

RIGHT:
Steve O'Connor:
We can create
our own future.

TRUST IN 'BRAND LIBRARY'

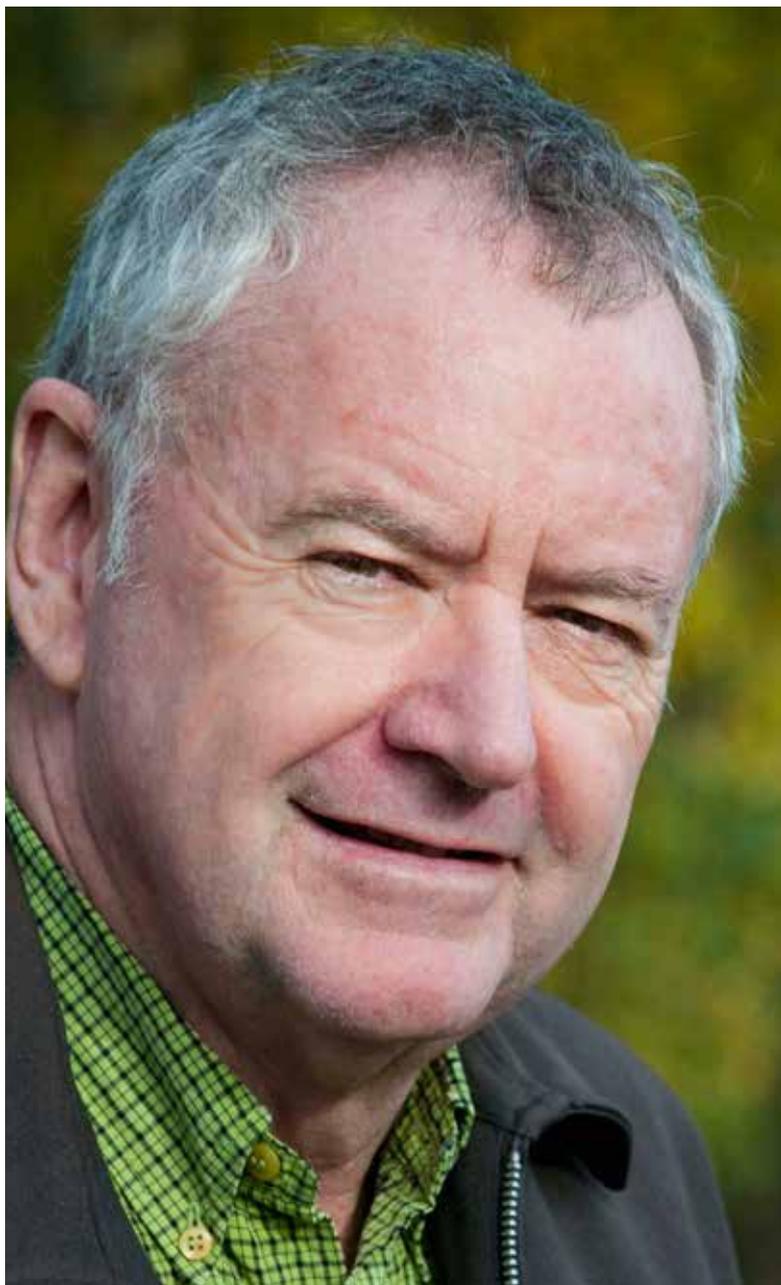
It is said, when under attack, defence is the better posture. Steve O'Connor suggests that, for libraries, perhaps it is more about survival than defence.

The word 'library' is a term/organisation/function that this profession can rightly call its own. The abandonment of this term in favour of 'learning centre'/'information hub' or whatever, is mistaken and a diminution of the value of the term library, and by extension of this profession.

Sun Tzu in *The Art of War* indicates that: 'Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive.' So defence is crucial and cannot remain a permanent state of being, but should always be matched by forward action. It is a balance of risk management approaches; to defend in the face of attack but to have a retort ready. The organisation which takes a defensive posture, hoping that the enemy will pass it by, will more often face an enemy willing to engage with a far greater level of risk exposure. What do they have to lose?

LIBRARIES ARE ALWAYS UNDER ONE KIND OF THREAT OR ANOTHER.

Many aspects of our lives come under one threat or another in political or economic environments. Some touch us and others are more distant. At a work level we, or our organisations, can adopt a defensive, a forward, or assertive stance. Another comment from *The Art of War*: 'standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a super-abundance of strength.' Sometimes the position we take is one in which we feel most comfortable with, not one which is necessarily the best to adopt. How do we choose?



In the process of choosing our future path we instinctively use detectors of trust and distrust as we decide on the appropriate course of action. For reasons known only to us we are affected by distrust factors as well. We trust certain approaches and distrust others. There is a significant literature on this dichotomy of trust and distrust.

A little while ago I published an article with my supervisor, Attitudes toward Technology as Predictors of Online Catalog Usage in *College and Research Libraries*. The research involved using measures of social attitudes toward computers in the particular context of the introduction of the online public access catalogue (OPAC) into a university library. It was a project of social psychology in action.

In that article we said, 'It is clear from the study that although library users, at one level, can give a specific technology a very high level of acceptance, the same users can, at another level, exhibit contrasting attitudes toward computer technology in general. This view of new computer technology has not been subject to intense investigation and yet may have far reaching implications for library managers and practitioners. These attitudes of distrust and positive acceptance can be predictors of acceptance and future usage of OPACs.'

At the same time, users could experience trust in one approach and yet distrust in another. Trust and distrust are powerful factors in how we address government, our colleagues, and our profession to name but a few examples. It also applies to how people, or library users, perceive librarians and libraries. Simple concepts of trust and distrust: trust for what the library was doing but distrust for the technology. Governments can rise or fall on this concept!

Abandoning the name 'library' is implying that it is now a distrusted place or term.

Such actions convey a sense of unknowing, or a sense of bewilderment and confusion in the role of the replacement for the library. It is no endorsement in any future! It is a recipe for an organisation without direction, history or community acceptance.

Time and again, I am reminded that people trust libraries to be safe places. They trust librarians to be trustworthy people. They trust the quality and accuracy of the information and materials they can access through the library. The metrics of library activity vary in this country but it should be argued that overall there is growth and reliance on the library and what it sets out to do.

We should recognise the trust that is placed in us and seek to grow that trust.

Libraries are always under one kind of threat or another, whether it is perceived that they will be replaced by the internet, by some mega-company marauding out there, or that they meekly go away in the face of local criticism/savage budget cuts. But the perception is there. As one example, over 20% of public libraries in the UK have closed as a result of financial cuts, but also because they were not connected enough to their customers. So many special libraries in this country and elsewhere have been 'disappeared' leaving only traces of past service.

The doomsayers portray the library as dead and irrelevant yet the library profession has much accumulated trust on which to build. Library users expect libraries to be there and to guide and assist them. The future will inevitably be different but the positions we take should not be defensive

but assertive; be informed with professional knowledge, imagination and belief.

On the basis of these informed positions and the trust in libraries and their staffs, there would be powerful directions in which to grow. We can create the future for ourselves rather than having it created for us. We can build on trust.

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