

Downsizing is just a state of mind...

... when less is more

Join any group of special librarians and someone's library will have recently been downsized, had the collection moved off-site or are in the midst of facing these challenges.

Instead of feeling overwhelmed and under-appreciated, the maxim that 'every cloud has a silver lining' may help to achieve an invigorating outcome.

In December 2005, it was announced that the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry would move from its locale of over 50 years in Barton, ACT to the city centre.

The Library had enjoyed ample accommodation in Barton, but was out-of-the-way and difficult to find. Staff saw the move as an opportunity to re-locate to a prime position with maximum visibility; however our new location on the ground floor of the 12-storey building meant having half our previous floor space, requiring additional off-site storage. The Library is now two spaces either side of a glass-sided entryway running from the front to the back of the building - challenging on the design front!

However, once we settled the shelving layout we calculated the degree of weeding required - about 50%. It was over ten years since we had seriously weeded, so despite the fact that we were proud of our extensive historical serials collection (late 1800's for some titles), we were less distressed than you might imagine. It was 'time'.

Reducing 2.5 km of collection to 1.0 km with a staff of four and limited contractual help took every bit of the 11 months at our disposal, particularly whilst maintaining all of our usual services and re-organising material selected to go off-site.

As a special library, serials are our 'lifeblood'. We had been gradually increasing our online access so that by 2006, many of our 'scholarly' titles were arriving in both print and online format,

or some online only. We therefore took 'one giant leap' for our 2007 serial renewals, announcing that henceforth, no journal that existed in online format would be received in print. Interestingly, approximately one-third of our titles continue as print subscriptions because much 'trade' literature is not available online.

We have a static IP address which simplifies authentication, so whilst there are issues of 'link rot' from time to time, our researchers have embraced this decision enthusiastically. It is particularly helpful for our regional staff across Australia, providing them with a far better service than was previously possible.

Clients have been equally excited due to our success in obtaining 'one-off' funding to purchase online backsets of many core journals. The funding bid was justified by the downsizing exercise and our aim to increase online content. Twenty-three bays of serials were replaced with instant, reliable desktop access to both current and historical research resources. No waiting for print issues to arrive, no interlibrary loan costs to obtain an article from an issue that never arrived or was lost on routing or loan. Our online backsets negate future interlibrary loan cost increases that would inevitably occur if we had simply discarded print issues. We have gained full-text access to a far wider range of material than we actually subscribe to due to the fact that many backset services are 'bundled'. Clients 'help themselves' and we can concentrate on assisting them by sourcing the 'really tricky stuff'.

Now we have a wonderful new library space; a fantastic location that has already seen new clients come and borrow material they didn't realise we had; shelves that are tidy and only 2/3rds full; serial storage boxes that are re-labeled to alert clients to the fact that for some titles, older material is offsite and newer material is online; and, an e-journals list that is satisfyingly replete with current links, reflecting updated catalogue records that mirror Libraries Australia holdings. Add to this the fact that we have the latest 'multi-function' devices that allow us to scan an article

or chapter and email it to our clients in PDF format in the blink of an eye. In the words of one client who recently discovered the range of online material we now have - 'this is so cool!...'

So yes, for us, 'less is more'.

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In search of the 'Page Three' librarians

In early 2007 I had an epiphany. I realised that a far bigger and better kept secret than my city's hip laneway and basement bars was the fact that there are a disproportional high number of extremely sexy special librarians working in Melbourne.

Not found in your conventional public or educational libraries, special librarians are harder to locate because they are dispersed around the CBD - in corporate high rise offices and throughout our government agencies.

Special librarians often shun the limelight, given little opportunity to bask in the glory of success; unlike their business or public facing colleagues who take the credit for contract wins or new services that the library not only support but are integral in the conception.

I decided I needed to reverse this injustice and showcase the hidden talents of hardworking and dedicated special librarians - unsung heroes. Drawing inspiration from 80's pop idol and Page Three icon Samantha Fox, the *Page Three Librarian* was born.

It is my pleasure and privilege to present to you the Victorian Special Libraries Page Three Librarians for 2007.

