

# Would you rather cuddle a computer?

Beth Mayo, Queensland Special Librarians Section president

There has been much talk of late of the migration in many organisations and government departments away from the centralised repository for information. Many of our workmates are convinced that access to electronic products (such as CD-ROMs) is all they need to perform their daily tasks. They assume these valuable sources of information will make them self-sufficient and automatically turn them into 'instant information professionals'.

But no matter how brilliant the technology or data base, no matter how many of them are added to a LAN or hard drive, we still need librarians to analyse information requests, anticipate information needs and weed out false 'hits' in searches. Even more importantly, the human element is still essential to evaluate the reliability of sources or suggest possible resources that will allow an information need to be met. But how do we make 'them' understand how essential the librarian is to their information needs?

Librarians are ideally-placed to lead the way in embracing technological changes. Special librarians can prove their worth to their organisations by constantly and pro-actively involving themselves in any new developments occurring in the areas of information retrieval and dissemination. We can no longer expect to maintain our professional status if we sit quietly in our libraries and never touch base with our users or create a professional bond with our organisations information technology people.

Librarians possess unmatched skill in the areas of: refining an initial request; selecting an appropriate resource to meet information needs; taking that intuitive 'extra step' and anticipating possible further request outcomes; quickly pinpointing inadequacies in data bases and having the ability to rank them in order of accuracy or relevancy to the information needs of the organisation; and maintaining an optimum level of communication within the organisation in order to filter the information flow and control 'information overload'.

It may also be useful to mention a recent survey of corporate libraries (Nardie, B, O'Day, V, Valauskas, E, 'Put a librarian, not software, in the driver's seat', *The Christian Science Monitor*, Vol 132, 4 June 1996, p18) that was conducted in that cauldron of the computer chip, Silicone Valley. The survey clearly demonstrated the special librarians ability to adjust to the constantly changing landscape of electronic resources, while at the same time treating their client's information needs with sensitivity and understanding in a way that 'intelligent software agents' could not.

Take a long, hard look at that computer that sits in your workplace. Does it smile, tell jokes or call you by name as you pass by? Technology is great, but it is not as great as a living, breathing special librarian on the trail of urgently needed information.

Reprinted from *Extra Special*, the newsletter of the ALIA Special Libraries Section (Queensland group), issue 4, 1996.



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**16/10 Online Multimedia Resources for Libraries.** Uni of NSW, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies. Contact: Maureen Henninger, ph (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, e-mail M.Henninger@unsw.edu.au.

**23/10 Indexing Photographs and Moving Images.** Uni of NSW, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies. Contact: Maureen Henninger, ph (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, e-mail M.Henninger@unsw.edu.au.

• **23/10-6/12 NSW Acquisitions Section committee meeting dates.** Meetings to be held at the Staff Room, Level 5, Fisher Library, Sydney Uni at 4.30pm. Those who wish to dine after meetings can normally be accommodated at a local restaurant, (23/10). Staff development day — invitation only (6/12).

• **24/10 NSW CYSS Management Seminar for Children's Librarians.** Occupational health and safety issues in supervising children. Guest speaker: Barbara Allen, Sydney Hospital. Burwood Council Chambers, 2 Condor Street, Burwood. 9.30-4.30pm. \$40 members, \$55 non-members. Contact: Pamela McKinnon, Baulkham Hills Library, ph (02) 9686 3798.

• **25/10 NSW Specials Section networking lunch.** Noble House Chinese Restaurant, 21 Bent Street, Sydney. Time/cost: 12pm, \$22 per head. RSVP: Marianne Shepherd, ph (041) 925 0852, fax (02) 9568 3271. Cheques payable to ALIA Special Libraries Section NSW Group, 85 Moore Street, Leichhardt 2040.

• **25/10 Diana Oliver Retires.** ALIA NSW Public Libraries Section, the MPLA (NSW), and Association of Local Government Librarians (NSW) invite colleagues of Diana to her farewell dinner. Novotel, Darling Harbour, Sydney. 6.30pm for 7.30pm, \$60 ea. Contact: Margaret, ph (02) 9710 0355, fax (02) 9710 0591.

**30/10 Doing Research on the Net.** Uni of NSW, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies. Contact: Maureen Henninger, ph (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, e-mail M.Henninger@unsw.edu.au.

**4-26/11 ILANET Courses** — Introductory Course (4/11), Internet and the World Wide Web (25/11), ILAMAIL Seminar (25/11 — FREE), Searching Australian Databases (26/11), GUI Seminar (26/11 — FREE). For course outlines and bookings ph (02) 9230 1424 or e-mail ilanet@ilanet.slnsw.gov.au.

• **6/11 NSW Health Libraries Section. Internet Workshop.** 6pm for 6.30-8.30pm at the Uni of New South Wales, Biomedical Library, Computer Laboratory. Cost \$25 members, \$40 non-members. For more details contact: Jill Denholm, ph (02) 9385 2663.

**7-28/11 Insearch/Knight-Ridder Information Seminars.** Introductory Dialog (7/10), DataStar/ProBase Workshop (8/11am), Pharmaceutical (28/11). Sydney contact: ph (02) 9212 2867.

**11-22/11 Managing Archives Workshop.** Uni of NSW, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies. Contact: Maureen Henninger, ph (02) 9385 3589, fax (02) 9385 3430, e-mail M.Henninger@unsw.edu.au.

• **27/11 ALIA NSW Branch seminar on effective communication skills.** Guest speaker: Peter Thompson, Radio National Breakfast presenter. ALIA

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