

# Life beyond the library!

Jenny Hale, managing director, Resource Options

The cyclical nature of the library employment means that employment opportunities change over time. At present, academic and public libraries take a solid slice of the available workforce while special libraries are either doing well or threatening to close, depending on the support they receive from their organisations.

In the special library environment, more and more librarians are being asked to take on new duties which have not traditionally been part of the job. Broaden your horizons by expanding into other areas, such as managing the content of internet and intranet pages, or taking on records management. It is important to see these challenges as opportunities rather than threats: by taking on other duties you are broadening your skill base and protecting your position within the organisation.

Libraries closure has a number of causes, with the most obvious being cost: of the floor space required for a library and of employing a librarian to provide a service which is seen as available through the internet, even if not to the same standard!

If you are to survive in the special libraries environment, you must make yourself attractive to management. Is there something you could do which might provide a more viable service? Do you know what your clients and management really want, or do you assume you know? If you haven't done a 'needs analysis' in the past, now is the time. It can take the form of a survey, but face-to-face discussions are much more beneficial and allow you to sell yourself and your skills

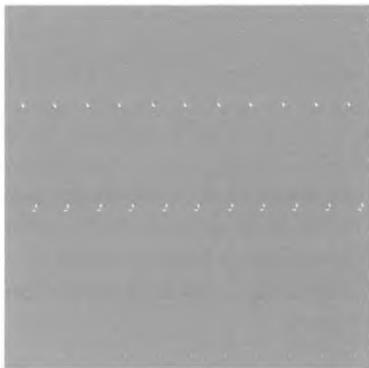
to your organisation at the same time. If done correctly, you will discover exactly what your clients expect of their library service, and you might be surprised!

Have a good look at your organisation and identify areas — outside the library — where you can apply your skills. Think outside the box. Talk to your manager and develop a plan for your contributions in the identified areas.

Employers are looking for people who contribute to the health and wealth of the organisation. This means that employees need to be multi-skilled and willing to adapt to a fast-changing world. Too often librarians are seen as an expense, rather than providers of a service which contributes to the success of the business. All is not lost! There are many fine examples of librarians who are a vibrant part of their organisation. Many of these people are undertaking a variety of roles which fall outside of the 'normal' role of a librarian.

Do you need to update your skills? Look at the requirements of the expanded role and plan accordingly. Records management courses are hard to find, but they are out there. IT skills, particularly in web-page development, will be in demand for some time and training in this area will never go astray. Ask your manager for assistance with study or training. If there is a mutual benefit you may receive help with fees or time off. If you are just starting out, seriously consider gaining these skills, or even training in an area of subject specialisation such as law or medicine. And above all, be prepared to be an 'untraditional' librarian.

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