

Volunteers in the spotlight



Kay Harris



Linden Fairbairn

Kay Harris and Linden Fairbairn are recovering from the delights and challenges of being co-convenors of ALIA's Information Online 2009. Online is the largest conference in the ALIA calendar, with approximately 1000 people in attendance at this year's conference. Kay has been involved with Online since 2001, Linden since 2003, and like all the conference committee, both are members of ALIA's Information Online Group (IOG). Not surprisingly, planning is already underway for the next Online in 2011.

Why do you enjoy volunteering for the library profession?

Kay: I volunteer because I enjoy providing educational and networking opportunities for the profession. When I first started in the information profession similar opportunities were given to me and have become invaluable assets to my career, so I like to share them with other professionals.

Linden: I too enjoy the networking opportunities, particularly because IOG offers you the chance to work across all library sectors. Putting the program together for Online is something I especially enjoy. Like Kay, I also believe strongly in my obligation to give back to a profession that has given me so much.

How do you ensure balance between your work, volunteering, and home commitments?

Kay: When undertaking a volunteering commitment I think you need to understand that you can't do it all. At certain stages your professional and personal life might suffer as a consequence of taking on this responsibility. Having said that, I'm very lucky that the IOG Committee consists of a set of very driven individuals, so the workload is spread evenly between all committee members. This means the personal sacrifices are minimal.

Linden: Arghhhh!! Many people would say I don't! Since Online 2009 less than two months ago, I've moved the 200 000+ volume University of Sydney Law Library to a new building, and embarked on another Master's degree, so perhaps I really am a lunatic! You have to prioritise. IOG is a very supportive group, and there's always someone there to step in when you have to face crunch time elsewhere.

What gives you a sense of purpose and accomplishment?

Kay: Doing a good job and helping others!

Linden: I love it when you see all the faces at Online, talking ten to the dozen over breaks, the smiles on vendors' faces at the exhibition, and people queuing up to talk to keynote speakers. Realising that it all works feels just great.

What do you feel are your greatest achievements and successes?

Kay: In terms of volunteering – I think it's putting on the Information Online show every two years. It is a lot of hard work, but it is very satisfying work.

Linden: The last three Online conferences have been significant achievements, especially as in 2007 I also completed a Master's degree in management. Putting on a conference like Online could easily be a full-time job. But it's just so satisfying when people tell you how much they get out of it.

What do you currently do in your "real job"?

Kay: I co-own an information consultancy called Vista Information Services & Solutions with Jan Titcombe, another Information Online Group member.

Linden: I'm the Manager of the Law Library at the University of Sydney.

If you could have your ideal role in the world, what would it be?

Kay: Running the United Nations Library Services.

Linden: I'd like a senior job in one of the big libraries like the British Library or Library of Congress – somewhere where BIG projects happen!

What are you currently reading?

Kay: *Dirt Music* by Tim Winton and *Blue Ocean Strategy* by W. Chan Kim and Renee Mauborgne

Linden: *Contemporary America* and *American Exceptionalism* – textbooks for the Master's in US Studies that I've just started.

Would you recommend co-convening a conference?

Kay: From my perspective, having been a convenor on my own to now being a co-convenor, the change is that it is now a shared experience. The decision making process is shared, the responsibilities are shared, and the problems are shared. For me the difference was highlighted at the conference, when I actually had time to talk to delegates, sponsors, and other key stakeholders, something that made it much more enjoyable than running around for three days without being able to draw breath.

Linden: Co-convening is terrific. Kay and I complement each other's skills and strengths, so it's win-win for everyone. From our perspective, Online 2009 ran very smoothly – we had no major last minute panics! Another strength we have is that Online is organised by an ongoing committee. Corporate knowledge grows with each conference, and because it stays in the group, we can build on it. We would love more IOG members by the way, so if you're interested in getting involved, please let us know.

Find out more about Information Online at <http://www.information-online.com.au/> or <http://www.alia.org.au/groups/infog/>

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