

5-2005

## Information Outlook, May 2005

Special Libraries Association

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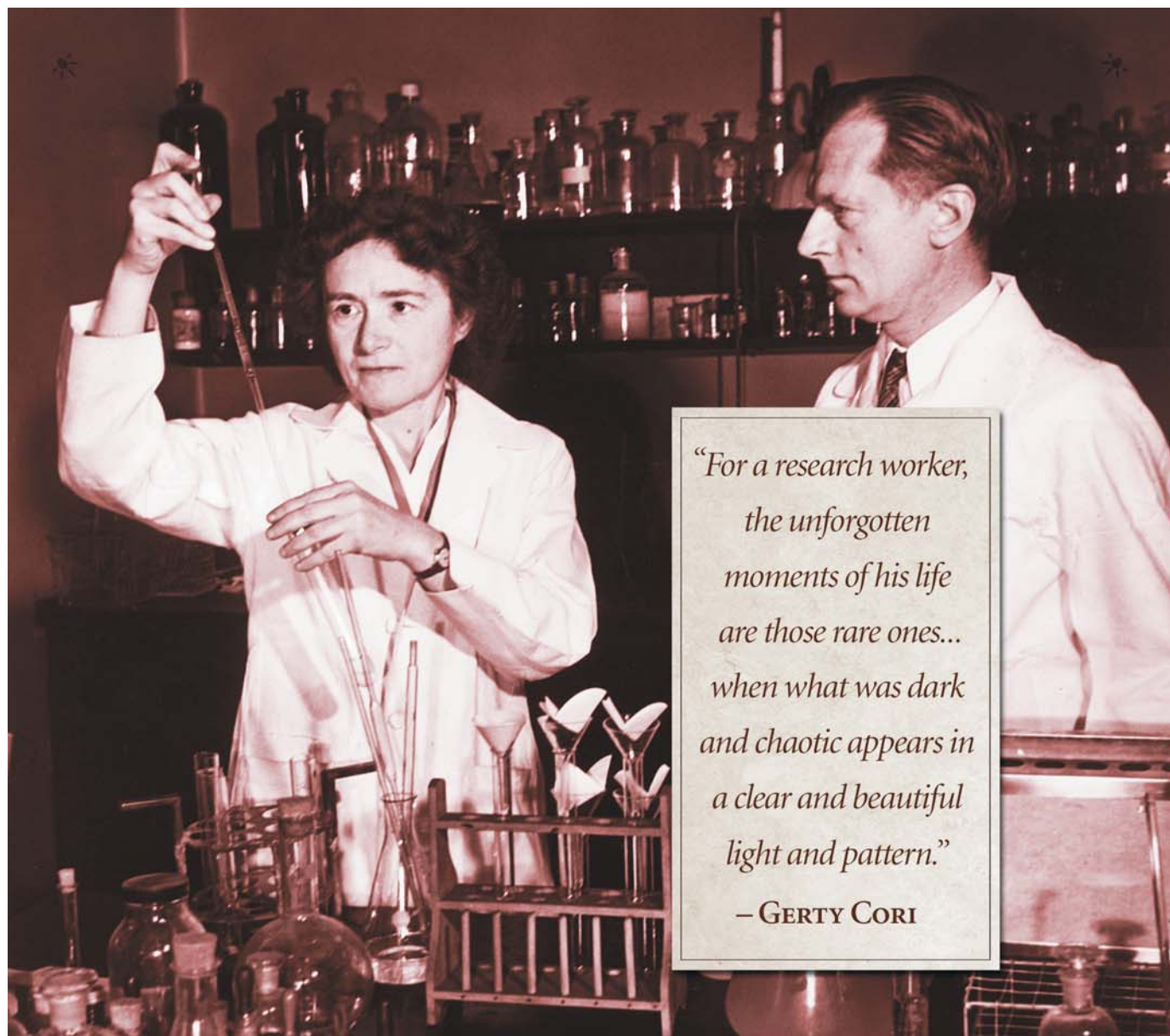
## Strategies for Climbing the Corporate Ladder

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**Taking Charge  
of Your Career**

**Seven Helpful  
Steps to Get  
You to the Top**





*“For a research worker,  
the unforgotten  
moments of his life  
are those rare ones...  
when what was dark  
and chaotic appears in  
a clear and beautiful  
light and pattern.”*

— GERTY CORI

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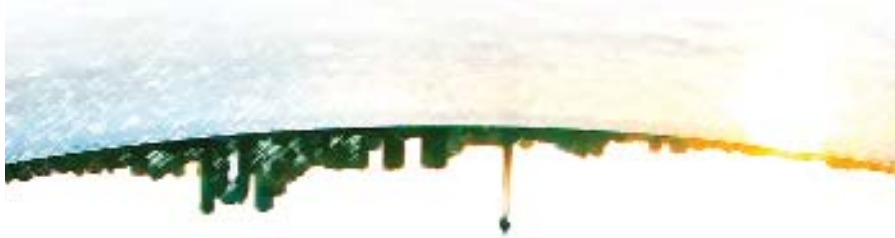
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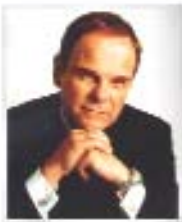
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Learning Corporation



**Bill Buxton**  
Principal, *Buxton Design*



**Gary Hamel**  
Chairman of *Strategos*

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## Thank You for an Awesome Year!

### Greetings:

It is hard to believe that this is my last presidential column for *Information Outlook*. My year as president has been awesome—a word many of our young colleagues use. I prefer to use “groovy!” I thought I would recap some of the adventures the SLA Board of Directors, staff, and membership faced during this association year and update you on our accomplishments.

### Simplification and Transparency

An SLA task force report in 2001 recommended a number of approaches we could take that would result in more simplified management of association activities as well as making the board of directors’ deliberations more transparent and simpler. We began that process this year by establishing consent agendas that allowed the board to approve tactical initiatives and thus allow more time for strategic discussions that would impact our board decisions. We initiated a Member Forum Session. We began these forums during the October 2004 board meeting and the January 2005 Leadership Summit. The board heard comments from the members-at-large, and we were able to make important decisions based upon member input from a good cross section of the membership. We will continue this activity at the June 2005 annual meeting. I thank the board of directors and the SLA staff for their work and trust during this transition period.

### Task Forces

The wonderful thing about task forces is that they are quickly formed and they work on a very specific charge. We had four task forces this year. One dealt with recommending a new model for our Leadership Summits, both held in January and June. The January 2005 Leadership Summit was the first attempt at this new format, and we are looking forward to the June 2005 Leadership Summit. We heard a report from the Committee Reorganization Task Force. There were a number of rec-

ommendations from this group, and many have already been implemented. A third task force was formed to arrive at language and methodologies information professionals can use to show our value as professionals. This task force will be working with the Public Relations Committee and our colleagues at SLA headquarters to arrive at new value statements and future directions. The fourth task force is working on ways to communicate information and share knowledge during natural disasters. This task force was established in part in response to the December 2004 tsunami in South Asia that affected so many people in that part of our planet. My thanks go out to each of the chairs and task force members for their hard work.

### New Communities and New Regions

Two new communities, or divisions, were formed this year: the Government Information Division and the Competitive Intelligence Division. Both were formed to fill very specific needs for government information that affects all market segments and for new competitive intelligence strategies and programs. Our newest chapter is the Australia/New Zealand Chapter. It has doubled in size since it was formed in 2004, and we are looking forward to hearing more about the chapter’s activities in the near future. I thank the community and regional leaders for their hard work in forming these new units.

### Presidential Visits

I was fortunate to visit the New Jersey Chapter on the occasion of its 70th anniversary. If you ever have any questions about New Jersey, just ask me—the chapter presented me with a copy of *The Encyclopedia of New Jersey* for my home library. The Kentucky Chapter celebrated its 30th anniversary—we had a wonderful time there, meeting many of the members and touring some of the innovative information centers in Louisville. Then it was on to western Canada, where I visited members in Vancouver, Calgary, and Winnipeg.

Not only am I an honorary citizen of the country of Texas (an honor bestowed upon

me when I visited Texas in March 2004), I am also an honorary citizen of Calgary, Alberta. I was awarded a hat as part of the “White Hat Welcome” ceremony, and if you ever want to see photos of Winnipeg in all seasons, just ask me. I have a copy of such a book, autographed by the mayor of Winnipeg. (By the way, it is very cold in Winnipeg, which is why many Canadians refer to the city as “Winterpeg.”)

