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SLA and the Global Community: Gaining Worldwide Recognition

The association’s efforts increase international recruitment and ease communication among members.

BY JANICE R. LACHANCE, SLA CEO

If need is the mother of invention, speed to market may well be the father of ubiquity. The speed with which technology products seem to appear on the market one day and dominate it the next has become striking. And while advances in consumer electronics, such as Apple’s iPhone or Nintendo’s Wii, capture the public’s imagination, we know that significant yet less ballyhooed advances in information technology are changing the landscape of the information profession just as dramatically.

In Stephen Abram’s first “Info View” column in Information Outlook, he discussed in detail the Innovation Laboratory SLA has developed to give members hands-on experience with emerging technologies in a controlled, risk-free environment. As Stephen rightly pointed out, SLA has a long and proud tradition of providing members with innovative education-related initiatives. Our commitment to the Innovation Lab represents SLA’s ongoing commitment to this promise. But it remains only one facet of our strategic goal to employ existing and emerging technologies to enhance education, communication, and collaboration among SLA members.

We all know the adoption of technology is not a goal in and of itself. Technology is only useful if it meets members’ needs and increases the value of membership. As the only truly international association for special librarians and information professionals, we are strongly committed to increasing our membership throughout the world. Technology that can eliminate barriers of distance and time and can facilitate 24/7 communication between members and colleagues anywhere will only help to improve SLA’s services and make it possible for info pros, no matter where they live on the planet, to contribute actively to the success of SLA and to the information profession. More importantly, technology promises members the ability to develop and call upon their own networks of friends and associates when they need advice in solving difficult business problems or in seeking new employment.

SLA was very active in 2007, and will be so again in 2008, in developing relationships with individuals who would like to be associated with an international community such as SLA. The SLA president, president-elect, and I visited no less than six continents last year in efforts to expand SLA’s international scope. And these efforts are paying off. In areas such as Asia and South Africa, more and more information professionals are learning about SLA and joining our ranks.

I also am fortunate to represent the library community and SLA in a number of international capacities; first as a participant in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) sponsored by the United Nations; and second as a member of International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) President’s Working Group on the Information Society. As a result, I have had unique opportunities to voice your concerns about the importance of open and unfettered access to information. And people seem to be listening.

When I attended the recent IGF meeting in November, U.S. Ambassador David Gross, who directs coordination for international communications policy at the U.S. State Department, specifically addressed the role of libraries. Discussing the document agreed to by the world’s community of nations at the World Summit on the Information Society, Ambassador Gross said, “And often overlooked, but I think extraordinarily important, paragraph 90, which, among other things... refers to libraries and the importance of access to information so that people around the world have access to the world’s information. Because that, in essence, is one of the things that makes the Internet profoundly different and makes our time profoundly different than any other time in human history: the ability for everyone, when they have access to the Internet, to have access to the world’s knowledge.”

This work not only allows me to represent your views at important international gatherings, but it also allows me to educate librarians and information professionals throughout the world about SLA and your excellent work.

Your efforts combined with SLA’s commitment to identifying and embracing new technologies that increase your skill and knowledge and make it easier for you to collaborate with your colleagues throughout the world, are at the heart of the association’s growth and success. And, as the world continues to get smaller and smaller and technology brings us closer and closer together, you can count on SLA to never stop looking for and adapting new technologies for your benefit and your continuing success. SLA
Internet Top Choice for People Who Need Problem-Solving Info

Pew survey also shows that Internet users are more likely to use libraries to find needed information—and for general-patronage purposes.

People who faced one of several common government-related problems in the past two years were more likely to consult the Internet than other sources, including experts and family members.

In a national phone survey, respondents were asked whether they had encountered 10 possible problems in the previous two years, all of which had a potential connection to the government or government-provided information. Those who had dealt with the problems were asked where they went for help and the Internet topped the list:

- 58 percent of those who had recently experienced one of those problems said they used the Internet (at home, work, a public library, or some other place) to get help.
- 53 percent said they turned to professionals such as doctors, lawyers, or financial experts.
- 45 percent said they sought out friends and family members for advice and help.
- 36 percent said they consulted newspapers and magazines.
- 34 percent said they directly contacted a government office or agency.
- 16 percent said they consulted television and radio.
- 13 percent said they went to the public library.

The survey results also challenge the assumption that libraries are losing relevance in the Internet age. Libraries drew visits by more than half of Americans (53 percent) in the past year for all kinds of purposes, not just the problems mentioned in the survey.

And it was the young adults in tech-loving Generation Y (ages 18-30) who led the pack. Compared to their elders, Gen Y members were the most likely to use libraries to locate problem-solving information and in general patronage for any purpose.

Furthermore, it is young adults who are the most likely to say they will use libraries in the future when they encounter problems: 40 percent of Gen Y said they would do that, compared with 20 percent of those above age 30 who say they would go to a library.

“These findings turn our thinking about libraries upside down. Librarians have been asked whether the Internet makes libraries less relevant. It has not. Internet use seems to create an information hunger and it is information-savvy young people who are the most likely to visit libraries,” noted Leigh Estabrook, dean and professor emerita at the University of Illinois, co-author of a report on the results.

She added that Internet users were much more likely to patronize libraries than non-users (61 percent vs. 28 percent).

This report is the fruit of a partnership of the University of Illinois–Urbana-Champaign and the Pew Internet & American Life Project. It was funded with a grant from the federal Institute of Museum and Library Services, an agency that is the primary source of federal support for the nation’s 122,000 libraries and 17,500 museums. The survey was conducted between June and September 2007, among a sample of 2,796 adults, 18 and older. The margin of error is plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

Survey Focus

The focus of the survey was how Americans address common problems that might be linked to government. The problems covered in the survey:

1) dealing with a serious illness or health concern; 2) making a decision about school enrollment, financing school, or upgrading work skills; 3) dealing with a tax matter; 4) changing a job or starting a business; 5) getting information about Medicare, Medicaid, or food stamps; 6) getting information about Social Security or military benefits; 7) getting information about voter registration or a government policy; 8) seeking help on a local government matter such as a traffic problem or schools; 9) becoming involved in a legal matter; and 10) becoming a citizen or helping another person with an immigration matter.

There was some variance in the results, depending on the type of problem that people confronted. For instance, those who dealt with a health problem turned to experts more than any other source, followed by family and friends, and then the Internet. And those who had issues related to big
government programs such as Social Security or Medicare were most likely to go directly to government agencies for help, then the Internet.

Most people were successful in getting information to help them address a problem no matter what channel they chose and no matter what problem they faced.

- 65 percent of those who approached the government for help said they were very successful.
- 64 percent of those who went to the public library were very successful.
- 63 percent of those who used the Internet were very successful.
- 61 percent of those who consulted professionals and experts were very successful.

Among the sources consulted, the Internet was the source most often cited as the one that provided a lot of the information people were seeking. “It is important to stress, though, that even as our data show the Internet is ascending, we also find that large numbers of people do not use the Internet and this low-access population prefers getting information and assistance from sources other than the Internet,” noted Lee Rainie, director of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, and one of the study’s authors. “Those without broadband connections at home or at work have very different needs and search strategies from those who have woven the Internet into their lives.”

