

## FRONTLINE

# WHAT TO TAKE HOME FROM ALIA INFORMATION ONLINE

There was a buzz in every room and an overall energy in the air at the ALIA Information Online conference in February. New technologies were showcased both in the conference content and in the operation of the conference itself. Participants tweeted their questions to presenters and a Skype connection was used to enable an overseas speaker to participate from cold and dark United Kingdom.

The conference theme was Be Different/Do Different and the conference committee, chaired by Jane Cowell from the State Library of Queensland, certainly delivered a program to provoke us to do exactly that. And any conference that links ladies shoes to libraries has my vote of approval!

There were two important take-home messages for me from the conference. First, the program included speakers who challenged librarians to see threats as partners. Most particularly, Sue Gardner, CEO of Wikipedia, challenged my thinking about her service as a friend rather than foe. Sue loves librarians as editors and contributors to Wikipedia, as our skills enable a high quality product. I recall she called us pedantic, but in a good way. Rather than see Wikipedia as undermining the value that we add in information sourcing, vetting, and distribution, she suggested that we should see Wikipedia as the place to start research, for a good overview, and from which our value is then added. Food for thought. One thing that we cannot overlook is that Wikipedia is one very large collaboration across the world and it is funded by donations. It carries the goodwill of many people and information consumers are voting with their mouses by going to Wikipedia as a matter of course. Collaboration with and adding value to Wikipedia may not be the end of our profession we feared, but may in fact showcase our profession and offer us a platform from which to demonstrate the value we add in addition to Wikipedia's general summary of a topic.

The second take-home message from the conference is how the principles of putting the user at the

centre of our technology-enabled services are so similar to the principles that the ALIA Board has adopted for the new directions for the Association – especially our desire to put member focus at the core of our activities. What impressed me was that all speakers focused on what technologies enable clients to do and not on the technology itself. It is so easy to be seduced by the technology, but the real test is how it can enhance our users' experiences.

I am sure that all participants in ALIA Information Online would join me in thanking the Conference Program Committee for their enlightened selection of speakers and the obviously forward thinking briefing that they gave the speakers. Social media conference gaming (not gambling!) gave an extra dimension to the conference and the availability of the conference program via QR code took the conference into a truly digital world.

Thanks also must go to our private sector partners for the conference: Copyright Agency Limited, RMIT Publishing, ExLibris, Wikimedia, Brisbane, OCLC, Charles Sturt University, Sage, and IEEE. Further thanks go to the many exhibitors who contributed to the value of the conference through their stands and presentations. Participation by the exhibitors adds depth to the conference experience and enables efficient and effective fact finding for participants, like me.

Thank you to all of the members who have taken the time to give me feedback on the Year of Consolidation plans for ALIA. It is pleasing to know that so many members support this strategy. I would really like to acknowledge the leadership of my fellow Board members and the ALIA staff in setting this direction and taking the Association into our consolidation phase.

It is election time for ALIA and I encourage all members to vote for those candidates that they feel will take the Association forward. There is a strong field of candidates for positions, which I believe indicates the strength of ALIA.

Finally, please take the time to



promote the Australia's Favourite Librarian campaign. Information about the campaign is on the ALIA website (<http://www.alia.org.au/ausfavlibrarian/>) and we have already had quite a bit of interest. This campaign is designed to get the community, schools, and others talking about librarians and librarianship, and it is a great chance to recognise the very best of and in our profession.

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