

Looking further than 'L' for librarian

Ross Bowerman

Library Locums



I am studying to become a librarian because I want to become an indispensable interface between clients and resources whether they be monographs or WWW documents. Other exciting drawcards are the multifaceted job opportunities and the chance to work around the world.

Rebecca Lowe (Curtin University)

Does this sound like an interview for a library job? He burst into the room with astounding vigour and let fly with an attention-grabbing dialogue from a Shakespearean play (sounds suspiciously like a scene from an Eroll Flynn movie).

Anyway, when the emotion of the moment had subsided, the speaker of that piece of literary genius asked for the

name of the play from which the speech came. A background in history or the arts would provide a head start in correctly naming the Shakespearean play in question. Well... the person had just that, correctly named the play and was appointed to the position of research assistant.

Confused? So was the librarian. She was waiting for her interview for the position of research assistant with a high profile executive head-hunting firm. You see, the firm was looking for someone who was proactive and quick-witted, discreet and professional, and skilled in searching online databases and printed reference material — not to mention someone who could respond quickly to pressure!

While this interview is one of the more unconventional kinds we have heard about at Library Locums, it also illustrates the point that there are careers for people with library skills that don't come under the letter 'L' for librarian.

I have searched our recruitment database and I have found that around thirty per cent of the jobs we have handled do not have librarian in the title. Some jobs could be described as 'a librarian by any other name...' for example, data researcher, information co-ordinator, publications officer, records co-ordinator, research development officer, search clerk.

Other positions sound more exotic — judge-

Becoming a learning opportunist

Marion Nicolson, ALIA Board of Education

There is a jobs revolution happening. It is happening around the world, in Australia and in the library and information profession.

The nature of library work and the skills in demand are changing because of global competition and rapid developments in information technology. Keeping pace with these changes while creating a satisfying and rewarding career is a major issue for our profession.

The new careers

You should not expect a single, neat career. You can expect to move jobs eight times in your working life and almost half of the moves could be involuntary.

You may have several 'careers' in your working life. You will be expected to meet the needs of a variety of work activities. It is this versatility that will define a 'career'.

Career planning

Career planning will become even more the responsibility of the individual rather than the organisation despite the recognition that staff are an organisation's competitive edge.

Taking charge of your career means not simply choosing jobs. It really means taking advantage of the learning contained within the job — both through formally created experiences/training and by mak-

ing effective use of opportunities in the job. Taking advantage of learning opportunities will be the career destiny of most managers. The important issue will be the capacity to learn and develop.

Learning opportunities

Some key areas in which librarians focussed on career development could look for learning opportunities are: information technology, financial management, marketing, and human resource management.

Future opportunities

I am optimistic about future career possibilities for librarians. With all the focus on quality in management, organisations are realising that quality information delivery is as critical to organisational success as quality financial management, quality marketing and quality human resources.

So far the emphasis has been on becoming computer literate. The next step is to become information literate — and this is the moment of opportunity for our profession.

Versatility, flexibility and transferability of skills are the hallmarks of careers into the 21st century. Versatility in careers requires versatility in learning. It means taking advantage of learning opportunities, it means being a learning opportunist.

ments officer, business reporter, classification specialist, export manager, litigation support manger, network manager, product development officer, configuration control officer.

A librarian recently found employment as a quality control documentation officer. A corporation going through the Quality Accreditation process needed someone to maintain a large collection of in-house manuals and reports. Sounds very familiar to special librarians. I wonder how many of us would consider looking for a job under this title?

And then there are people like the person at the start of this story and myself who go into the recruitment business. Throughout much of my eleven years in traditional library roles I never considered other options even though I had completed a Business Degree. That is not until I was involved in the establishment of a fee-based information service tar-

geted at the corporate and public sectors. The diverse needs for daily information presented a whole new ball game to me, and somehow started the grey matter ticking over.

Soon after I found myself in a marketing role for a software company. And for the past four years I have worked in the recruitment industry. Here I am applying my information retrieval skills, searching by Boolean logic, managing a database, marking up in html and navigating the Internet. Certainly my organisational, communication and time management skills have been honed and enhanced.

Yes there is risk and the grass may seem greener in another pasture, but now is the time when you can think of taking your professional ambitions into new territory. So as you venture forward, it may be worth taking a plunge into waters which do not have a sign beginning with 'L' for librarian. ■

A childhood obsession with my local public library (despite the foreboding atmosphere and sombre-toned staff) led me to put 'date due' slips in my books and lend them to friends! This obsession continued through various library semi-professional positions leading to my enrolment at Curtin.

Kay Saunders (Curtin University)



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