I ended my presidential year by visiting the Southern Appalachian Chapter and the Heart of America Chapter. My thanks go out to all the chapter leaders who graciously shepherded me from one venue to the other.

### The End...

I have thoroughly enjoyed this year as your president, and I am honored to have met so many forward-thinking information professionals. During my travels I met with students who are working on their master’s degrees in information science, library science, and archives. I also met with a number of students who are enrolled in library technician programs. Each one of these individuals who are entering our profession is passionate about the products and services we offer and is ready to begin showing our value to their organizations. I wish them much luck and success.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible this June in Toronto for SLA’s annual meeting. As always, Make it so!



*Ethel H. Salonen*



By Carolyn J. Sosnowski, MLIS

With this month's column, we begin a series on blogs. Over the next few issues, I'll explore some blogs of interest for information professionals, and then provide more information about the blogging world. Previously, I've written about the ResourceShelf ([www.resourceshelf.com](http://www.resourceshelf.com)), the Librarians' Index to the Internet (<http://lii.org/>), and SiteLines ([www.workingfaster.com/sitelines/](http://www.workingfaster.com/sitelines/)) blogs. Here are other suggestions for keeping current. Visit the sites directly, or subscribe through your favorite feed reader.

### Library Stuff

[www.librarystuff.net](http://www.librarystuff.net)

This interactive (lots of comments!) and ahead-of-the-curve blog by Steven M. Cohen reports on technology (search, blog, RSS, communication, etc.), conferences, and, well, many other topics. Cohen is a frequent conference presenter and a library world personality, and his enthusiasm really shows in the blog (around since August 2000, believe it or not). There are several new postings every day, which are conversational, and oftentimes inquiring, in nature. Find out about other blogs, how to blog, and what's going on at the conferences here.

### LISNews.com

[www.lisnews.com](http://www.lisnews.com)

Blake Carver created LISNews back in 1999 and, true to the librarian that he is, has developed a site that is full of information, well organized, and a real community. A "collaborative" blog, LISNews encourages readers to establish an account and submit articles, editorials...or whatever the contributor wants to post. Registration also permits users to create blogs, moderate (rate comments), and add a signature to comments. (Karma also plays a role; see the FAQ for more information.) As a bonus, the site offers Web hosting for just \$10 a month.

### ONLINE Insider

[www.onlineinsider.net](http://www.onlineinsider.net)

*Information Today's* Marydee Ojala writes this technology-focused blog on "products, people, and events" in the information arena. The items published here are more up to date than

Continued on page 8...

### Strategy Guru Gary Hamel to be Closing Keynote

Business strategist Gary Hamel will deliver the keynote address at the closing general session of SLA's 2005 Annual Conference in Toronto.

"Gary Hamel is one of the most sought-after management speakers in the world. He is an expert on innovation, and we believe his address adds great value to the conference experience," said Ethel H. Salonen, SLA president.

Hamel is chairman of Strategos, director of the Woodside Institute, and a visiting professor of strategic and international management at the London Business School. The *Economist* has labeled Hamel "the world's reigning strategy guru," and MIT's Peter Senge has called him "the most influential thinker on strategy in the Western world."

His book *Competing for the Future* is the best-selling business strategy book ever and was *Business Week's* management book of the year in 1994. Hamel's most recent book, *Leading the Revolution*, is a global bestseller and industry revolutionaries like Virgin's Richard Branson and Dell's Michael Dell have described it as the essential guide to business innovation.

Hamel originated concepts such as "strategic intent," "core competence," "corporate imagination," and "industry revolution." The 2003 Global Ranking of Business Thinkers, the most recent survey available, ranked Hamel fourth—higher than notables such as Bill Gates, Stephen Covey, Jack Welch, and many others, including Branson and Dell.

"Our ability to offer a speaker of this caliber says a lot about our association, our membership, and our mission. This kind of learning opportunity positions our members to grow—as leaders within SLA and in their individual careers," said Janice R. Lachance, SLA executive director.

Hamel's appearance is made possible through the support of Factiva, a Dow Jones and Reuters Company.

Hamel bolsters an already impressive keynote speaker line-up at SLA 2005. Keynote sessions will feature Don Tapscott, an international authority on business strategy, and Bill Buxton, designer, researcher, and expert on the relationship between technology and creativity.

For more information about the conference, see [www.sla.org/toronto2005](http://www.sla.org/toronto2005).



## Kentucky Chapter Pushes for Federal Funding

When the going gets tough the SLA Kentucky Chapter gets going. That is what happened when President Bush gave the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) zero funding in his proposed 2006 budget. Chapter Secretary Stacey Greenwell stepped forward and led the association to add a link to their site advocating continued funding. The NHPRC request is an "action alert" on the SLA Web site (<http://capwiz.com/sla/home>).

Due to the efforts of Kentucky librarians, the Council of State Historical

Records Coordinators has indicated Kentucky as a model for other states to follow.

This struggle is important to Kentucky, which has received more than \$2.1 million in funding to support such projects as the Kentucky Virtual Library, the Kentucky Local Records Grants program administered by Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, the publication of the Henry Clay Papers at the University of Kentucky, and Louis Brandeis and D.W. Griffiths publications at the University of Louisville.

NHPRC money also has been given directly to institutions to preserve and process important collections. These

include the University of Louisville for microfilming the *Louisville Defender* newspaper, the Filson Historical Society for preserving important Kentucky manuscripts, KDLA and the Kentucky Historical Society for microfilming the records of Kentucky governors from 1792 to 1927, and University of Kentucky for the preservation of photographs from the *Lexington Herald Leader*.

"Without this important funding, Kentucky history would deteriorate and fade from knowledge," a press release from the Kentucky chapter said.

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what's printed in the bi-monthly *Online Magazine*. Ojala posts new entries every few days (more often when reporting on industry events), complementing news items with opinion and notes about her own travels. The archives of ONLINE Insider go back to the site's inception in January, and comments have been enabled (few have been posted so far).

## Open Access News

[www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html](http://www.earlham.edu/~peters/fos/fosblog.html)

In just one part of a large site that covers open access issues, editor Peter Suber and many other contributors aim to educate and disseminate news and information about the open access movement. Posts are frequent, lengthy (in a good way), and include links to source documents such as press releases, articles, and a variety of scholarly publications. The blog and archives are searchable, a great feature if you want to trace a particular development or find out more about an OA proponent.

## SearchEngineWatch

<http://blog.searchenginewatch.com/blog/>

It's so hard to keep up with developments in search engine technology, so why not let the experts do it for you? The SEW blog posts up-to-the-minute news on the favorites (you know the names) and newer players (why not try a few?). Danny Sullivan, Chris Sherman, and Gary Price keep readers informed about features of the search tools and what is going on behind the scenes at the companies that create the search engines and run them. In addition to post groupings by day, week, and month (available to all readers), SEW members also have access to categorized entries. Reader comments can be posted through SEW Forums (free with registration), a separate part of the massive and informative SEW Web site.

*Carolyn Sosnowski, MLIS, is an information specialist at SLA.*

You may send descriptions of your favorite Web sites to [magazine@sla.org](mailto:magazine@sla.org). Include the URL, your name, and a sentence about what you do. 🌐

## Staff Member of the Year

Penny Sympson, librarian at Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates Inc., has won the Special Library Staff Member of the Year award from the North Suburban Library System in Wheeling, Illinois.

The award recognizes exceptional contributions to NSLS and its member libraries.

During the six years Sympson has been an NSLS member, she has been active in a number of organizations. An SLA member, she is in the Illinois Chapter and the Engineering Division.

NSLS is a consortium of more than 650 academic, public, school, and special libraries in north suburban Cook, Kane, Lake, and McHenry counties.



## Inaugural Texas Vendor Award

Tina Byrne of Factiva is the first recipient of the SLA Texas Chapter Lone Star Vendor Award. The award is designed to recognize exceptional vendor customer service and support. Byrne was honored for her outstanding customer service acumen, in-depth product knowledge, and outgoing personality. "She knows her product's capabilities, understands the information professionals' role within their organizations, and knows how to incorporate her product's content into the information environment. In addition, she is extremely supportive of Texas Chapter events and is a frequent presenter for SLA on a variety of topics," said a press release from the chapter. Byrne has been a project manager with Factiva, a Dow Jones and Reuters Company, and is based in Factiva's Houston, Texas, office. She has an MLS degree and more than 18 years of experience in the information field. Pictured from left are Marcia Schemper-Carlock, chapter vendor liaison; Aaron Buchannan, chapter president, and Tina Byrne.

