted by an information professional is much more likely to yield results that can be relied upon, saving both time and money in the long run.

Clearly, the Internet and related digital technologies pose both threats and opportunities to the library and information professions. Research continues to indicate that although librarians are generally well-regarded by their co-professionals in corporate and other environments, they tend not to be regarded as key corporate players whose contribution is either strategic or critical. Frequently this results from a perception that the service ethos of the traditional information professions can be a handicap in the highly competitive and entrepreneurial world in which corporate libraries have to operate. Whereas this is a generalisation, and one can always find examples to counter it, there can be little gainsaying the fact that it continues to be a widespread perception among non-librarians.

Such opinions become all the more worrying when taken against the growing acceptance of information as a corporate resource and with it, recognition that knowledge-based changes are increasingly seen as the way ahead for successful organisations. Then the question becomes not whether librarians are entrepreneurial, but whether or not they are recognised as players in the overall process of corporate change and renewal. In a period of technological and organisational change, it may not be enough to be responsive and user friendly. The need is to be proactive, entrepreneurial and able to ensure an adequate fit between the library/information centre profile and that of the business units which it exists to service.

There is need for a change of mindset on the part of many corporate librarians if they are to survive the turbulence that is certain to engulf their parent organisations in the coming decade. That this is frequently matched by the need for cultural change within the wider organisation will not necessarily save those corporate librarians who are unable or unwilling to change with the times. ■

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Surfs up for ABN and Ozone

Christine Clay
National Library of Australia

The Internet is rapidly becoming the preferred method of access to the National Library's Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) and Ozone services.

Almost half of all ABN and Ozone enquiries are now made via the Internet. This is a significant shift away from the situation this time last year when enquiries via leased line and Austpac predominated.

ABN is Australia's largest bibliographic network. It gives access to more than twelve million bibliographic records and over twenty-three million attached holdings records in Australian libraries. Ozone hosts more than thirty-five Australian bibliographic, directory and research databases.

The Internet offers access to the full range of ABN and Ozone services including searching and document ordering, and data creation on ABN. In many cases, access via the Internet can also achieve greater cost savings than either leased line or Austpac access.



All customers of the National Library's online services are being encouraged to move to Internet access. Leased line and Austpac access will be shut down in August 1997 and the Internet will be the only method of access to the WORLD 1 service, which will progressively replace ABN and Ozone.

Libraries with Internet access can also take advantage of the National Library's recently released CJK service. The CJK service is a unique source for copy cataloguing and interlibrary loan locations for Chinese, Japanese and Korean material in Australian libraries.

Information about these services is available from the help desk on freecall 1800 026 155, e-mail: networks@nla.gov.au, or from the National Library's home page on the World Wide Web at <http://www.nla.gov.au/networks.html>. ■