Another major focus of this survey was on those with no access to the Internet (23 percent of the population) and those with only dial-up access (13 percent of the population). This “low-access” population is poorer, older, and less well educated than the cohort with broadband access at home or at work. They are less likely to visit government offices or libraries under any circumstances. And they are more likely to rely on television and radio for help than are high-access users.

Another important concern in the research was to see how the rise of the Internet might affect the way government officials and librarians could work to meet citizens’ needs.

“The big message in this survey is that those who want to help citizens—whether they sit in government offices, libraries, non-profit organizations, or politically-active groups—live in a much more complicated environment now than they did a decade ago,” said Evans Witt, CEO of Princeton Survey Research Associates International, the firm that conducted the survey and one of the report’s authors.

“They must serve citizen needs that run the spectrum from high-tech digerati who want everything served to them online to grandparents in rural areas who want the government to mail them key documents that are printed on real paper with real ink.” SLA

These findings turn our thinking about libraries upside down. Librarians have been asked whether the Internet makes libraries less relevant. It has not. Internet use seems to create an information hunger.”
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Advancing Computing as a Science & Profession
Want the Back Story on Stocks? This Wiki Has a Host of Options

BY CAROLYN J. SOSNOWSKI, MLIS

Or, if you need info on electronic products, here’s a site that will give you pricing, reviews—and user manuals.

Wikinvest
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The name says it all…it’s a wiki on “investing…simplified.” The site creators wanted a resource that went beyond numbers to the story and ideas behind them, to create context for investors. So, you can search by concepts, not just stock exchange symbols, to find companies of potential interest. The wiki format allows for anyone to contribute their knowledge and opinions…about 100,000 contributions have been made so far by almost 600 individuals. It’s easy to see which articles are most popular or most recently edited, and to trace the input of contributors, who may rate companies and concepts as neutral, bearish, or bullish. Isn’t it more interesting to have this type of “conversation” than to read a stock chart?

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LISjobs Message Boards
http://lisjobs.com/forum
Rachel Singer Gordon has added discussion forums to the extremely useful LISjobs.com site. Share your thoughts and questions about education (read about library school experiences…good and bad), career (moving into management), and jobs (resumes, interviewing) with colleagues in the forums, which are moderated by names you’ll recognize: Meredith Farkas (Information Wants to Be Free, http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/index.php), Kim Dority (Rethinking Information Work), Michael Stephens (Tame the Web, www.tametheweb.com/). The site is pretty new, but the discussions have been active. Use the search function to find older posts, and keep up with new ones by subscribing to the RSS feed.

Spark Recipes
www.sparkrecipes.com
If you’ve made a resolution for 2008 related to healthier eating, you might find this site of interest. Not only can you search for recipes, but if you plug recipe ingredients into the calculator you can get the nutritional information for that recipe! Then, you can add that recipe to the site for others to use. Among the other tools: add multiple recipes to the site to create a whole cookbook, save recipes (yours and others’) in a virtual recipe box, and use the discussion boards to find long lost recipes and share diet and exercise goals. Spark Recipes is part of the larger SparkPeople site, a community that promotes a healthy lifestyle for its users.

CAROLYN J. SOSNOWSKI, MLIS, is SLA’s information specialist. She has 10 years of experience in libraries, including more than four years in SLA’s Information Center. She can be reached at csosnowski@sla.org.
The EPA Libraries: Awareness and Action

THE EPA BUDGET CUTS MAY NOT BE THE LAST TIME THE FEDS ATTEMPT TO LIMIT PUBLIC ACCESS TO SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION.

BY JAMES KELLY

As law librarians, we understand the importance of information access and the vital services librarians provide to their users. We also understand that the pervasive notion that “everything is online” leaves libraries only as a storage facility of last resort to many potential users. The recent controversy over the Environmental Protection Agency (“EPA”) libraries highlights the willingness of policymakers and elected officials to exploit this public misperception to advance their own agendas. This article provides a brief background of the recent cutbacks at the EPA libraries, along with the political wrangling that followed. It serves as a cautionary tale for all librarians.

In 1971, the EPA established a network of libraries to house legal, scientific, and technical information. By 2003, the network housed 504,000 books, 3,500 journal titles, 25,000 maps, and 3.5 million microfilm materials in 26 physical libraries around the country, including 10 regional libraries. The network currently uses an online catalog. In 2005, there were 728,362 visits to EPA library Web pages. This catalog is used by a wide variety of patrons, including scientists, lawyers, research and consulting organizations, and the public at large.

The collection provides important information about environmental risks and governmental policy. As described on the library systems’ Web site, the network “contains a wide range of general information on:
- Environmental protection and management.
- Basic sciences such as biology and chemistry.
- Applied sciences such as engineering and toxicology.
- Extensive coverage of topics featured in legislative mandates such as hazardous waste, drinking water, pollution prevention, and toxic substances.”

Many of the resources are “unique” and can only be accessed through the EPA library network.

In early 2006, the Bush Administration announced that the budget for fiscal year 2007 (beginning October 2006) would cut $1.5 million from the regional libraries and half a million from the EPA headquarters library. The EPA headquarters library only had a budget of $1 million before this announcement. Before President Bush’s budget was approved by Congress, drastic changes were made by the director of the EPA, Stephen L. Johnson. The libraries in Chicago, Dallas, and Kansas City were closed to walk-in traffic along with the Chemical Library and the headquarters repository in Washington, D.C. The other EPA libraries cut their hours.

A workgroup report from the EPA made suggestions on how to deal with the budget cuts. The collections would have to be “dispersed,” and “responsible dispersion” meant the collection had to continue to be accessible to anyone needing access. The recommended method of dispersal included weeding multiple copies of items, boxing materials, cataloging and labeling of boxed materials, and updating the...
library catalog to reflect new locations. Such dispersal, the report said, would have to be complete before the fiscal year began. The report included examples of the cost of such dispersal, but gave no indication how libraries on the verge of major budget cuts were expected to pay. It also gave no plan to oversee the dispersal, nor did it provide any means for public comment.5

The subsequent method of dispersal did not meet the standard of “responsible dispersal” called for by the EPA’s own report. Many of the materials were boxed up and became accessible only through interlibrary loan. Interagency e-mails and personal accounts later reported that some journals and other materials were simply discarded. Librarians and scientists feared that unique information available only through the EPA library system was being destroyed.

The EPA library closure is only one of the most recent examples of a trend by the federal government to curtail access to important scientific information and restrict library access.

The EPA justified the closures by saying that much of the material was or would be available online. Even now, almost two years later, much of the material is not available online. By EPA’s estimates, much of the material will not be online (and thus not readily available to the public) for at least two years. According to its Web site, the organization is currently reevaluating its digitization policies and procedures. The Web site gives no indication when this review will be complete, but says that, “(l)based on the results of the review, EPA will revise its plans for digitizing hardcopy of EPA-unique library materials.”6 In other words, the EPA does not currently have a plan in place for the digitization of thousands of materials and will not carry out any digitization as it examines its procedures. Further, no money has been allocated to digitization.