# YOU'RE THE EXPERT SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW

## Here Are *Information Outlook's* Major Topics for 2005

We're always looking for new authors for *Information Outlook*. That's one way we get new ideas, learn new ways of doing things.

The editorial calendar below shows major topics we want to cover for each issue in 2005.

*Please note:* The editorial calendar is only a starting point. We need more articles on more topics than we've listed below.

If you want to write on a topic that isn't on the calendar, or on a topic that isn't listed for a particular issue, we want to hear from you. For example, articles on topics like marketing, searching, and technology will be welcome throughout the year. We want to hear all of your ideas for articles.

Also, our descriptions of the topics may not fit your approach. If you have a different idea for a topic, let us know.

### August

**Global networking.** How have you built your network of fellow professionals? How has it helped you succeed?

**E-publishing.**

### September

**Knowledge management.** In an information-based economy, how is your organization getting the most out of all its intellectual capital?

### October

**Marketing library services.**

### November

**Trends in library design.** A library is more than a collection of books and periodicals. How can design make a difference for your clients? Or, with increasing digitization of information, are the days of physical libraries nearly through?

**E-publishing.**

### December

**Purchasing.** How do you get the best deal for your company's information needs?

### Deadlines

In general, we need to receive completed articles six weeks prior to the month of publication: for example, October 15 for the December issue.

However, we prefer that authors inquire before submitting a manuscript. If you are writing for a particular issue, your query should be early enough to allow for writing the article.

For more information on writing for *Information Outlook*, see [www.sla.org/content/Shop/Information/writingforio.cfm](http://www.sla.org/content/Shop/Information/writingforio.cfm), or write [jadams@sla.org](mailto:jadams@sla.org).



## How to React to – and Manage – Change

By Debbie Schachter

In previous columns, I have written about many important and practical management skills, from project management to performance planning. One important underlying skill for the successful management of all such activities is the ability to manage change in your library. Change is inevitable in the workplace today; but effective change management is not universally understood or applied as a management function in libraries.

It is important to understand how you as an individual react to change—be it change that you implement or change that is imposed upon you. By developing an awareness of how you react to change, you will become more effective in helping your staff deal with change in your library environment. By better understanding how you and others generally respond to change, you will become more skilled at avoiding the pitfalls of implementing change and the damaging negative reactions to change.

At the broadest level, change can be understood simply as the movement from one state to another, or, as social psychologist Kurt Lewin describes it, unfreezing from the current situation, experiencing a movement phase, then refreezing in the new state (Robbins, p. 634). The difficulty in implementing change lies in the effort involved in moving yourself and your staff from the status quo to a new situation. Every new initiative that affects how library staff members do their work, what work they do, or with whom they work will follow this path. Your task as manager is to ensure that the change goal is achieved and to manage the change as it unfolds.

When change is imposed upon your library by an external agent, are you aware of how you react? Do you exhibit stress or react in a negative manner that is visible to your staff? When you are undergoing change, one manage-

ment expert suggests practicing a Japanese concept called *shoshin* or “beginner’s mind”—a state that allows you to be open to learning and change (Sullivan, p. 121). You can practice *shoshin* whether the change is externally applied or implemented by you. A state of openness will allow you to be aware of the benefits and pitfalls of the proposed change, from your perspective and that of the library staff. It will allow you to bring about the shift in states with more positive results.

You should always be seeking change, as you strive to provide the most effective services and products to meet the changing business needs of your customers. But, as you are undoubtedly aware, when you implement change in your library, you often encounter resistance, within yourself or from library staff. And resistance can lead to unexpected outcomes. For example, you discover that a new software application will allow you to automate a clerical activity that is the source of frustration for some of your staff. You decide to purchase this product but, to your dismay, staff members respond negatively because they perceive that you are trying to reduce their work and possibly downsize the library—not your intention at all.

Resistance arises out of fear of what the change will bring. The status quo may not be ideal, but for many people it is preferable to a change that brings an unknown way of working. Resistance to change manifests similarly at the individual, departmental, and organizational levels: inertia due to

habit, fear due to loss of security, perceived threat to authority or responsibilities, potential negative economic implications, fear of the unknown (Robbins, p. 635). As the library manager, you should be aware of your own feelings about change and of the reasons why employees may resist new work processes and changes to library roles or staff structure.

How can you reduce the negative impact or negative responses to change? Awareness of people’s natural reactions to change is the starting point. Then you can use the following key practices to ease the implementation of change in your library:

1. Be aware of how you react to change and model behavior that shows a willingness to accept change.

Employees look to you for clues on how they should react to change, whether it is internally or externally introduced. If you know that you are somewhat resistant to change, making an effort to reduce your negative reactions and show an openness to change will lessen the possibility of a negative response from your staff. If you react to change with stress, it will be apparent to your staff that you are uncomfortable with what is happening and they will be uncomfortable, too. To model a positive attitude toward change, mentally step back from the personal effects of the change on you and concentrate on the larger benefits that the change is meant to bring.

2. Make sure you have a vision of the change and the reasons for it.

If you are to effect change—to the

*Debbie Schachter has a master's degree in library science and a master's degree in business administration. She is the associate executive director of the Jewish Family Service Agency in Vancouver, British Columbia, where she is responsible for financial management, human resources, database and IT systems, and grant application management. Schachter has more than 15 years' experience in management and supervision, technology planning and support, in a variety of nonprofit and for-profit settings. She can be reached at dschachter@jfsa.ca.*



organization of the library, to a process, or to a procedure—do you have a compelling vision of what the change is and how it will be implemented? Can you convey to your staff the need for the change and what it will mean in practical terms? If you cannot do this, you will not be able to convince your staff to accept the change, and it will be difficult to implement.

3. Communicate with those who will be affected by the change.

Before implementing any change, convey your vision for the change and its outcomes. During the change process, continue to provide timely communication to your staff and to customers who will be affected by the change. Include all the basic information about the proposed change, such as how it will affect them, the time frame for implementation, and the planned outcomes.

4. Involve the right people in the change process.

Involve all staff who will be affected by the change. Simply telling staff members about the change will not suffice; you should involve them, including seeking their input on the decision to make the change and how to implement it. If they are excluded from the process, the people who will be affected by the change can cause it to be delayed or to fail—some employees may simply become disgruntled, while others may attempt to sabotage the implementation of the change.

Staff members who will be affected should partici-

pate from the earliest stages in evaluating the need for change, planning the change, implementing it, and participating in the follow-up assessment. Staff participation will increase buy-in and will also help identify potential obstacles that you may not have anticipated but that may be obvious to your staff. If customers will be affected, make sure they understand why you are making the change and when it will be in place. Encourage customer feedback about the change.

5. Use negotiation and coercion, if necessary.

Negotiation and coercion are the last resort, but they may be required in extreme cases. Accept the fact that all your staff may not buy in, regardless of how well you involve them in the process. Respond to general negativity toward the change through communication and involvement, and by being open to employees' suggestions. Be aware of specific employees who may attempt to sabotage the process by spreading their discontent. Make sure that these employees understand that their input is valued, but they will not be allowed to sabotage the process. In certain situations, you may have to use negotiation, coercion, and warnings to manage negative behavior.

As most of us can attest, change can bring about personal and professional rewards. It can also bring about a great deal of stress in the workplace. Change can result in unexpected

results even with the most well-developed plans and appropriate staff input. Regardless of any unpredictability or difficulty, change is a certainty in all workplaces, including libraries. Library managers must continue to seek out change and to manage their own response to change. Through skilful change management, the implementation and results of change can become a more positive concept in libraries, for both managers and staff.