Ms March: Jill Bartholemeusz,
Melbourne Athenaeum Library

Jill is the Librarian at the Melbourne Athenaeum Library (The Ath) - a subscription library on the Paris end of Collins Street. The Ath is arguably the



sexiest library in Victoria, with its lounge room ambiance and chilled out staff. So it went without saying that Jill would make a perfect inaugural Page Three Librarian. She's also the Vic Specials Committee Convenor. Jill's hobbies include music and Bollywood dancing. Her library highlight: 'collecting fresh retired librarians who offer to volunteer in the library'.

Mr June: Josh Earls, honorary Special Librarian

I found Josh performing stand up at Trades Hall during the Melbourne Comedy Festival. The night I attended the show there were two full rows of librarians in addition to a packed room of general punters. It was kind of weird being a librarian groupie...but it was probably weirder for poor Josh being grouped on by a bunch of librarians. Josh is actually a school librarian in inner city Melbourne, but he entertained us enough to warrant honorary Special Librarian status. Josh on bringing sexy back to the library: 'I've heard that some people think librarians can't be sexy. It's not true; we just do it quietly, and in order.'

Mr September: Lawrence Hogan, KPMG Research and Library Service

I knew Lawrence from my KPMG days, where I knew that I could wander into the library and research centre of this 'big 4' corporate services firm and get some sort of cerebral entertainment. As Mr September Lawrence penned some Haiku (a Japanese poetic form) and told us how he gets excited about Excel spreadsheets, which is probably considered sexy in accounting language. Lawrence on his strangest research request: 'What's the economic value of a penguin to the Victorian Economy?'

Ms December: Alison Morin, Ebook Library

Finally, the lovely Alison. Being from the US, Alison admitted she had never heard of the page three concept. However she was brave enough to submit to any questions that a Page Three Librarian might be asked. Alison is the Accounts & Technical Services Manager for Ebook Library - an ebook purchasing and lending platform. Ebook Library is

headquartered in Perth so she works from her home office in Melbourne. Alison on the Australian vernacular: 'I have two that I quickly adopted and love: dodgy and 'no worries'.

And there it all was - twelve months and four excellent Page Three Special Librarians later. Bring on 2008, and with it much more Page Three action!

To read the full 'Page Three' librarian interviews go to the Vic Specials Newsletter page of the ALIA website: <http://www.alia.org.au/groups/specialvic/vicspecials/>

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Working for a non-government special library

I don't often tell people I work for the Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia because for some reason they feel compelled to explain why they are indulging in a second glass of wine!

The Alcohol and other Drugs Council of Australia (ADCA) is the peak, national, non-government organisation representing the interests of the Australian alcohol and other drugs sector, providing a national voice for people working to reduce the harm caused by alcohol and other drugs. ADCA is contracted and funded through the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing to provide a National Resource Centre (NRC) to Australian alcohol and other drug (AOD) workers.

ADCA is a small organisation of about 12 staff with half of them working on the NRC project providing a library service to AOD workers around Australia. NRC staff are a mix of full and part timers and include: librarians; library technicians and experienced library staff. The NRC is probably best known for providing the Drug database to libraries across Australia.

Working for a small non-government organisation comes with challenges and benefits. The challenges are

mainly limited resources; the lack of a larger organisation's infrastructure and managing an organisation with a small staff.

Limited resources are a common difficulty faced by many libraries, and NGO libraries are no exception. The inability to match government salary scales is often the greatest handicap however, so far the NRC has been fortunate in retaining longstanding, dedicated employees.

A small organisation without the benefit of a larger organisation's infrastructure means that at times some tasks are outside our combined expertise and alternative, expensive outside assistance has to be sought. This occasionally is the case when IT problems occur.

A special library meets the needs of a specialised group or population and the NRC certainly does that, but whilst the NRC provides a library service for its client group and organisation, it is also very much part of its parent organisation as a whole, meaning that there can be some blurring of responsibilities and lines of duties. While give and take is essential in these circumstances, NRC staff are also very proud of their library identity and are aware of the need to maintain, and be acknowledged as having, specialist skills.

There are also benefits to working for our NGO. A small NGO can provide flexibility and increased autonomy, making you feel truly part of an organisation.

Perhaps the biggest benefit of working for this NGO, and the reason staff retention is high, is that you truly belong to a special sector. The NRC is assisting people from all over Australia who are working in varying capacities to help those with alcohol and other drug problems. Many are not well paid and are themselves working for a non-government agency but are passionate about their work and grateful to library staff who help them with research and information gathering.

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