Scientists, lawyers, and other users of the EPA libraries protested. Many felt their work was impeded. Librarians joined them. ALA president Leslie Burger submitted an op-ed piece to the New York Times to raise public awareness of the issue. SLA urged the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee and its chair, Barbara Boxer (D, California), to examine the issue as a threat to public safety and health. Its members organized protests to their members of Congress in February 2006 soon after the cuts were announced.

Congress began to look into the matter only after many of the changes had already been implemented. On 19 September 2006, United States Representatives Bart Gordon (D, Tennessee), Henry Waxman (D, California), and John Dingell (D, Michigan) sent a letter to the Government Accountability Office requesting an examination of the administration’s plan for restructuring the EPA library network.7 Later, a group of senators appealed to the Senate Appropriations Committee requesting that it direct the EPA to restore library collections and services “to the status they held as of January 1, 2006.” In January 2007, following this public scrutiny, the EPA announced a temporary moratorium on its library restructuring. (This moratorium has officially ended, but unofficially remained in place, leaving the library system in limbo.) On February 6, 2007, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing regarding many EPA issues, including the library restructuring.

Order to Reopen
Recently, the Senate Appropriations Committee ordered the reopening of the closed EPA libraries with its fiscal

BUDGET ADDS $1M FOR EPA LIBRARIES

The EPA budget, approved in the 2008 omnibus budget bill, allocates $1 million to restore the agency’s network of libraries.

In communications with EPA staff, SLA has received clarification that this allocation is additional money, above the budget requested by the EPA, and is earmarked specifically to restore the network of regional EPA libraries that were recently closed or consolidated by the Bush administration. There has been some confusion, as well as inconsistencies reported by the press, as to the amount of money earmarked for restoration of libraries and services in the fiscal year 2008 EPA budget. This confusion stems from reports of an earlier bill, proposed by the Senate, that included $2 million above the EPA budget request for libraries. SLA received clarification from EPA staff in January.

The EPA budget is complex. What was unclear, as of early January, was the amount of the entire 2008 budget for EPA libraries. There is not a single line item for libraries; the libraries’ funds are broken up across multiple areas in various EPA office budgets. SLA will provide additional information as it becomes available on the amount of the total budget for libraries.

According to the Appropriations Report, directed the EPA to report on what actions “it will take to restore publicly available libraries to provide environmental information and data to each EPA region within 90 days of enactment of this Act.”

For more information see:
- SLA’s EPA library history at www.sla.org/content/SLA/advocacy/EPA/epaupdate.cfm.

This information was provided by Doug Newcomb, SLA’s chief policy officer.
Interagency e-mails and personal accounts later reported that some journals and other materials were simply discarded. Librarians and scientists feared that unique information available only through the EPA library system was being destroyed.

In the case of the EPA libraries, this scientific information concerns some of the greatest threats imaginable. It includes information about pollutants, the environment, and potential health risks and impacts. This information is vital to lawyers, scientists, and many others concerned with these issues. While policymakers assured users that no information would be lost or otherwise become unavailable, access to this vital information has become severely limited through library closures and shorter hours. To librarians who serve the legal community, the closure of the EPA libraries should be a grave concern and an important lesson.

Libraries are not just repositories of information. Librarians guide users through the overwhelming amount of available information. In 2005, EPA librarians handled over 130,000 research requests. Estimates say these requests saved 200,000 hours of research time and $7.5 million.

As librarians, we must be vigilant against threats to libraries and the pervasiveness of the “everything is online” mentality. SLA was one of the first organizations to decry the EPA cutbacks. While organizations like SLA continue to promote awareness of these issues, law librarians themselves must continue to vigorously market themselves and their services so that libraries are not just viewed as warehouses. We must work with our patrons and our elected officials to ensure that the importance of what we do is not lost in the age of the Internet. SLA

JAMES KELLY is research librarian at the Alyne Queener Massey Law Library at Vanderbilt University. The article is reprinted with permission from the fall 2007 issue of Legal Division Quarterly, the newsletter of the SLA Legal Division.
A Young Librarian, On the Job

AFTER LEARNING FROM HER MENTORS, SHE GIVES BACK TO HER COMMUNITY—AND TO SLA.

BY FORREST GLENN SPENCER

Down the street from the Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, and Children’s Hospital Boston is a satellite building that houses the Center on Media and Child Health (CMCH).

Among the staff, there is a solo librarian, but no physical library. There are no public hours. There are few books and periodicals on CMCH’s shelves, but they are a center of inquiry—the research, the studies, the vast collection the center possesses is digitized and indexed, and under the care and supervision of SLA member Brandy King. She is the gatekeeper of the center’s information, a dedicated librarian who has steadily expanded her role in the organization over the past five years.

Brandy King

Joined SLA: 2003

Job: Information specialist

Employer: Center on Media and Child Health at Children’s Hospital Boston

Experience: 6 years

Education: Bachelor’s in English and women’s studies, Smith College; MLIS, Simmons College

First job: Assistant at my father’s printing press (which included the task of punching holes in film)

First professional job: Work/study position as a reference assistant at the Smith College Library

Biggest challenge: Translating what scientific research has shown about media use into information that parents can use to make healthy decisions for their families.
“CMCH is an inter-disciplinary research center exploring how media can positively and negatively influence the health of kids and teens,” King, 28, explained. “These are the kinds of topics you always hear about on the news: whether violent video games affect kids’ behavior, whether watching educational TV makes kids smarter, whether fashion models influence teens’ body image.”

While there are many advocacy groups that have organized around these topics, CMCH is the first academic research center dedicated to examining media as a public health concern.

The center’s proximity to other health institutions is no accident; each one is a partner. CMCH was founded in 2003, the brainchild of Dr. Michael Rich, a filmmaker who left Hollywood to purse his medical degree and a course of study that has always focused on the relation between his two passions: media and medicine.

Over the years, Rich realized that these topics were controversial and needed discussion. He had seen that there was good science produced but that no one had collected and systematically organized it. He knew that if the data was pulled together correctly, the field could change and progress could be made.

In addition to serving as CMCH’s director and maintaining clinical duties, Rich is also an assistant professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School and assistant professor of society, human development and health at Harvard School of Public Health. Growing up, Rich’s godmother was a corporate librarian for a steel company who later became a librarian at the Maryland Historical Society. Knowing the important services that librarians provide, Rich immediately realized that if CMCH were to be a scientific center of excellence, he would need a librarian on-board from the start.

Enter young Brandy King.

King, a Boston native, secured the job a few weeks before completing her MLIS at Simmons College, just a few blocks from her current office. “I was getting married that summer, and what I was honestly looking for was a short-term job where they wouldn’t mind that I needed to take so much time off for the wedding.” Rich was originally seeking someone for a three-month position of collecting research into a database for him to use. But after brainstorming with two candidates (King and SLA member Sharon Gray), he realized that the database could be even more powerful if it was offered as a public service on CMCH’s Web site. In the end, he hired King as the project manager and Gray as a consultant.