### For More Information

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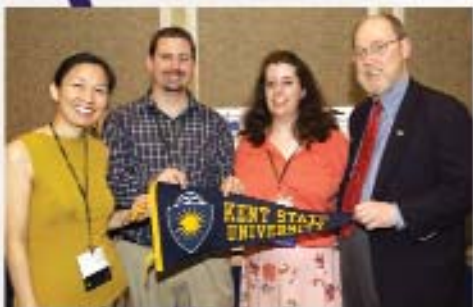
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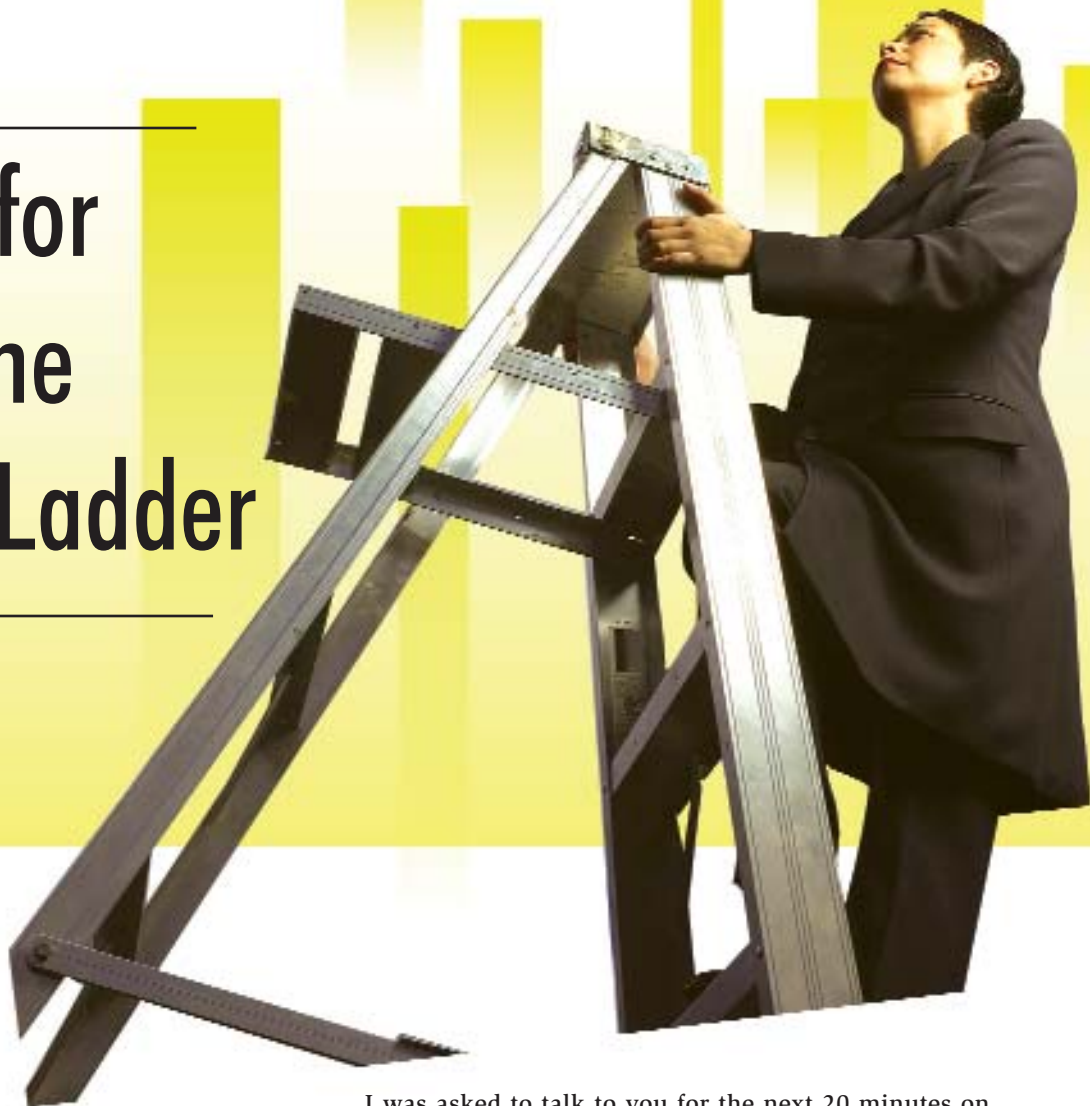
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# Strategies for Climbing the Corporate Ladder



By Susan Fifer Canby

Beta Phi Mu is an international organization founded in 1948 by a group of leading librarians and library educators to recognize and encourage scholastic achievement among library and information studies students. Each year, the Washington, D.C., chapter, on the basis of recommendations from the faculties of the University of Maryland and Catholic University of America library schools, invites graduates with high scholastic averages to join. Earlier this year, four new members were inducted in a program held at the National Public Radio headquarters in Washington, D.C., by Beta Phi Mu president Susan Fournier. I gave the following address:

I remember sitting where you are now in the winter of 1975, mostly thinking about finding a job, after having just graduated from CLIS, as I was being inducted into Beta Phi Mu. I also remember that Bill Gordon, director of the Prince George's County Library System and later executive director of ALA, spoke that night. I remember being so impressed with his passion for librarianship that I was determined to find a way to get to know him. Over the next years, I made opportunities to serve with him professionally in various capacities and even to develop a friendship. I hope my message can be as helpful to you as his was to me.

I was asked to talk to you for the next 20 minutes on strategies for climbing the corporate ladder. So while your mind may be on getting the right job to utilize your new training, I'm here to suggest that there are ways to make the most of any job so that you assume more responsibility and become a leader.

I'm not sure of the origin of the expression "corporate ladder," because it seems like a misnomer, suggesting a recognized structure—instead, I think the process is more organic than it is linear. And to make it more difficult, often the rungs of the ladder are invisible past a certain point. However, I will give you a little personal context, and then do a countdown of 10 strategies I have applied in my career to become the first NGS [National Geographic Society] vice president for libraries and information services.

*Susan Fifer Canby is vice president, libraries and information services, National Geographic Society, Washington, D.C.*





Like some of you, I came to this profession because I realized I had a bent for organization and liked to help people. I also had a little teaching and writing experience and probably some innate leadership skills. However, I was pretty clueless about what I wanted to do with my newly minted MLS.

I was encouraged by a librarian friend, Gene Kubal, whom I'd worked with at the Pentagon before library school, to attend some local professional meetings to meet some other librarians and talk to them about their jobs. I remember being open to any position where there was an opportunity to try to make a difference. My librarian friend said if she had it to do over again, she would apply to the National Geographic Society, which I did. Of course there were no jobs, and I was told that people had to die of old age before one would ever come up. However, I learned an important lesson early on: All employers are two weeks away from a vacancy—if you want to work somewhere, call for an information interview, volunteer for an internship, and find someone in the organization to put in a good word for you. I did some of those things, things happened, and I was hired as a circulation librarian in February 1975, a month after graduation.

In my first job, I found myself a manager of three paraprofessionals and armed with only one management course from the University of Maryland library school. The basic strategies I learned from Professor Paul Wasserman at CLIS were the underpinning of any management approach, and so bear with me if some of these tactics sound familiar.

## Starting the countdown with number 10:

### 10. Plan and set daily, weekly, monthly, and annual goals.

If you don't plan to go somewhere, you probably won't get to where you want to go. When I was hired in 1975 as a circulation librarian at the Geographic, I was the only one of 28 people who set annual goals and developed an action plan for the library. Soon my little staff of three began setting goals. Then, because we did—and actually achieved most of those goals, since they were in our headlights all the time—others began to follow our example. My staff calls that vision, but I just say it's good planning.

### 9. Report on impact.

Write regular and annual reports to describe your impact on your customers or organization. At first I worked for bosses who didn't understand why I bothered writing reports that they weren't even asking for. As time went on, these reports provided trending information, evolved into corporate history, and provided a reference point for questions that they will ask—seemingly out of the blue.

Again, it took a couple of years before all parts of the

library were writing annual reports, and a few more before we began to write them as one. Then the challenge became to get management to read and be influenced by our reports. That is an ongoing process. Today we write short, well-illustrated reports that focus on impact and short attention spans! We use our quarterly meeting sessions to teach our boss about our services, collections, and new ventures, and to engage his help. Often we are in the position of dispelling old notions of librarianship—it is our responsibility to teach our bosses about our skills, knowledge set, impact, and leadership.

### 8. Telling your story is an ongoing process.

First, you determine how your customer (whether staff, manager, client, student, or boss) learns or receives information best. If you're not sure, ASK. Usually bosses and customers want your message to be short and to the point. They want the message to be in their language, not in "librareze." My boss likes stories that help him remember our message.

