

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

Edmund Balnaves, Prosentient Systems



When you get the technology bug, it is quite infectious. So, when my day starts, it starts with technology. Hopefully not the ping of an SMS – that may mean an early alert of a problem on one of the systems we monitor. It might be the tinkle of Skype, as this time of year is busy with preparations for our forthcoming sessions in the Information Technology Section of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), and planning entails contact with my colleagues around the world – especially Slovenia (the section chair), Rome (other section colleagues), and Germany. Early morning in Sydney picks up late afternoon in Europe, which can work well for chatting.

At work I have two other major hats to don (apart from my red, fire-warden's hat). The first encompasses the world of library information technology hosting, design, and support. The interesting thing about running your own business is that it can be a blend of the opportunities that are presented and your own interests and focus. Working with open source systems means that our small team in Australia is connected with a wider group of developers, documenters, library technologists, and library staff

around the world. My library business has evolved to suit my temperament – taking opportunities to work with software, with librarians around the country, and to play with new technology. Some of today's challenges involved helping one of our staff with some new code to use a 'captcha' approach to stop mischievous

mis-use of the feedback forms in our DSpace digital library systems. The morning also involved talking to a library about its upgrade to the latest version of Koha. It included nudging along a new technology project for news scanning and automated feeds to the digital library for one of our clients. It also included some planning for a forthcoming DSpace technology training session for the new Solomon Islands National University staff (their Systems Librarians are coming to Sydney for the training – a prospect we are very excited about).

We are a small team at Prosentient (six in all) supporting quite a diverse group of libraries (over 400 using different systems). Our clients, being mostly special libraries are kindred operations: often with only a few staff and supporting library clients and systems on a tiny budget. They face big challenges and are meeting these challenges often in very adventurous ways. I have a great time working with these libraries – they are full of ideas and they innovate marvellous ways around problems. We always try to let their ideas drive our software development directions.

But every job has its downside: let me tell you about tenders. They are horrible. No one likes working on them; they are usually long-winded, laborious, and with



David Cook, Rob Garnsey and Harkaran Bajwa Singh from our office.

an unlikely fate. While they are a necessary evil for a business and good governance in the public sector certainly requires them, no one pretends they are fun. Lots of creative energy all for just a chance to reach starting point. Today's tender work involves crafting a carefully worded response to a tender which is implicitly written for commercial software, but offers potential for an open source approach. Not all organisations accept open source, but there is growing acceptance.

The specifics of any job are always constrained by the role you have at a given time: mine is (as you can see) very technology focused. However I have always been impressed by the collegiality of the library profession (in specific contrast to the information technology profession). Even though I love the technical side of things, it is by participating in the professional association that I maintain contact with the wider view of the library world. I do this in IFLA through the IT standing committee, and, more recently, by serving on the ALIA board. With this comes extra work, a lot of which has to be done out of hours, but it also entails many rich experiences. For instance, Wednesday last week was the ALIA Prize for Best Student at Mt Druitt TAFE – a great chance to meet fired-up students entering the library scene. Today a board meeting commanded several hours of time and associated pre-reading, and post-follow-up, but was also replete with a wide spectrum of issues facing the profession. I can't think of a more important time to be involved in ALIA.

The afternoon (what is left of it) entails a round of phone calls and emails to set the agenda for the next day.

The evening may entail dabbling with code – this time

for carpooling systems with a small group of enthusiasts setting up a new not-for-profit association – the Community Carpooling Association. I know I also have to prepare my paper for the IFLA conference in August (reminder to self: put in a calendar alert). Carpooling has been my entrée to writing apps for smartphones and tablets and I can see they are

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the technological 'place to be' and give me more gadgets to play with. I see in the last email for the day an announcement on the IFLA list serve about the bicycoolibrary.org initiative and that gets me mulling how I could integrate my carpooling and library strands together.

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