“It worked out as a great partnership for us because Sharon was able to look at the big picture while I was able to do the daily work of finding and cataloging citations. Basically, Sharon looked at the forest and I took care of the trees.” Though Gray moved on after the CMCH database was established, King calls her often for professional advice, both about CMCH specifically and about her career in general. “Sharon has been an amazing mentor. She’s the one who got me to join SLA, pointing out that—as a solo librarian—I would need to find a group of colleagues. She knew that SLA, with its active and innovative members, would be the right place for me. “Realizing that these librarians could find anything, regardless of whether they were familiar with the subject at hand, seemed magical to me. I wanted that kind of power.”
Mentors
Mentors like Sharon Gray have played a big part in King’s desire to become a librarian and to remain professionally active and involved. While working in the library as an undergraduate at Smith College, King was trained to become a reference assistant, performing “triage” for the librarians. She took the quick questions about how to access databases, where the best electronic sources were, and where students could find a particular book. She handed off the more complicated questions to the reference staff so they could spend quality time helping students.

The experience was an eye opener to her as to just how much information was out there. “Realizing that these librarians could find anything, regardless of whether they were familiar with the subject at hand, seemed magical to me. I wanted that kind of power,” King said.

It was Bruce Sajdak who mentored King at Smith and encouraged her to pursue her MLIS. Seven years out of college, they still keep in touch. “I saw him recently and he was so excited to hear about my career; he was thrilled to know that he had passed the torch to someone just as enthusiastic about library services.”

When she started her MLIS at Simmons College, advisor Allen Smith encouraged King to fast track her degree. “He basically told me to get in and get out,” King recalled. “He explained that an MLIS is an applied degree, so the fun really starts when you can apply your classroom knowledge to a work situation. He was right.”

Another mentor, Cara Helfner, shaped her interest in consumer health librarianship. Helfner was her supervisor at the Kessler Health Library at nearby Brigham and Women’s Hospital. King worked there while in graduate school, and Helfner exposed her to all the functions of a librarian.

“Cara really made sure that, over the course of my internship, I had experienced every aspect of working in the library: reference, cataloging, customer service, publicity, even shelf-reading,” King said. It was in this job that she discovered her interest in consumer health and strongly considered pursuing a special library job rather than the academic job she had always imagined.

“All of these mentors,” she said, “have shaped my career in some way, encouraging me to pursue librarianship, to become active in professional organizations and to use my skills in new and innovative ways.”

Today, King enjoys talking to people considering careers in librarianship and working with library science students to provide the kind of guidance from which she has benefited.

Solo Librarian
The three-month job at CMCH has turned into much more; King has been at CMCH for five years now.

“What I’ve really learned through this experience is that if you can bring value to the organization, then they’ll find ways for you to stay. I really didn’t expect to be here this long, but between me being willing to take the initiative on a lot of projects and my director trusting me as a librarian, I’ve carved out a niche for myself here.”

The organizational model of CMCH is based on two areas: knowledge building and knowledge translation. King’s interests and job duties fall within both realms. Her work on the CMCH Database of Research gets at the knowledge-building realm: collecting existing and new research on media effects into one place has never been done before. As she started searching databases in 2003, she realized that media-effects work has historically been multi-disciplinary instead of inter-disciplinary.

“Researchers in gender studies were looking at the same questions as researchers in medicine, but they...”

Former SLA President Ethel Salonen, left, gives Brandy King the LexisNexis Innovations in Technology Award.
Because she is a solo librarian and spends much of the day working on a computer, she relishes volunteering for the social connections it provides.

On the knowledge translation end, King is responsible for translating what scientific research has shown about media effects into easily understandable language that parents and others can use to create a healthy media environment for children.

“Parents want to know which kinds and what amount of media will help or harm their children,” King said. “They may receive mixed messages from advertisers and the news media about music, movies, television, and computers and need help distinguishing the safest media practices for their families.”

King translates the science to the public using many kinds of outlets. She maintains the CMCH Web site, which offers resources for parents and teachers; composes monthly newsletters for three different audiences; posts current events and related research on the CMCH blog; and even gives workshops about media and body image to students.

She also spends a lot of time working with CMCH researchers themselves. This group includes researchers from a variety of educational backgrounds, including public health, medicine, psychology, and anthropology. In fact, her favorite aspect of the job is the reference work she does for her team.

“I spend a lot of time on email and IM answering reference questions,” said King. “I find that I’m most excited about the reference aspect of my job because of the unpredictability of the questions. I can get anything from ‘I need a list of all the research from the past 30 years on how media affects sexual behavior’ to ‘Can you find a music video with smoking in it so I can use it in a presentation?’”

From left, David Engel, George Peckham-Rooney, Matthew Burt, and Brandy King at Simmons College where she spoke on knowledge management.
The queries she finds especially intriguing are the ones that start with a sheepish “You know that study where...?” “I get a lot of ‘You know that study where they compared homicide rates in Africa to those of the US? It had something to do with the introduction of television...’” And she does know the answer. After looking at this specialized research for five years, King can immediately recall which author worked on the topic. It’s this opportunity to help people find answers and seek knowledge that drives her.

“Recently, we had a new PhD join the team and after three days she looked at me and said, ‘You do a lot around here, don’t you? I didn’t realize librarians did all of this.’ It was really validating to know that someone stepping into this group could already see how integral a librarian is to how the organization is run.”

King’s contributions have not gone unnoticed in other sectors of her life. In 2005, King won the LexisNexis Innovations in Technology Award at the SLA annual conference for her work with ontologies and semantic search. She collaborated on this project with another mentor, Kathy Reinold, a software consultant and King’s co-author of a forthcoming book about ontologies and the semantic Web. “Kathy explained to me the big picture of the semantic Web, and we have worked out together how we think libraries and librarians will fit into this picture.”

**Volunteerism**

King’s work is accomplished in a flexible environment. “Some days I’m the first one in at 7:30 in the morning,” King said. “Other days I’ll come in at 10 a.m. I regularly work from home on Fridays. As long as my work is getting done, our director is okay with it.” Advances in technology have much to do with this flexibility. Since most of her work is done on the computer, especially through IM and e-mail, it matters less that she’s available in person.

“This flexible work environment not only benefits me, it benefits the group,” she said. “Because I’m allowed to integrate my personal life with my work responsibilities, I am a happier and more productive person.”

This flexible schedule also allows King to give her time and energy back to many organizations, including the Massachusetts Health Science Libraries Network (where she is membership chair), the Boston Smith College Club (where she was young alumnae chair for two years), and SLA. During her first SLA conference in 2005, she was not quite sure where she fit in. Then she attended a new members’ breakfast for the SLA Social Science Division and found her place.

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She soon asked if there were any board positions open; she has been their webmaster ever since.

King has a growing reputation within SLA for her volunteerism—a way of life she learned from her mother. “When she was raising us, my mother was constantly busy, volunteering for everything, including the town library. I got the volunteering bug from her. It just feels so good to be able to use your education and expertise to further a cause or an organization.” Because she is a solo librarian and spends much of the day working on a computer, she relishes volunteering for the social connections it provides.