For instance, my boss likes to tell the story about how as the CFO [chief financial officer], he challenged us to create a product to sell, because libraries usually are expense centers rather than revenue centers. It so happened that our archivists had wanted to write the story of the Geographic for years. They had the writing skills and knew how to find the illustrations from our collections, but they didn't have the necessary production skills. We agreed to write the history if he could help us with the production and manufacturing—his very strengths. Now he says he inspired us to do what most libraries don't do—but in point of fact we heard his question, saw it for the opportunity it was, responded in his terms, and produced the book *High Adventure*—something that sells briskly in our store, is used widely by our staff, and is often given as a gift in the field, because it is a good short story of the Society's history.

### 7. Find ways to leave the library and to meet people on their own turf.

From the start, I would plunk down with different people at lunch in our cafeteria and ask them about what they did and what challenges they faced. As they talked, I listened for ways and opportunities a librarian could help them be better at their jobs. Then I'd follow up. It wasn't long before my colleagues associated me with information they needed. And they became my informal departmental contacts when I needed information or support.

Today my staff and I meet once or twice a year with all the major business and editorial departments to talk about services and training and to remind them that we are their information advocates.

Seize opportunities to work with other departments to develop a lunchtime forum, build a database to resolve a problem, participate in emergency planning, to work with teams that emerge that will broaden your participation in the primary business of your organization.

Although I have always worked hard to know my customers, I also began to think beyond the library to determine potential synergies with separate library-like divisions—archives and records, indexing, and the map library. Out of these efforts came the opportunity to convert both the index and the map and archival catalogs to the same software the library used for its OPAC [online public access catalog].

## 6. Surround yourself with the best people.

When I was promoted to library director, eight years after starting at the Geographic, I was 32 years old, only the fourth librarian since 1888, with 32 people reporting to me. Many of my managers and colleagues were between 10 to 20 years my senior, and for many, change was a very uncomfortable notion.

Using the discipline of setting goals and building accountability, we worked to create a new vision for the library. Over the next few years, as the staff inevitably turned over, I used every opportunity to hire people who were smarter than I was, who could complement the team I was building.

I have always tried to hire the very best staff and wager on my being able to engage them to take us to the next level. I'm an impatient person, yet it took nearly 10 years to really reset the course and build enough momentum to make the changes necessary to position the library to meet the digital information age and provide a competitive edge for the Society.

## 5. Contribute to our professional organizations.

During those years when things didn't seem to move as quickly as I would have wanted, I volunteered in various professional organizations to practice leadership, networking, and project management skills. Of course I found them helpful, as I described, in landing my first job. I also identified people in our field who were knowledgeable or skilled—like Bill Gordon and Shirley Loo—and found ways to work with them to see how they managed. Our organizations often expect us, as librarians, to be better educated than others. Since I realized that I wouldn't know everything, I needed to know who knew what, for when the crunches came.

And although at first it is probably subliminal, bosses and colleagues are influenced by the outside recognition we receive. Although I have worked for the Society for 30 years, I update my resume every year. In fact, I give a copy to my boss at evaluation time and highlight the changes that were made that year, to remind him that I am intent on improving my value to the Geographic, and, of course, my marketability.

I think my boss appreciates that I do my management job well, but also on some level that I have exercised leadership as president of various organizations and; represented the Washington, D.C., area on the OCLC Members Council; served on the Washington Literacy Council board and as a literacy tutor; and that I am asked

to speak at meetings and conferences. Your library colleagues become your friends, network, source of ideas, and your insurance policy against becoming parochial.

## 4. Innovation and initiative means tackling the “white space” – those places within the library and outside the library where no one else is working.

Sometimes that “white space” is the work pressure points—the spots where the work piles up that no one is tackling: the collection that needed shelf reading the Web site that needed updating—whatever.

Early on I couldn't expect to be handed juicier responsibilities if I wasn't willing to undertake projects that others didn't want to do and figure ways to improve the process. Mostly taking on new responsibility is not about being anointed—it is about finding and working in the white space.

Thirty years ago, while shelf reading the collection, I realized that we had a significant historical collection of women's travelogues that were not retrievable as a collection and, therefore, not being used effectively. I wrote a bibliography and a short article about them for the *SLA Geography & Map Bulletin* and persuaded our catalogers to add a new subject heading to aggregate them. Then I lobbied the Geographic for 10 years to publish an article or a book on these amazing women. In 2000, the Society finally published a book on women travelers called *Living with Cannibals*, and I was asked to write the afterword.

Later I would help the Society develop an intranet, build an internal university, introduce federated searching and communities of practice, evaluate changing demographics, and more, because there was white space where no one was working and where our skills could be used. Don't politely wait to be asked—assert and insert yourself.

## 3. Embrace change as part of doing business.

By 1988, along with the Society's centennial celebration, things were changing. I noticed more MBAs joining the organization and the editorial staff was being edged out of their premier leadership position. I decided, although we still reported to the editor of *National Geographic* magazine, that we needed to hire a business reference librarian to shore up these new decision makers with competitive intelligence and environmental scanning. This was a difficult case to make as the editorial staff saw themselves as our main clients, and as we went through the downsizing of the early 1090s, they didn't want us diverted from their increasing editorial information needs. But we made the case and got our business librarian, who proved to be just the wedge we needed to begin to work the white space of market and business research and to support senior management's growing information needs.

This is not to say I have never been blindsided. In the early 1990s during this transition, our librarians were act-

ing as gatekeepers to online searching—having been the first ones to learn and introduce it, we knew we were the most cost-effective searchers, and in a time of serious cost containment, we thought we were serving the organization best by handling the avalanche of search requests ourselves, given their costs, the training required, and the stress our clients said they were under.

However, I was looking at the trees and not the forest. After a few battles with senior management, I realized that what the organization needed from us was to become a “change agent”—to assist staff to make their way onto the Information Highway; to set the competency levels, the speed limits, and the safety rules to become self-sufficient with searching and new technologies. This meant we also had to work with the online vendors, who also wanted our end users to use their products, but first we needed to help them improve their search interfaces and develop new pricing structures that would enable us to offer their products to our organization. Our role had changed from being primarily expert searchers, to expert trainers, expert negotiators, and expert scouts, while still acting as the safety net.

Change is part of every organization now, so if you falter, look up, get back up, and tackle the issue from another angle. Use your network to keep your fingers on the pulse of your customers—and watch for emerging trends...which sometimes aren't articulated or may even seem counterintuitive.

## 2. Take necessary risks.

When we switched to client server technology in the mid-1990s, we saw the opportunity to move not only our catalogs and indexes, but our research guides, policies, history, and daily reports onto the Web. This took creating the prototype and presenting it on a server so that management could visualize what we were talking about. We created the first bootleg HTML pages, which positioned us to be part of the launch team for our external site (nationalgeographic.com) and to organize a team internally to build the Society's intranet. Although I kept my risk-averse boss at the time informed of what we were doing, I don't think she realized the impact of these new technologies until the library's site launched and happily, there was no going back.

Then with the pain of downsizing came new opportunities. My boss asked me to take on Indexing, a division I had already worked with when I was looking at synergies to automate. Because I didn't know much about indexing, I decided to learn. I volunteered to write a cumulative index for six volumes of local history in my community. It took me three years of spare time. This effort outside NGS reassured my staff of my interest and ability with indexing. A couple years later, I was also asked to take on the Archives and Records Library, which again, I didn't know much about at first, but have learned to manage through listening, research, and hard work.

**And finally:**

## 1. Watch for the windows of opportunity.

A lot in life is just being prepared when there is a crack in the window that will allow you to wiggle through. A few years ago, with 25 years of increasingly more responsible experience under my belt, I was recruited to interview for a VP position at an art museum in New York State. I advised my boss, and reminded him of the breadth of my responsibilities and why the art museum had asked me to interview. Given this new opportunity, I asked him what the chances were to be recognized as an officer at the Geographic for the value that libraries and information services bring to the organization, or if, in his opinion, it was necessary for me to consider outside opportunities.

