

Dear Editor,

As a retired Special Librarian I was delighted to catch up with the current Special Libraries' scene in your August issue which is devoted to this sector of the library and information world. However, I was disappointed to see that no librarian from the geosciences, my old area of work, got around to contributing to this issue.

I hope Deanne Barrett and Cathy Brady have been able to get geoscience librarians interested in participating in the Special Libraries Stream at ALIA Access 2010. I am sure they have a lot to offer as they operate many major library-based services which, along with agricultural libraries, represent two of the most important industries in Australia. We did a lot of effective work in delivering value-added services and the creation of a national database at the erstwhile Australian Mineral Foundation, Adelaide, in the 70s to 90s, in conjunction with Federal, State, and industry organisations. There has been much development since then and I hope that geoscience librarians will also strut their stuff and give the rest of their colleagues the benefit of their considerable knowledge, experience, and innovative developments at ALIA Access 2010.

And best wishes for a very successful Special Libraries Stream at the National Conference.

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Usability vs Sustainability

Sol Trujillo when running Telstra a few years ago optimistically valued the Sensis website at about six billion dollars. I doubted this valuation at the time. Now it would be absolutely nonsensical. Whatever Sensis does these days, it's completely given up providing a real telephone directory online.

Two recent experiences make clear to me that libraries abandoning paper in favour of Sensis are probably betraying the customers. My search last week for Westpac in NSW – I hadn't narrowed the search in any way – produced two responses. They were identical, and gave the only Westpac facility of any kind in that state as being at Cherrybrook, on the outskirts of Sydney. A phone book consulted at a shop nearby gave the full list.

Similarly, recent hunts for Sydney bookshops and locksmiths gave incomplete lists. Unlike paper lists, which allow perhaps hundreds of entries to any single page, the Sensis system shows about 15 entries to a page. There is no alphabetisation, and there are multiple entries for one small business. The Cherrybrook duplication is Paticake. A few locksmith shops had more than half a dozen entries. Put that together with the lack of alphabetisation (and geographical restriction within states and territories) and the small number of entries to a page, and you have a carelessly designed system that, in my experience, means that using Sensis typically can cost the user ten or twenty times as much time and effort as that needed for using the old-fashioned system: learn the alphabet, use it, run your eye or fingers down a page.

I know a full set of telephone directories takes a lot of shelf space. Sensis doesn't replace them; or try to. Please don't vanish the paper directories from your shelves.

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ALIA National Library & Information Technicians 2011 Conference

Back to Basics – Perth 2011

12–16 September 2011

Sheraton Hotel, Perth WA



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Save The Date – 5th ALIA New Librarians Symposium

16–18 September 2011

Sheraton Hotel

Perth WA



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Call for Abstracts Opening Soon!

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We'll keep you up to date with more information as the planning of the ALIA 5th New Librarians Symposium takes shape.