One volunteer program she participates in is SLA on the Job sponsored by the Boston Chapter. Students sign up to go into a workplace and shadow a librarian for a day. “I keep volunteering for that because I think it’s important to show students that there are lots of different ways of being a librarian. After they see what I do within the organization, they may be able to think of lots of job options besides working in a more typical library setting.”

King is also a major proponent of the SLA Contributed Papers since writing and presenting two of her own papers. She considers scholarship to be an important part of library science and notes that the contributed papers program offers a chance for people to share their ideas and best practices with their colleagues. “I think sometimes that, as librarians, we are so involved in helping other people do research that we often neglect writing about what we’ve found in our own field,” King noted.

After presenting her first paper, King contacted SLA with a number of suggestions for increasing publicity about the papers and soon joined the Contributed Papers Selection Committee. This year, as chair of the committee for the SLA 2008 Annual Conference & INFO-EXPO in Seattle, she is working to ensure that more SLA members take the opportunity to become a part of the conference by sharing their ideas in a paper. She enjoys volunteering at the national level and hopes to continue to be of service to SLA for a long time to come.

It is clear that King represents the next generation of SLA members—individuals who were born and raised in the midst of the technological revolution. King has learned from those who came before her in this field; and in return, she gives back to those who seek information using the tools available to her. No one walks away empty handed. It’s more than responding to inquiries. It’s about making a lifelong commitment to fulfill others’ quest for knowledge—and in the end, to improve their lives. SLA
Proactive Marketing: Connecting with the Corporate Client

DON’T WAIT FOR YOUR CLIENTS TO DISCOVER YOUR SERVICES. GET OUT THERE, GET THEM INVOLVED, AND LET THEM KNOW HOW YOU CAN HELP.

BY SOPHIA GUEVARA

A couple of months ago, I was invited to lunch to discuss technology and marketing issues with a librarian friend and her manager. A two-hour discussion ensued, which included brainstorming ways to increase the use of the library.

On the drive home, I began to think about our conversation and about how little librarians actively market their services. While many librarians think that their value to the company is self-evident, many employees remain unaware that the corporate library exists. Others may limit librarians’ worth to books and journals when their real value to the organization is so much more.

To assist your colleagues in understanding your full value, you’ll have to paint the picture for them. Be passionate about who you are and what you do. Go after the clients instead of waiting for them to come to you. Ready to paint your picture? Here are 11 ideas to help you get started.

1. Distribute reminder items. Provide the library’s clients with a highly visible take-away that will promote the library anywhere it’s placed. A coffee mug with the library’s logo and a catchy motto would be the perfect item. The mugs could serve as a reminder item that would spread the library’s advertising message with its everyday use. They could be easily distributed by placing a few within the break room or using them as a giveaway at a library training session or at an information fair.

2. Host an information fair. This idea comes from an article by Peggy Bridges and Suzette Morgan (“Creatively Marketing the Corporate Library,” MLS: Marketing Library Service, March 2000.) The authors call for a fair to showcase your library’s information products. Reserve a room with a few computers to display your digital content. Staff each computer with a librarian who can provide attendees with a demonstration of the resource and answer any questions they may have. Provide a few giveaway items to help draw attention and interest in the event. Chances are you’ll attract a number of new clients, as well as improve the awareness of your base concerning new tools the library offers.

3. Blog. Implement a blog on your library’s Web site. Use it to update clients about changes within the library. Advertise new products and training sessions, and provide research tips. Every month, post interviews on your library’s blog that show how patrons are using the resource to do their jobs more effectively. The interviews can serve as a valuable testimonial for the library and provide a message that may be better received than other promotional activities.
Recruit library ambassadors.

Recruit clients from each of your organization’s departments to serve as library ambassadors. Ideally, they should be some of your library’s most loyal users. Provide in-depth training on some of your most essential resources, focusing on those that may be of special interest for their departments. As an embedded library connection, these individuals can promote the use of the library among their colleagues. A pro-library message spread by a departmental colleague will have a greater impact than one coming from the company librarian.

Be sure to make the role a beneficial one for both the library and the ambassadors. Provide them with priority access to new resources during product trials to get their thoughts on how the product would benefit their department. Invite them periodically to a complimentary lunch to discuss the changing expectations of your client base. Let them and their managers know that their services are appreciated.

Create table tents.

This is a cost-effective way to advertise your services to all levels of the organization. Put them in the company cafeteria and other places where people meet frequently. Advertise client services and highlight database products that can help employees find the authoritative information they need quickly.

Get on the small screen.

Consider investing in a flat-screen television that can be placed in a high-traffic area to spread your marketing message. See if you can split the cost of the purchase with other departments that may be interested in broadcasting their own messages to employees. If your organization already offers a venue in which you can display a marketing message, make sure you take advantage of it.

Host brown-bag sessions.

Transform the image of your library. To prevent employees from thinking of your service as only books and journals, host information sessions for staff. Invite speakers from various departments to give a lunchtime lecture on a particularly interesting project they are involved with.

Other ideas: Develop a hands-on workshop to introduce employees to a few examples of Web 2.0 technology. Co-host a session with your company’s IT department that will help attendees make better use of Outlook and other office software.

Participate in new employee orientation.

Provide material for inclusion in the new-employee welcome packet. If your HR department provides new employees with an orientation session, ask if you can come in for a few minutes to introduce yourself and the library. Then, go one step further. Work with your HR department to gain access to the new employee lists and check up with these employees within 90 days of their orientation. Give them a quick telephone call to see how things are going and ask if there is anything you can do to help them with their information needs.

Let everyone know the librarian is in.

Hold monthly consulting sessions within individual departments. Reserve a departmental conference room for an hour and let the department members know that you’re available for individual consultation. If they need any more time to resolve their information issue, invite them to the library. You may have to build interest in the beginning by bringing along a few treats or a small supply of give-away items. This is an excellent way to increase the library’s profile and provides the additional benefit of working with your clients in their own environment.

Have a draw.

Provide a few copies of the local newspaper, the *New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. People can enjoy reading the news with their morning coffee as they arrive to work. This may be a simple reason to draw people in, but you’d be surprised how many people visit the library to get free access to the newspapers they enjoy reading on a daily basis.

Greet people as they come in to the library.

With my own experience in several library environments, I’ve always been dismayed that corporate libraries fail to provide what I perceive as an adequate welcome to their clients. I’ve rarely seen these libraries encourage their staff to make regular contact with the clients who walk in. Post a staff person close to the library entrance to greet clients on their way in and ensure that they are satisfied with their results before they walk out. If you fail to see the value in this proposition, let me put it this way: It is much easier for your organization’s leaders to cut funding to a faceless entity. The more opportunities you make to develop a friendly rapport with your clientele, the less likely you’ll wish you had after your library is shut down. SLA

SOPHIA GUEVARA, MLIS, is an information professional. She serves as the diversity chair for the SLA Michigan Chapter and is the Digital Content Section chair-elect for the SLA IT Division. She is also a board member and webmaster for the Michigan Library Association’s Committee on Organization. She was recently appointed to the Library and Information Technology Association’s LSSI/OCLC Scholarship Committee.
The CCRM curriculum is designed to help an organization properly manage their content rights.