Before this I don't think it had occurred to him that a librarian might aspire to be a vice president. When he next met with the Society's president, this conversation motivated him to introduce the idea, which was endorsed. I wanted to be promoted for my staff, to raise the ceiling of potential, and to reassure each of them of the value the organization placed on us. I also wanted to be an example in our profession that might encourage others. We are often too quick to think our field translates into director or manager, when in fact we can be change agents and contribute to the strategic direction of our organizations.

So in conclusion: Know that organizations are unlikely to promote you if there isn't someone handy who could take on the job you've been doing, because organizations don't like to change what's already working. If you want to rise, and unless you are willing to assume more responsibilities, it is best to groom a successor for as many aspects of your job as you can, so you are free to make a change when the window cracks open.

Don't be disappointed if you don't find a career ladder per se in your organization; you may need to build one. If so, it may be an opportunity to build your own job, because sometimes the best jobs are the ones you help create yourself.

There are obviously other strategies that you will learn in your careers, but I hope that one or two of the 10 I've recounted will be of help as you start your climb. Congratulations for completing your library degree and for the excellence that enabled you to be selected for Beta Phi Mu. Good luck to each of you. 🌟

# Taking Charge of Your Career



By Kevin Manion

There are no secret recipes for a successful career. Librarians more than ever have an opportunity to chart their own future. It is essential for library school students and information professionals at the beginning of their careers to understand that their professional and career development is in their hands—no one is going to come along and open the doors for them.

I moved from shelving at a Canadian university library to associate director of information services at a major American multimedia publisher in six years. So far, I've learned that creating and recognizing opportunities, networking, working hard and having no ego, and just a touch of luck are part of any successful career.

## Creating Opportunities

When I entered McGill University in 1995, I had some idea where I wanted my career to go, but I had no set plans. I understood that I needed to start with a broad base of experience, so I quit free-

lance translation—which was paying the bills (including a mortgage!)—and focused on getting a job in the university's library system and connecting with academic librarians and library school faculty. While I had worked as a professional translator in a large financial institution, I knew that I had to start at the bottom in this new profession, so I accepted a minimum-wage shelving job in the government documents library. I worked hard and got my hands very dirty on dusty old volumes. Within a few months, I understood the various classification systems and was asked to work on a project selecting 18th- and 19th-century materials for rebinding.

While working in government documents, I heard of a shelving/circulation job in the Education Library—I did my homework and learned about the library and its clientele, applied, and got the position. I now had two part-time jobs ... but I wasn't done. Within a few months, I was offered a part-time reference job in the Education Library. I had worked hard and demonstrated growing skills and a willingness to learn from the

library staff; the reference job was my reward. So I left government documents and moved on. Never one to let an opportunity pass, I was soon interviewing for a second part-time job at one of the teaching hospital libraries—I knew nothing about medical libraries and thought it would be valuable experience. I got the job not by pretending I knew anything about medical libraries but by demonstrating interest in the subject, a willingness to work hard, and an interest in the collection and the hospital community.

During the two years I spent in graduate school, I worked in four different libraries at the university and for a professor on an international project selecting library science materials for developing countries. I could have stayed in one job for the duration of my degree, but I believed that broad experience would be a valuable asset and would demonstrate to potential employers my willingness to learn. This decision served me well in obtaining my first full-time job, and the exposure to different library environments has helped me in my career so far.

## Taking Charge

Having banked some decent experience and made some good connections over the two years, I attended an ALA mid-winter conference and interviewed for a slew of jobs. One of the posted jobs—electronic resources librarian in the research libraries of the New York Public Library—offered interesting opportunities, but it meant moving to New York, which I had not considered.

I interviewed for the job with two different people, sent the appropriate thank-you cards, and then waited. After a couple of weeks I decided that if I seriously wanted the job and felt ready to make the move, I needed to take matters into my own hands. I e-mailed the two librarians who had interviewed me and told them I would be in New York City the following week and would love an opportunity to visit the library and talk to them more about the position. They were delighted to hear from me. By taking this proactive step and going out on a limb, I took my career into my own hands. I believe that this additional time with the interviewers gave me an edge over other candidates: A few weeks later I was offered the position.

## Networking

During my second year in graduate school, I became aware of the importance of networking and building professional relationships. When I left a job, I made sure to tell qualified fellow students about the position and let the librarians in charge know about candidates who fit the job description and had the right skills and attitude. Although I didn't realize it at the time, I was not only networking but also helping to ensure that the libraries were well served with the inside track on the best candidates. Even today, I get calls from colleagues and headhunters I know in the profession who ask for recommendations for candidates.

I like to tell the story of how I landed a job at *Consumer Reports*. Five years ago, I was invited to a cocktail party at a friend's house in New Jersey, where I met Diane Goldstein, manager of the New York office of InfoCurrent, a placement firm for information professionals. Diane and I started chatting about work, career paths, and real estate. I told her I

was house shopping north of the city, and her eyes lit up. "I have a great job for you," she said. "I'm not really looking right now," was my response. "Send me your resume." "Really....I'm not looking." Six days later I was offered a job as manager of the Information Center at Consumer Reports.

Networking is an essential part of healthy career development. The associations in our profession create forums for lifelong learning, networking, and leadership development. In the past couple of years, I have become more involved in SLA, first volunteering to work at a career fair, then speaking at a conference, and, recently, accepting a board position with the Business and Finance Division.

There is a great deal of satisfaction for me in giving back to the profession. Moreover, I have met and become friends with some remarkable people. These are people who give of their time, expertise, and experience to help others and promote our profession.

But there is some additional value to making connections. My organization is in the process of selecting an electronic records management system. Having a support system of colleagues to call on for ideas and advice is priceless when you're faced with making decisions that will affect your entire organization.

Recently, we began searching for a new researcher to join our ranks. The candidate who had the inside track was an experienced librarian who had worked with us earlier as a temporary staffer. I happened to run into her at an SLA event. The morning after the event, I walked into my senior director's office and suggested that we interview this candidate for the position. A few weeks later, she joined our team; since then, she has been promoted to a senior staff position.

## Continuing Education

Look at your strengths and weaknesses. Think about what you are afraid of and take it on—head on! You can only understand the areas where you need to grow by facing up to your own shortcomings. None of us is an expert in everything, and all of us have at least one area in which we feel weak. Financial management? Managing diffi-


cult personnel situations? Don't ignore it.

I used to be terrified of speaking in front of a large group; in fact, it had gotten to the point where I was beginning to damage my career by avoiding situations where I would have to speak publicly. I built up my courage and faced up to my fears and took an American Management Association course on presentation skills. The difference this course has made is astonishing. I applied the concepts I learned in the three-day course, and today I welcome the opportunity to speak to groups; I have done it numerous times since taking the course.

I am lucky enough to work for an organization that values professional development. In our annual performance appraisal process, we identify areas we would like to develop and build a development plan. From learning new databases to searching skills to advanced courses in competitive intelligence or management, we support staff and create the opportunity for growth and development.

## No Secret Recipes

I started this article by admitting that there are no secret recipes for a successful career. We all know that we are in a time of great change for our profession. The future is filled with infinite possibilities and opportunities, and they are there for us to discover. Not sure of the road you should take? Talk to colleagues, go to a seminar, and join an SLA committee. There is strength and knowledge in numbers. Where our profession and our own careers go in the coming years will depend on how much we take the lead in defining ourselves and our field. If we don't do the defining and create the path, someone else will do it for us.

*Kevin Manion is associate director in the Strategic Planning and Information Services Department at Consumer Reports; he is responsible for research coordination and oversight, administering the corporate records program, and overseeing the archives. Kevin is active in SLA, currently serving as secretary of the Business and Finance Division. He is working on a book on the archives of Consumer Reports that will be published in fall 2005. Contact him at MANIKE@consumer.org.* 

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# Seven Helpful Steps to Get You to the Top

By Dan Tonkery, MLS

Librarians can climb to the top of the profession through many different avenues. In my 35-year career, I've been fortunate to work as a librarian in many different roles, from advancing to a senior position at the National Library of Medicine to working as an associate university librarian at UCLA and then moving over to the business side of the industry, where I served as president and CEO of three different library services companies.

From this unique background, I have found several healthy career habits to be invaluable in helping me achieve my professional goals.

## 1. Develop your professional strengths.

Any person working in the library should come into the profession with more than one area of expertise or strength. In my case it was with a background of science (biology) and computer science. Through on-the-job training, I

**Libraries are people-based places and our profession is very much a relationship business. Don't underestimate the importance of networking.**

gained other skills such as negotiation, and accounting and financial services.

