

## CHANNEL 9 LIBRARY PROFILE

# ADRENALINE RUSH: WHEN USERS NEED INFORMATION, THEY NEED IT NOW!



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On call 24/7, rosters for Christmas Day and public holidays, 30-second turnaround times for document (we call it product) delivery, no two days ever the same – sounds like a tough gig? Not so. Jenny Allen and the team at the Channel 9 library in Melbourne love every minute of it.

INCITE was granted a rare behind-the-scenes tour, which involved a quick look inside the locked crime room – wall-to-wall tapes with raw footage of crime scenes, murder victims, the sort of material that can't fall into the wrong hands – a show-and-tell of the studio where the Channel 9 News and other 9 broadcasts are filmed, and a walk through of the busy open plan space that is home to the news, weather, design, editing, and graphics team. It's a wall of screens, a mass of technology, and there's an underlying sense of urgency, on the edge, just-in-time activity that really gets the blood pumping.

The library is right next to the operational hub, and it has to be. The library is in use constantly, from early

morning, when the reporters are getting ready for the 11 am news slot, through to late evening and the final news wrap-up. No barriers, it's all one team, and the library staff are an integral part of getting the show to air, to the extent that Jenny and her colleague, Leith Marshall, run the autocue for the 6pm News.

Let's start with the obvious questions. How many staff do you have? "Six staff in Melbourne, two qualified, four assistants. We have two people on each day, covering 10am to 6.30pm, with a half position for the autocue. On weekends and public holidays, one person covers, but when there's a major disaster it's all hands on deck. Black Saturday was insane, keeping up with the news crews. We were broadcasting three hours of news a day over the following two weeks (compared with 30 minutes of regular news and newsbreaks throughout the day), which meant 18-hour days. We were lucky if we could spend an hour cataloguing the previous day's film. It took a long while afterwards to work through the backlog."

How big is your collection? "No one knows. Channel 9 has been



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broadcasting since 1956 and before that we had the test transmission. We've run at least 300 stories a month for 56 years,

so that's over 200 000 stories that went to air. Then you've got the stories that were cut and never broadcast, and hours and hours more tape that was filmed, but never used. The vast majority of the collection is pre-digital (image 2).

"We store the very old film in a warehouse in Altona. When we need a short piece of film from the archives, we request the relevant carton which arrives by courier. Recently, on an urgent trip to the warehouse, I stood with a pallet of possible cartons in front of me, sorting through every one of them until I finally located the reel of film and the small canister brought back to the station. We have got a fantastic old card system, which tells you where to start looking, but after that, it's a lot of hard work and intuition.

"Around 1980, we moved from the old formats – 16mm telecine, mag film, 1" and 2" film – to Betacam SP, SX, and finally Digi, and at that time keyword searches were introduced. They were very abstract, just subject headings, but from there, a protocol developed. On 1 March 2011, we went totally digital, but we're still using all the different formats, digitising as we go. The plan is to digitise everything eventually, but it's a massive task and it won't happen soon."

On the day we visited, Jenny and one of her assistants, Lisa D'Alessandro, were putting together footage for the state funeral of Dame Elisabeth Murdoch. There were rolls of old film on the desk and video tapes lined up ready to view. "We have notice for this event, but someone can die and we've got to go live in 30 seconds. That happened with Michael Jackson. Sometimes we're lucky and we'll already have a compilation. Other times, it's cross your fingers and search like crazy. If we're unlucky and the server goes down – which can happen – we have to rely on the stuff we have on tape. That's when the adrenaline really kicks in."

Just after we'd left, Jenny and the team received a heads-up about the impending death of a famous individual and spent 25 minutes running around, retrieving, ingesting vision from the archives, and searching for recent references in the system. The seventh floor store room was raided and the storage depot lined up for withdrawals. In less than half an hour, the team had assembled still images, general overlays, and interview ready for the news to break.

Of course, it's not all death and disaster. There is a lighter side, too. "We'll be celebrating Peter Hitchens's 40 years in TV in February (image 5, Jenny and Peter). Our job is to find a range of things – serious, memorable, funny. We've found him taking part in McHappy Day in five different years; we've even found

film of him receiving the hairdressers' award for the Best Dressed Newsreader."

The compactus is the only clue that you're in a library (image 3). There's a TV on in the corner, keeping the team up to speed with the latest news. There are four work stations in line, each with two or three screens. Reporters bounce in with requests: "can you give me street, busy, cost of living?" and out again. Within seconds Lisa has found footage of Bourke Street, packed with people, to illustrate the story about cost of living increases affecting Christmas sales.

The library staff are an integral part of getting the show to air, to the extent that Jenny and her colleague, Leith Marshall, run the autocue for the 6pm News.

Training reporters so they can find their own footage is part of the role of the library team. "A couple of the reporters are ex-library staff. We're really keen that when students come in on work experience, they come through the library. It makes their job easier later and it reinforces the importance of the work we do – they know, they've done it!"

Having non-librarians using the system affects how items are catalogued. "We can't use the traditional system. It has to be easy and user-friendly, but still highly accurate. For example, if we used MVA for motor vehicle accident, people wouldn't get it, so we use 'car crash'." Another complication is that the library system is a digital system with strict naming protocols on one platform, while the broadcast operating system for the station, which runs all the news and graphics, is on another platform, so catalogue records have to be manually transferred. "It doesn't take long, and the system is evolving and getting better all the time," says Jenny.

Each piece of film has to be catalogued to make it findable and to advise users about any restrictions. "The backfields cover attributions, descriptions, source, and copyright. There are also notes about editorial decisions and suppression notices, where the police have asked us not to use a particular piece of film or head shot of a suspect, because of a pending court case. Part of the job is to collate film to comply with court orders and warrants."

It's not only the news team that

needs the library service: there are also TV shows, for example *The Block*, the *AFL Footy Show*, *Postcards*, *Kids WB*, and the publicity team. Channel 9 broadcasts across New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, the Northern Territory, and ACT. There is the Central Nine News library in Sydney, with a team of four, a programming Archive Department in Sydney, and small libraries in *60 Minutes*, *Getaway*, and other production departments. Channel 9 is affiliated with WIN TV across the rest of Australia.

A big part of the job is dealing with DVD and Vision requests. "We receive requests all day, every day. They come from students putting together presentations, companies making submissions to government, authorities seeking footage of accidents, victims' families asking for the crime stories that

went to air (image 4). Our 'vision' is sold internationally through ITN Source ([www.itnsource.com](http://www.itnsource.com)) who manage the commercial use of footage. Copyright is a main part of our responsibilities.

"We also work with other media owners, the ABC, *Herald Sun*, Channel 10, *The Age*. When the Chief of Staff of the different stations allow it, we trade content. The library team negotiates the content, credits, attribution. Overnight News is a shared resource. It's a pooled cooperative, so that's another source we have to manage."

If you think Jenny and Lisa (image 1) look familiar, you've probably seen them on screen. When there's stock news footage needed, the library is a welcome source of talent. "We've done 'driving while texting', 'drinking and smoking while pregnant' (it was pretty uncomfortable in the body suit), 'sneezing' for the hay fever season, and I've filled in tax forms for the last five years."

There is a warm, collegial atmosphere in the studio and the library team love their jobs. The irony is that Jenny didn't apply for the job – her daughter did on her behalf. "I was on holiday and got a text from my daughter (a journalist), saying that Channel 9 needed a librarian and she'd sent in my CV because she thought it would be the perfect job for me. I was a bit put out when she did it, but there's a happy ending to the story because it turned out she was absolutely right."