Topics covered in the CCRM course include:

- Understanding vital copyright law components and concepts, including the fair use defense and orphan works
- Evaluating and managing different types of content rights within licenses to help lower liability and costs
- Developing, communicating, and maintaining a content rights management plan within your organization

Who Should Attend
All professionals who purchase, manage or create content and are responsible for ensuring that it is used appropriately and that the content rights are maximized at all levels of the organization.

2008 Schedule of Cities/Dates

- March 4, Houston
- March 11, Chicago
- March 27, Washington, D.C.
- April 30, Boston
- May 13, Philadelphia
- May 21, San Francisco

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Is There Such a Thing As Information Overload?

BY STEPHEN ABRAM

“Information overload refers to the state of having too much information to make a decision or remain informed about a topic. It is often referred to in conjunction with various forms of computer-mediated communication such as e-mail and the Web. The term was coined in 1970 by Alvin Toffler in his book Future Shock.” (Wikipedia)

“Interruptions aren’t merely annoying; they’re also bad for productivity. And when you multiply the interruptions made possible by e-mail, phone calls, text messages, and Twitters across the entire U.S., the result is lost productivity on a massive scale: $650 billion in a single year.”

That’s a big number, according to research firm Basex (www.basex.com), which chose “information overload” as its 2008 “Problem of the Year.” The firm predicts that failure to address the issue of enterprise information overload will lead to “reduced productivity and throttled innovation.”

Also, Intel’s Nathan Zeldes estimates “the impact of information overload on each knowledge worker at up to eight hours a week.”

Wow! It sounds to me like these enterprises need more librarians! This isn’t the first of these studies that show the massive impact on productivity for knowledge workers of poor information strategies. Some of the reported symptoms include the inability to make clear and accurate decisions, increased personal stress levels, and a reduced ability to concentrate on priority issues due to interruptions. Some research suggests that overload lowers IQ due to diffused focus. It’s been well discussed over the years as information overload or techno-stress.

Causes of Overload

Wikipedia outlines these general causes of information overload, and I quote:

- A rapidly increasing rate of new information being produced.
- The ease of duplication and transmission of data across the Internet.
- An increase in the available channels of incoming information (e.g., telephone, e-mail, instant messaging, RSS).
- Large amounts of historical information to dig through.
- Contradictions and inaccuracies in available information.
- A low signal-to-noise ratio.
- A lack of a method for comparing and processing different kinds of information.

I think it’s easily explained as information content growing faster than people’s ability to absorb and deal with it. The good news is that there are processes and strategies to address these problems on the enterprise level. It all centers on our profession and stepping up to the plate to promote our value to our organizations through the skills that information professionals and librarians enhance:

1. Searching and Finding

Widespread access to the Web and its riches has created the illusion with average end-users that they have unlimited access to quality information. Nothing could be farther from the truth. There is a vast difference between simple, positive, information experiences when choosing a movie, vacation, or restaurant and those required when one is betting the business. Hundreds, or indeed thousands, of expensive co-workers spending hours seeking information on the Web and not finding it or finding it very slowly is not a good way to run a business. If informed decision-making is the goal of organizations, then organizations must, logically, invest in excellent information practices. Empowered librarians do this.

2. Going Beyond the Free Web

We all know that there is good content for free on the Web. It is, however, not a competitive advantage to have identical information to everyone else. It seems simple, but it’s amazing to me how many executives fail to grasp this concept. Information wants to be free—not just cost-free but unfettered. The best way to unfetter information is to employ an information professional. The free Web is riddled with information rot, aging Web sites, bad links, and more. Simply put, librarians know how to access quality, on-point information.
You must invest in keeping up to date for competitive advantage. If an organization doesn’t, it deserves to decline and expire.

3. Determining Authority
Few people can determine authority and authoritativeness to a business standard. Librarians can. This issue goes beyond brand. It’s about making sure the information that users base their decisions on is trustworthy. Ask, do we want our doctors basing our own health decisions on the free Web? How about anti-terrorism strategies? Or your own legal defense? Really—are there any critical questions of life that we would trust our own lives to on the free Web? Why would we apply a different standard to our enterprise strategies? In many sectors, the latest information is sometimes the best. On the Web, it is often difficult and sometimes impossible to gauge the currency of the information being accessed. When it really matters, you need to know. Librarians can look under the hood of content and Web sites and increase the trust factor.

4. Separating Fact and Opinion
This is the essential skill of true information literacy (and a bunch of other literacies, too—media, critical thinking, and more). As our media outlets continue to blur the line between reporting and editorial opinion, this distinction is getting to be a more critical aspect of information practice. I believe that most people cannot tell the difference between a blog and a Web site or a news article and a column. As we support decisions based on information, it is essential that someone can separate fact, opinion, bias, and point of view. Enterprises must value this skill or risk disaster.

5. Understanding Optimized Search Results
Too many end users do not understand the role that the search engine optimization industry (SEO) plays in search result rankings. Special interest groups, partisan factions, and advertisers have at their disposal tools that allow them to influence what is displayed on the search results that end users see. With localization of SEO becoming more commonplace, your organization is at risk. Does anyone think it’s good that your competitors may be optimizing the results for your co-workers? Value added, for fee, or OA databases are not (or at least less) subject to this result manipulation.

6. Filtering and Adding Value
Again, most free search engine results give the searcher a huge number of results. This is overload at its worst. Good librarians filter out the best based on the context of the users and their questions. Great librarians also add value to make the information more instantaneously useful.

7. De-Duplication
With most Web searches, you find tons of duplicate information. Making end users read and filter all of this is a waste of time and productivity. On an organization-wide scale, it’s a huge waste of money and staff resources. Librarians remove the duplicate information and polish the search results to enhance the productivity of their patrons. Licensing haystacks and finding needles are two different things!

8. Cost Effective Enterprises and Efficiency
In the old days of time-based pricing for online searches, librarians became adept at fast in-and-out searches. Now the game is played differently. Enterprise-wide intranet licensing and the needed end-user training can be cost effective solutions to organization-wide information productivity issues. Librarians excel at this.

9. Credulity
As anyone who has been on the Internet for decades knows, spam, phishing, and other Internet scams are not new. For whatever reason, there are people out there who have reason to introduce false information into the Web. Others just leave superseded information out there through neglect. It takes some time to develop credibility skills and ensure that the information tools and content offered is credible.

10. Content and Tool Awareness
Lastly (although I know there are many more talents), when your enterprise depends on information to make great decisions, then you must invest in content, information systems, and information professionals like librarians. You must invest in keeping up to date for competitive advantage. If an organization doesn’t, it deserves to decline and expire. Most organizations depend on informed decisions and knowledge-based learning. Imagine any major knowledge enterprise today doing otherwise. Would you hire a law firm, go to a hospital, or invest in an R&D-based company that failed to have good information practice? I hope not.

