

Information brokers continue to prove their value

Fran Heap, Department of Finance and Administration Library

From its beginnings in the days of the Department of Housing and Construction, the Department of Finance and Administration Library has had a non-traditional focus. We have always offered services which provide tender evaluations and company risk assessments and have kept current Australian standards. We have only collected in the fields which have been of interest to our department, and only for as long as that interest has been maintained. This has led us to a very pragmatic approach to our entire collection, and an 'if we don't need it now, get rid of it' attitude.

Apart from our need of practical material in the areas of architecture and engineering, the library has had an extended management interest with an emphasis on customer service and best practice. Our collection was focussed on this area and we practised what we preached. If a request was urgent, staff would scatter all over the city to put the items on the manager's desk within half an hour of the request. It was important that our services should match our clients business requirements.

Thanks to the determination of the librarian-in-charge, our technology is up-to-date, and with the support of information technology professionals we are at the cutting edge. Database searching, especially our favourite Dialog database, *ABI-Inform*, ensures that our customers are aware of international developments, and the expansion of the full-text facility in this database and the development of *Carl Uncover*

mean that document delivery is almost immediate. This information has helped business units within the department win tenders based on their knowledge of current international trends.

The Internet, even before the advent of the world wide web, is a source of government and academic information. Like most libraries, we are asked 'Who needs a library? we have the Internet', but our expert searching skills have proved our worth. We actively encourage our clients to use the Internet and we point them to useful websites through a weekly e-mail bulletin. E-mail is an easy, non-resource-intensive method of communication and advertising, and has also been the vehicle for establishing and moderating an international discussion group on public sector matters. PUBSEC has generated interesting discussions and members have provided urgent information which could not easily be found in published sources.

Our library bulletin has moved from paper format to the department's website. Our weekly e-mail complements, and advertises this service.



Increasingly, we are moving to a value-added environment. We do not merely produce lists of possibly relevant information, but we flag the best. And we tailor the information we present as close to the request as possible. We are placing ourselves at the core of the organisation.

Since the demise of the Department of Administrative Services, we are the

library for the new Department of Finance and Administration. We face a steep learning curve, with the need to rapidly become aware of the focus and subject areas of the new department. Our challenges are to remain relevant, to increase the use of our services by users who have not traditionally been large consumers, and to focus internationally on areas of policy development. And we are achieving this with half the staff that were previously employed in our area.

We have developed spreadsheets to assess the time it takes to produce our services. Everything must now be examined for cost-effectiveness, and services such as journal circulation may no longer be justified. 'Timeliness', and 'targeted' are the buzz-words, and anything produced 'just in case' is no longer relevant. Document delivery, rather than inter-library loans is becoming the focus, with paid services which deliver promptly determined to be more useful than free services which take staff time.

As we move into the next century many traditional library services will change for company or departmental libraries. Technology will continue to challenge us and information will increasingly become more widely available. However, I am convinced that there will still be a need to maintain the provision of an information service which is targeted, timely and relevant, to support the increasingly busy lives of senior management. ■

 <p>Australian Library and Information Association</p> <p>Directory of libraries and archives in the Pacific Islands</p> <p><small>compiled by Adrian Cunningham and edited and indexed by Susan MacDougall for the Asia and Pacific Special Interest Group</small></p>	 <p>Australian Library and Information Association</p> <p>Asian resources:</p> <p><small>A directory of databases on Asia accessible in Australia compiled by Nereida Cross and edited by Susan MacDougall for the Asia and Pacific Special Interest Group</small></p>	<h2>Special for ALIA members...</h2> <p>Purchase the newly-released Directory of libraries and archives in the Pacific Islands, and receive Asian resources: a directory of databases on Asia accessible in Australia for only \$5!</p> <p>The fine print...</p> <p>Contact the ALIA National Office for an order form.</p> <p>This special offer is open to ALIA members only; normal member price is \$12 for each directory; non-member price is \$15 for each directory</p>
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