In today's competitive job market, it is essential to have strong communication skills, extensive computer knowledge with a concentration on technical skills, and a subject focus that is helpful in the library setting. Be prepared for a lifelong learning experience and look for the special skills that are most useful in a library setting.


Develop a proper understanding of bibliographic control and the principles behind it. One of my most important classes in library school focused on bibliographic control—in the Dark Ages we called it cataloging—and that has formed a strong basis for my understanding of the organization of information.

## 2. Network, network, network!

Libraries are still based on people and our profession is still very much a relationship business. Early in your career, start building a professional network. To do this effectively, you need to get out and participate in regional and national meetings with your peers. While funding is often limited, don't underestimate the importance of networking, and what can come from the relationships you've built over the years.

Networking is a continuing process. Many of the people with whom you networked in the early part of your career will retire, and you must focus on rebuilding that network of influential

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people. It is not uncommon for me to find that I have known the last six directors of some of the major libraries in the United States.

### 3. Seek leadership and volunteer opportunities.

Become an advocate for your profession. Library associations offer great opportunities to help you meet new people, expand your skill set and assume leadership roles. Some of my best friends in the profession have come from boards or committees where we both served.

Be the first to volunteer. Enthusiastically take on assignments. Don't be afraid to tackle projects that are new or seem difficult. Successfully fulfilling these roles will help build your reputation among peers.

### 4. Take risks.

Too often, we avoid taking risks for fear of failure and fear of the unknown. If you want to get ahead, you've got to step outside your comfort zone.

You will never know if you are capable of accepting a new role until you roll up your sleeves and do it. Learn from your successes and your failures. Successful people take risks every day. Risks help us identify when our careers need to go in another direction.

### 5. Update your skills.

Lifelong learning is vital to our profession. Seek continuing education opportunities. Make a commitment to update your skill set on a regular basis. On-the-job training is also important. Embrace

new assignments that require new skills.

### 6. Cut your losses and move on!

It's important to develop a sense of timing. Many jobs start out as great learning and growth opportunities, and then you hit a plateau. Learn to recognize when it is time to cut your losses and move on to the next position. When you have exhausted what you can learn and what you can contribute to a current job, pursue the next opportunity.

### 7. Identify mentors.

This is perhaps the most important suggestion, and one that has been very rewarding to me through the years. Early in your career, find a star in the profession and seek their

advice and training.

If your career goal is to become a library director, then locate the top 10 library directors in your region or country and find a way to introduce yourself or make an opportunity to meet them at one of the national meetings.

Develop more than one mentor in different areas, and as you advance, consider choosing another mentor at the next level. Choosing the correct individual(s) to work with is one of the most critical decisions you can make to influence career advancement.

I have been privileged to be mentored by some of the best in our profession. Having benefited from that early guidance, I now have an opportunity to be a mentor as well. That has been one of the most satisfying aspects of my professional career. 🌐

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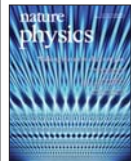
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# Competencies for Information Professionals of the 21st Century

## Professional Competencies

- Managing Information Organizations
- Managing Information Resources
- Managing Information Services
- Applying Information Tools and Technologies

## Personal Competencies

- Sees the big picture
- Takes calculated risks; shows courage and tenacity when faced with opposition
- Communicates effectively

## Core Competencies

- Commitment to professional excellence and ethics, and to the values and principles of the profession.

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# If You're Flexible, Adaptable, and Willing to Take Risks It's a Great Time to Be an Information Professional



If you think the information profession has changed over the last few years, you ain't seen nothing yet.

Change will continue—and you'll have to adapt and lead or you'll be left behind, says T. Scott Plutchak, associate professor and director of the Lister Hill Library of the Health Sciences at the University of Alabama, Birmingham.

Plutchak, who has written and presented extensively on library and information science, will speak at a luncheon presented by the Leadership and Management Division and sponsored by LexisNexis and Basch Subscriptions Inc., during the SLA annual conference in Toronto.

He spoke with *Information Outlook* last month in a telephone interview.

**IO:** The description of your conference presentation says information professionals are at a transition point as “profound” and “momentous” as Gutenberg’s invention of movable type. How is the transition going?

**Plutchak:** On any given day I think a lot of people are very frustrated and frightened. That is certainly the case in the health sciences sector. What I tend to tell people is this is really a fabulous time to be in this business. But it does require perhaps a greater degree of experimentation and risk-taking than has been the case in the past. And I'm not sure that people who got into the library profession, say, 10 to 15 years ago are always the most temperamentally suited to that kind of environment. So it's been very hard for a lot of people.

**IO:** So, what are some of the opportunities?

**Plutchak:** The opportunities are vast because I think the skills and abilities that we actually have—and sometimes we're not good at really recognizing them—are really needed more than ever before. The information space has become so much more complicated. The need for good information resources has become so important that every organization,

entity, business, whatever, has a much, much greater need to manage its information effectively.

And I think those individuals who are good at identifying the needs of the organization they work for and then being creative in identifying solutions are going to find that they can become very indispensable to those organizations very quickly. But it requires rethinking your role and rethinking your relationship to the organization.

Again, as an example from the area that I'm most familiar with, I often hear hospital librarians being frustrated in trying to figure out ways to get people into the library. And I think that's absolutely the wrong approach. We have technology tools that make it possible for them to not come into the library to get the information, so they shouldn't have to come into the library to get our expertise either. But we tend to still be very focused on our relationship to the space out of which we have traditionally worked.

And I think that's really where the change has to be the most profound. I had a meeting with my reference librarians here [recently], talking about where I see things going over the next few years. I want my people to spend less and less time in the building. Too much of our professional identity is still tied up in the nature of the place out of which we work, whether you call it the library or the information center.

Conceptually, we still think of that as the place; we identify ourselves too much with that place, and we need to disconnect ourselves from it.

**IO:** Getting to Gutenberg, the definition of "library" has always included books. How do you change people's perception on both sides?

**Plutchak:** Well, I know that within the (SLA) community, there has been a shift away from using the word "library" and "librarian" and trying to talk more generically about "information specialist." And I think that that has been done as an attempt to address exactly that issue.

I tend to actually be pretty old fashioned in terms of the terminology. We can get people to think about librarians in new ways by acting in new ways. But again, the focus for me is on the individual and not the place.

What I want the people in my institution to be thinking about is: Oh yes, there is that library over there

**I was the most worried about the people I call the "inept but satisfied," because they're doing lousy searches. They're getting retrieval that we know is not good. But because they're satisfied, they don't tell us that they're having a problem, and they blithely go off and make patient care decisions on the basis of lousy information.**

and there are occasions in which I need to go there, but what is really essential to me is the librarian who comes to my space and comes to my lab or my office or my classroom and does their work in whatever space I'm in, and that's what's really important—not that building that happens to be down the street.

**IO:** And what will that work be when your reference librarians and others get out into the rest of the workplace?

**Plutchak:** The sorts of things that we're doing right now. I'll give a concrete example: My medical school is going through their accreditation process, and one of the things which has come out of the committee that accredits medical schools over the last 10 years is there is an increasing emphasis on making sure that people who graduate from medical schools have good information management skills, that they know how to get

information... they know how to evaluate it... they know how to incorporate it into their decision making.

So we are working with the school of medicine to look at their curriculum and identify appropriate places within the curriculum where we'll have a couple of librarians come in and do a session related to information management. In the first year, it may be basic searching of Medline. (Note: Medline is at [www.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.nlm.nih.gov).)

In the second year, it may be a session that has to do with evaluating Web sites. We may be doing something dealing with management of PDA resources for students in the third year, not as separate classes, but integrated within the curriculum, depending on what the other learning objectives of the particular course are.

I see the librarians spending a lot more time doing that kind of thing.

There's been discussion within the health sciences community about something that was initially called the "informationist," and this comes out of an editorial that was in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* several years ago.

The current terminology is "information specialist in context," and that can be anything from somebody who's actually a member of the clinical care team, is based on the ward, goes on rounds with the physicians and then gathers specific information resources that deal with whatever the top patient problems are that day to somebody who works in the genetics lab with the people who are doing a bioinformatics research, helping them use the very complicated information tools that that sector is using. Those people are working out in the areas in which the people that they serve work.



