

# An information expert... without books

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In 1994 the BP Library was downsized from five staff to a single librarian, and the service was merged with the Exploration Library. Shortly after this I joined BP as librarian in charge of a greatly reduced service.

The previous librarian had been instructed not to market the service, presumably as this would increase the workload. The consequences of physically moving the library coupled with no marketing, was an invisible library. As I had not been personally told about not marketing I carried on as though I knew nothing, and marketed. The work began to grow and I required extra part-time staff to help me. This small growth in staff members was acceptable — managers do not really see people who arrive only two days a week. There was also invaluable assistance from RMIT student librarians who helped with everything — cataloguing, reference, administration and document delivery. In the super busy periods I also learnt to work smart and cut unnecessary tasks, and sometimes services. Naturally, I have never resumed those tasks. The library became a lean machine, and I was working between fifty and sixty hours a week.

Enter the internet — and a new phase for librarians. I was able to persuade management to let me have the first internet terminal in the company, and the library became a hub of activity. It also became an opportunity for me to develop new strengths and skills. I became the 'internet expert'. Those were heady days, the days when nobody else understood search engines, or knew how to deal with Netscape, and of course they could not find any information either. Then came the real internet explosion. Internet access was available from every desktop, and everybody became an expert. So, to compensate for this I learnt how to design web pages, and for a short while I was the champion of Front Page. However, the IT group seized on this. They were bigger and stronger than I was, and they used a lot of jargon to confuse everybody. Naturally, this made them look very clever, and IT promptly became the bright new specialists in organising the company intranet.

This was a dark period. My manager really could not understand why I wanted to be involved in internet, after

all it was an IT function. He looked at me very queerly when I said I also wanted to be part of the knowledge management team. It was the old story of being viewed as a book minder, and nothing else.

However, my initial efforts at training and web management had still paid off. There was constant stream of people asking for guidance with internet searching and web design.

It was during this period ALIA did a survey to discover which corporate libraries had expectations of growth. A dreamer always — I could see rosy times ahead and replied that 'yes' I thought my service would grow. I did not know that the Exploration group was ready to sell off a major portion of its interests. The consequence of which was a massive downsizing of the library. This meant I no longer had a place in Exploration, 'But' they asked 'could I please train the receptionist to run the library?' This was the first time I ever openly defied a manager, and I refused on the basis that a receptionist could not run a library, and that this was an open insult to the profession. Amazingly, this worked. The manager back-pedalled and agreed to hire another librarian part-time — a small victory.

I only had a short time to find a niche somewhere else. I began to lobby. Armed with usage statistics, lists of projects I had provided information for, and lists of satisfied customers, I went straight to the top. Luckily for me, the managing director was open to discussion. He listened to my problems and he suggested several managers who might be willing to take me on their team. I drew up some grandiose plans for developing meta-data for the company intranet. I padded my report with jargon, power terms, and lots of diagrams. I also took along a great passion for the project. Finally, after lobbying several prospective managers, I found one who did listen — maybe he was the only one who understood it. He assigned me to an IT expert who was to help me get the whole project started. Oh joy and more joy. But very short lived. Two weeks later that person was offered a great job in London. I was back to the drawing board.

Finally, somebody decided that

they wanted me — but they did not want any books. The BP Library service of the past was doomed, but I was still kicking. I welcomed the idea of being a professional information expert without books. I stored all the books, (and there lies another story) and I was given a desk in the IT department.

So here I was — a survivor, but greatly reduced in many ways. I had time to concentrate on value-added services. There was also time to market of course. There were the comments from foolish people who wondered what on earth I actually did — now that the books were gone! The upside was that the bread and butter requests became a steady stream, and each day my once clear desk began to smother again under a load of work.

Now, the growth of E-world has everybody in a new frenzy. Like the internet revolution, there are no benchmarks for action. Everybody wants to have a piece of the action, including yours truly. I am back onto expounding the wonders of metadata, the magic of instilling quality measures into data-warehousing, and the dangers of sloppily indexed E-Catalogues. I have finally realised that the slow uptake is because most people simply do not understand the simple concept that data must be indexed before they can find it.

There is a new development. The global intranet editor is leaving the company, and asked me to take over his task of managing the directory and quality control of the global intranet. I still cannot fathom why he offered this to me. I believed he thinks this is a small and unimportant task, and therefore he is glad to pass it on. But you and I know that this is the greatest opportunity to come along and I am back on the metadata trail again. I am very proud that finally a librarian has the opportunity to prove that we should have been there in the first place. Another development, just hot off the e-mail — I have been asked to take part in a global document management project prototype.

Maybe, just maybe, I might need somebody to assist me with all the extra work, and maybe the information service can begin to grow again like I always knew it would. ■