If we are truly entering a knowledge-based economy (and I believe we already have in the developed world), we had better speak up more clearly on the roles that a variety of information professionals and librarians play in assuring success. These are SLA’s members. Perhaps SLA could target investors, venture, and equity capitalists? Maybe we need to say that these people shouldn’t invest in firms that have horrible information practices and lack professional staff and software to manage knowledge assets. If its knowledge assets are at extreme risk, so is the value of your enterprise and its future. Investors expect their targets to have professional auditors. Isn’t information practice just as important?

Hmmmm. It’s still up for debate as to whether an individual can experience information overload as a syndrome. But I can come out firmly on the side that enterprises can suffer from information overload. The cure? Librarians.

SLA
A Special Certificate Program In Copyright Management

Work on the new copyright certificate program began at SLA 2007 in Denver. The first course opened in January.

BY LESLEY ELLEN HARRIS

At the SLA 2007 Annual Conference in Denver, there were seven different sessions or panel discussions on copyright. My copyright presentation panel was on the last day of the conference, in the last time block of the day, and I expected a small audience.

Much to my delight, it was full, with some librarians standing in the back of the crowded room. The room held librarians from all over the world, with various backgrounds and levels of knowledge in copyright.

Throughout the session, I pondered a quick discussion I had prior to the session, with John Lowery, SLA’s director of professional development, about a possible certificate program in copyright for SLA members. I was so encouraged by the audience that after the session I returned to my hotel room and made some notes about what would be covered in such a certificate program.

After a meeting at SLA headquarters, many conference calls and uncountable e-mails, the certificate program launched late last month. Here’s how it came together.

Not long after the conference concluded, I was struggling with developing the program to meet the needs of SLA members. I found much material online for academic and public librarians, but less so for special librarians. In speaking at SLA conferences and teaching online copyright tutorials for several years at Click University, I had a feel for the kinds of issues you struggle with. I also understand that special librarians are not lawyers, and quickly determined that the program should deal with copyright management issues and, where possible, provide practical advice. The curriculum for the program would have to cover both general copyright management issues and topics that are more advanced.

I took a blank piece of paper and wrote down all of the copyright management issues that would need to be covered in the program. Then I started grouping together the topics until it became obvious to me what topics fit into which course. This process eventually led to a seven-course certificate program (eight if you count the course on Canadian copyright law). The first five courses are online courses, and the last two courses are each full-day sessions at the SLA annual conference in Seattle.

At the same time, I was contemplating which courses would be best taught online and which in person. Again, once the content fell into place, so did the format for each course. It also became evident that the first few courses should focus on copyright management principles. The latter courses (building upon the principles) would deal with management issues and practical exercises and advice.

As is true with many fiction writers, this non-fiction program took on a life of its own, and everything became clear.

The Curriculum

We begin the program with an introduction to copyright management principles and issues. Participants can then choose between a course on the basics of U.S. or Canadian copyright law. Since much of the content librarians use is online and therefore involves knowledge of international copyright law, that is the subject of the next online course. The course on digital copyright principles will focus specifically on copyright and Web site content, license agreements, digital archives, blogs, and the like. And an entire course will be devoted to library and special library copyright issues.

In Seattle, at the SLA 2008 Annual Conference in June, the two remaining courses of the program will be held as one day, in-person sessions.

The Certificate

Each participant in all seven courses of the program will receive a Certificate in Copyright Management at a special celebration in Seattle. (If librarians cannot take all the courses in by June 2008, they will have a year to complete the missed courses.)

Taking all of the courses in the program provides a librarian with a solid basis in copyright management and copyright compliance skills to apply to daily work, and the means to educate others in the enterprise.

Click University and I are already contemplating two future certificates to build upon this general one—one for copyright officers, and one for licensing officers.

LESLEY ELLEN HARRIS is a copyright lawyer, business, and strategic issues in the publishing, Internet, and information industries. She is the editor of the print newsletter, The Copyright and New Media Law Newsletter. To receive a sample copy of this newsletter, email contact@copyright-laws.com. She also is a professor at SLA’s Click University, where she teaches a number of online courses on copyright and managing copyright and digital content for SLA members. For details, see http://www.clickuniversity.com.
Information Pro as Storyteller
For Staff, Patrons, Management

BY DEBBIE SCHACHTER

How do we get our message across more effectively to our patrons, to our supervisors, and to our staff in a culture of shortened attention spans and competing interests? How do we make our message—whether it is a marketing pitch, a request for additional funding, or the need to change our services or ways or doing our library business—more compelling? What is our “story” as information professional and library manager?

Even as the power of the storyteller in humankind’s oral tradition has never truly disappeared from our culture, we are now seeing a renewed interest in the business world in the importance of developing skills as storytellers. This is not merely for the purpose of the traditional sales pitch, but for the whole range of developing communication skills in all aspects of work.

When we craft an argument, develop a vision, create a strategic plan, or roll out a marketing program, we are telling our stories. Good speakers have always been recognized as those who can tell a good story. And all information professionals, even those who don’t see themselves as a public speaker or potential CEO, must be able to convey their message well. Learning how to craft a good story is an important part of getting the message across, getting buy-in from staff and stakeholders, and involving others in the success of your information center.

What Is Our Story?
As a supervisor or manager, creating a story that resonates with staff is important when trying to communicate the reason or need for change, to help convey why we do what we do, and ultimately to improve our services and customer use of our services. To do so we need to know what our “story” is and how to tell it. Sometimes this means determining specifically what our staff perceives to be our story. This is linked to the culture of the organization and the history of what has come before.

There are tools, such as organizational culture assessment tools, to identify employee perceptions of the organization as it exists today, and where they believe it should be going. This will form the background of the current organizational story, and is particularly useful for those library managers who are new to the organization or to the position.

I used this type of tool once to identify employees’ current perception of the organization. It was intended to reveal whether it was perceived as a family-type of concern, entrepreneurial, hierarchical, or market driven, and to determine where the employees wanted to see the organization go in the near future.

The interesting thing was that this tool showed what I had expected for the current state—that the organization was perceived to be a “family” type of organization that was market driven.

The preferred future direction, however, surprised me. Even though most of the staff had worked in the organization for a number of years, the majority were primed and ready for a change. They wanted to see the organization become much more entrepreneurial and flexible.

This small example shows how merely identifying the shared story is sometimes not as simple as we think, given that our individual perception may not be an accurate picture of the group’s perception.

You should develop your information center’s stories to support the work you do. You can do this by collecting success stories from staff to use in your arsenal when meeting with your executives, such as for funding or new project proposals. Storytelling can work as a pitch—for more money, for creating a new vision, and for setting a new direction. It is also a helpful and honest way to convey information from executives or the organization at large back to your staff. Essentially, it can become two-way communication through engagement and story sharing up and down the organizational hierarchy.

