

Relevance – ALIA Board Directors weigh in

Are we still relevant? In my view, the answer is a resounding yes. The essential skills that drew us into this profession are still needed – separating quality information from the huge pile of chaff we all wade through every day, organising it, finding ways to make it accessible, and preserving it for the future. The technological revolution in which we are immersed enables us to apply these skills in innovative ways while adding a whole new layer to our arsenal – innovation, creativity, project management, and change management.

Most librarians and information professionals are passionate about what they do and excited by the potential inherent in emerging technologies, mobile devices, and social media. Promoting that passion and our capabilities to people who still conjure up an antiquated and stereotyped image when they hear the term 'librarian' is a major challenge. 'Librarian' shouldn't be a word we avoid or admit sheepishly when asked what we do. We need to wear the label with pride, promote the skills we offer, and convince others that it is a highly desirable and vital career.

In all sectors, librarians encounter the question "can't I just Google that?" from people outside the profession. In my view, we should grasp the tiger by the tail and acknowledge that, for some purposes, the answer is yes. Google is the obvious choice for queries where 'close enough is good enough' and reliance on links influenced by advertising is immaterial. The real strength of our skills begins to emerge when we focus on users whose need for information goes beyond what can be found on the first page of a Google search. High-end users who seek comprehensive or highly specific information rely on librarians to navigate the deep web and identify resources that a simple Google search overlooks. Behind the scenes, our profession's work to develop standardised and well-structured metadata ensures that deep web content is retrievable. Revealing the wealth of information that still only exists in the print world and helping the

information poor and marginalised find what they need are other facets of a librarian's role that we shouldn't underestimate.

The custodial role librarians play in harnessing, organising, and preserving the explosion of information that surrounds us every day raises big questions. Debates around copyright law, legal deposit of electronic publications, mass digitisation, preservation of born-digital information, and open

access to scholarly information are all discussions in which librarians need to be involved. We all know there is strength in numbers and that's where ALIA comes in. There are

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many ways you can lend your support to your association and keep what we do relevant. Use your satisfied customers to champion the expertise librarians can offer within your own organisation and let other librarians know about your successes. Speak up about the issues facing you in your own work environment and where you think the association needs to focus attention. Encourage your colleagues to join ALIA, attend group events in your local area, and get involved. Of course we are relevant – we all know that. Our task is to make sure others take it for granted as well. Our profession and our association are only as strong as its individual members make it. Help ALIA have a strong and united voice on the issues that matter.

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