Skill at conveying information in story format is important for leaders at every level as we communicate with staff and stakeholders. And the key to an effective story is that it engages the listeners’ emotions as well as their minds. Apparently, the human brain is hard
The key to an effective story is that it engages the listeners’ emotions as well as their minds.

wired for learning through storytelling, to help us to make sense of the world and to communicate our ideas to others. When you think about it, facts alone are often not sufficient for us to remember or to develop a deep understanding of a topic. A story provides the context and the meaning for ideas and facts.

In *The Elements of Persuasion*, Richard Maxwell and Robert Dickman emphasize over and over the five essential elements of a good story: Passion, a Hero (or heroes), an Antagonist (or problem – it doesn’t have to be a person), Awareness (which they describe as the “aha” moment) and Transformation. These components are not new concepts, but they help us develop our awareness of creating a good story with these timeless elements.

**Change Management**

Storytelling is also a very effective way to help communicate the need for change. Change management relies heavily on communication to be successful, so as a change agent, you should develop story themes that will help your listeners to see themselves in the context of the story you are telling. At the staff perspective, relaying stories showing the positive and negative impact of situations, actions, and inaction helps to define the need for change when change is resisted. It can be used to emphasize the positive transformations that will occur through change, and help us to define our specific roles and positions within the story, when things are changing around us.

**Conclusions**

Being a good communicator has always been a part of the skill set of information professionals. Finding the best way to get the message across and to have it resonate with our listeners is key to good communication. It’s not so much about being liked or telling people what they want to hear, but to somehow impact and engage the listener through the message within the story.

To make any communication genuine, and to excite the involvement of your listeners, you must have an honest interest and passion for what you are saying. By personalizing or immediately relating the topic to the listener, and showing that you are committed to this issue, gains you the focus of the listener for what will come next. The honesty of the passion that you feel for your topic is essential; otherwise, listeners will not be engaged.

**References**


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www.ischools.org/oc/conference08/

MARCH
3-6
AIIM International Conference and Exposition
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www.aiim.org/article-events.asp?EventID=4086

12-15
14th ACRL National Conference
Association of College and Research Libraries
Seattle
www.acrl.org/ala/acrl/acrl/events/seattle/seattle.cfm

16-18
ASIDIC Spring Meeting
Association of Information and Dissemination Centers
Las Vegas
www.asidic.org/meetings/spring08.htm

17-18
EIA 17th Annual Conference
European Information Association
Chester, U.K.
www.eia.org.uk/conference.html

16-21
Electronic Resources and Libraries 2008
Atlanta

25-29
PLA 12th National Conference
Public Library Association
Minneapolis
www.placonference.org

27-28
IACR Spring Conference
Illinois Association of College and Research Libraries
Bloomington, Illinois
http://iacr.net/2008%20Conference/2008index.html

APRIL
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IFLA International Newspaper Conference
Singapore
http://blogs.nlb.gov.sg/newspaper_conf08

10-14
Information Architecture Summit
ASIS&T
Miami
www.isummit.org/2008

14-16
APLIC-I 41st Annual Conference
Association for Population/Family Planning Libraries & Information Centers International
New Orleans
www.aplic.org/conferences/2008

16-18
Wisconsin Association of Academic Librarians Annual Conference
Madison, Wisconsin
www.wia.lib.wi.us/apa/conferences/2008

21-22
International Copyright Symposium
Amsterdam
World Book Capital Foundation
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21-24
IATUL Conference 2008
International Association of Technological University Libraries
Auckland
http://www.aut.ac.nz/iatul2008/

MAY
16-21
2008 MLA Annual Meeting
Medical Library Association
Chicago
www.mlanet.org/am/am2008

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CL/ACR National Conference and Trade Show
Canadian Library Association
Montréal

JUNE
2-7
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Dubrovnik and Mijet, Croatia
www.ffos.hr/lida

5-8
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North American Serials Interest Group
Phoenix
www.nasig.org/conference/2008

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Seattle, Washington
www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/ac2008/index.cfm

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INSTICC
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www.iceis.org

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www.webcontent2008.com

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www.archivists.org/conference/sanfrancisco2008/index.asp

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Remember: Cost and value aren’t the same. You may have a say in the cost. Your patrons determine the value.

BY JOHN R. LATHAM

Writing this column as we move on past the confusing Judeo-Christian festivals of faith and consumerism and into a New Year, one is inclined to reflect, but on what? In spite of the fact that it was instilled in me that one should never discuss sex, politics, or religion in polite company, you will have to bear with me. In good English middle class tradition I was brought up in the comfort of the Anglican church, which gave you signposts but left it up to you where you might end up by avoiding dogmatism at all costs. This has the advantage of allowing one to dispense with all the religious stuff while hanging on the philosophical bits, but the disadvantage of making one wonder who the hell one is. A bit like being an information professional in the 21st century.

With the demands on information professionals constantly changing, it becomes all the more important to know who we are. If you are experiencing static or dwindling financial resources it becomes even more important. Who or what we are depends on the information services and products we provide, and their success depends on our core competencies, the tenets of our faith. You might start the year by carrying out an objective review of the services and products you provide and ask yourselves: Are they what is needed; are they what we can afford; are they being well provided; and how can they be improved?

This review can be on an informal brainstorming session, or a more formal information audit report. If you have kept testimonials or satisfaction surveys throughout the year, these can be used to assess the quality of your services and to design a user survey. If you use automatic evaluations for completion after each project, remember that they are normally designed to evaluate that service, and will not necessarily give you concrete data on what your users need.

Sometimes they don’t know what they need because they are used to what they get, and therefore adding a question about other services required may not help at all. A more valuable approach may be to find out what are your users’ goals and objectives, and what information and resources they use on a day-to-day basis to achieve them.

The demands on your users are changing just as quickly as your own, so it is more than likely that this exercise will provide ideas about new or improved services. You may find that your users have been searching for information that you can provide for them in half the time using resources that you have been using for ages. It is easy to assume that our users are aware of all the products and services that are available to us, but in many cases they are not. Often, the information that you provide is not being used in the way you thought and a simple revision to the service can provide additional value to your users.

Having carried out your review and having looked at new or improved services, you must remember that you cannot be all things to all users. In these days of tight budgets and limited resources, you have to prioritize your services. If you are fortunate enough to have ROI data available, prioritization is much easier. But if, like most, you do not, you will have to look at the actual costs of providing your products and services. You will need to look not only at the direct costs such as Internet and database providers and licenses, but also staff costs based on time spent on each service.

Remember, however, that cost is not the same as value. You have to prioritize by value to the users. Spending a lot of money on a service does not mean that it provides high value. Conversely, a service that costs little in time or expenditure may be very valuable to your users.

Also, concentrate on your and your staff’s personal strengths. When reviewing your services take some time to look at skill sets and competencies required and whether you are matching staff competencies with the requisite services. We all have strengths and weaknesses so make sure you put each individual’s skill sets to good use. If there are skill sets missing within your department, try to train the person who is best suited to develop the required competency.

Whether we like it or not, there are generally services which are delivered better than others. Make sure we know what they are and work on promoting the best and improving those that are not.

SLA

JOHN R. LATHAM is the director of the SLA Information Center. He can be reached at jlatham@sla.org.

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