**IO:** So as you use librarians to help educate the people who are becoming a specialist in any category, say, medicine, or physics, or English history, that leads to another question about how to educate the librarians. Because they'll need to be more than just information specialists.

**Plutchak:** That is true to, I think, a very significant extent. And one of the things that's happening now, this information specialist in context that I mentioned, the Medical Library Association has actually let a contract to the medical library at Vanderbilt University. And they're doing a two-year study of this concept. One of the things they're specifically looking at is how do you take either subject specialists who would become interested in the information side of things or people who come out of a library or information science background and give them that kind of specialized knowledge. (Note: The Medical Library Association is at [www.mlanet.org](http://www.mlanet.org).)

Is this something that you can do as sort of an added certificate? How much training does it need? Can it be done on the job?

It's not clear to me where that's going to fall, again, depending on the area. I think that the people that I know, who are working in that capacity in bioinformatics, almost all have at least a hard science master's that is related to the field that they're in.

But law librarians have always been information specialists in context because the law library is the laboratory that lawyers work in.

**IO:** Yes, but wouldn't you say some content areas or knowledge areas are a little more accessible than others. Law would seem to me to be much more accessible than medicine or some of the narrow specialties within medicine.

**Plutchak:** Yes and no. I mean I've lived my entire professional career pretty much in academic medical centers, and I'm not all that impressed with the knowledge base.

I spend a lot of time with medical

students and medical researchers, and I don't think that there is anything inherently more complicated about learning the knowledge base in medicine than in any other profession. They—doctors certainly do their damndest to generate a mystique about what they do. But I would say don't be fooled.

To be fair to the profession, that's one of the things that we're seeing changing very radically within medicine. The notion that 20 years ago the doctors came out of medical school with all of the knowledge that they needed to practice in their head is over. And so learning information skills and understanding that you need to be good information managers on your own—and part of that is knowing when to call in an expert information specialist—is part of the training that physicians are getting nowadays.

**IO:** There's so much out there these days, how can anybody know it? And how can anybody know what the good stuff is?

**Plutchak:** That's the area in which we have a spectacular opportunity. The information specialist in context's notion says you don't need to know as much as the doctor knows about medicine. And the doctor doesn't need to know as much about information management and information seeking as you do. But you both need to know enough that you can work together effectively as a team.

And I think getting the people that we serve and that we work with to understand the complexity of that is one of the real challenges.

We have been good at building tools that are deceptively simple so that people think that they're getting good retrieval and getting good infor-

mation on their own when they're not. I wrote an editorial years ago in which I used the phrase "the inept but satisfied end user." I was at St. Louis University at the time, and we were looking at some of the very early CD-ROM products for searching Medline.

We were doing a typical librarian evaluation: We were doing satisfaction. But what we were finding was you really had to look at it as a quadrant because you had some people who were satisfied and were using the stuff really well. And that's where we wanted everybody be.

And then there were some people who were not satisfied, but it was because they weren't using the stuff well, and we can train and work with them and hopefully move them into that first category.

And then there were people who were dissatisfied but were really using the tool as well as it could be used. They were dissatisfied because it didn't have the scope they wanted or didn't have all the years covered they wanted or whatever. They wanted to do something that it wasn't designed to do. And again we can try to explain to them the limitations of the tool.

But I was the most worried about the people that I call the "inept but satisfied," because they're doing lousy searches. They're getting retrieval that we know is not good. But because they're satisfied, they don't tell us that they're having a problem and they blithely go off and make patient care decisions on the basis of lousy information.

That is a situation we continue to have. You know, we talk the "Google problem" all the time: people doing Google searches and thinking that they're getting good retrieval. This is not at all to knock Google, which is a great tool, but people spend a lot of

**The emphasis on marketing is often misplaced because often what that translates into is people trying to create a buzz about the stuff that they're currently doing when, in fact, the stuff that they're currently doing isn't that valuable.**

wasted time using tools and thinking that they're getting good retrieval and thinking that they're getting good information.

And so a large part of our challenge is helping people to understand what they don't know and when they really do need the advice of a trained professional.

**IO:** To get back to something you said earlier, having informationists who are able and willing to take that role would require a different kind of temperament than some people in the profession might have. Now could you explain what you mean by that?

**Plutchak:** Yeah, and I do have to be somewhat cautious in that. I don't have the same kind of day-to-day experience with people in other professions. And so, maybe everybody—all professions are like this.

But my impression of many of my colleagues is that there is a certain degree of timidity or deference or hesitation to take risks in the job environment that may have not been a problem 20 or 30 years ago but that prevents people from doing the kinds of things that they need to do to be effective now.

**IO:** What kinds of risks?

**Plutchak:** Developing a program or a project that you don't have a good model for, that you're not sure that the outcome is going to be what you want—and so it's quite possible that you'll invest a lot of time and energy and it's going to flop.

I think that those sorts are basic kind of planning things. I think if I look in my case—if I'm looking at budget decisions—am I going to cancel the print version of all my online journals, for example. Is that going to have an unintended consequence down the road that's going to make me really wish I haven't made that decision?

That, in fact, is a decision that we have made. There are people in my organization who are very, very uncomfortable with that. They think

that that's taking too much of a risk because now we don't have that print backup in-house. And can we really rely on [the provider's] archiving to protect us down the road?

It means taking the kinds of personal risks of going out and talking to faculty members and saying, "I can really help you meet your educational objectives," and coming up with a plan and then showing up in the classroom and not making a fool of yourself.

**IO:** And the need to take these risks is coming at a time when it seems that we've been seeing more and more about the need for librarians to prove their value to the organization... and preserve their jobs, to prove your value and calculate your department's ROI. Is that in conflict with taking risks, when you're just trying to get the work done and not make any mistakes?

**Plutchak:** The problem is that there's a risk inherent in trying to prove your worth, because it means drawing attention to yourself. But I think just sitting back and getting the work

done isn't going to do it.

The emphasis on marketing is often misplaced because often what that translates into is people trying to create a buzz about the stuff that they're currently doing when, in fact, the stuff that they're currently doing isn't that valuable.

I used to say for a long time when the question of marketing has come up: Figure out what keeps the guy in charge awake at night. Then try to figure out how to make them sleep better.

Many people will say that the people that they work for are idiots, but I tend to believe that most people running organizations are, by and large, well-meaning, trying to do the right thing. There are many more good ideas that cost money than they can approve in any given day. So it is their responsibility to approve only those ideas that they think are going to have the biggest positive impact on the things that they are most worried about.

So you can go to them with whatever really cool, neat, fabulous service or thing that you've got. And if it doesn't tie directly to the things that



they are the most worried about, not only will they not fund it, they shouldn't fund it. It would be irresponsible of them to fund it if it doesn't tie into their key thing.

And that's true if you're in a business. It's true if you're a public library dealing with a community. It is certainly true for me in a university. My university is worried about maintaining its research portfolio. It's concerned about increasing the qualifications of the students that come in. It's concerned with making sure that the health professionals who we graduate meet a certain set of objectives. And if the things that I do are not all clearly tied to making those things happen, then the provost should not give me money.

**IO:** So it's basically figuring out or learning what the organization's mission or strategic plan is.

**Plutchak:** Absolutely.

And now, once you've done that, then going in and doing the sorts of traditional marketing things to say here are the ways that I can help you solve your problems becomes very important.

But you've got to do that kind of planning first and really make sure that you're aligning your services. I tell my staff all the time that our job is not to build a better library. Our job is to figure out what are the key concerns of this university and where do we have the particularly unique skills and talent that are going to enable us to move the university forward.

Sometimes that means we're going to be doing traditional library stuff. Sometimes it means we're going to be doing things that nobody ever thought of librarians doing. And sometimes it means we're going to stop doing things that people expect librarians to do because in our setting they're not needed.

**IO:** Getting back to the traits of librarians... You mentioned a time frame, in the last 10 to 15 years, which coincides with the growth of the World Wide Web and other information technologies. Is that the kind of thing you're getting at?

**Our job is to figure out what are the key concerns of this university and where do we have the particularly unique skills and talent that are going to enable us to move the university forward. Sometimes that means we're going to be doing traditional library stuff. Sometimes it means we're going to be doing things that nobody ever thought of librarians doing. And sometimes it means we're going to stop doing things that people expect librarians to do because in our setting they're not needed.**

**Plutchak:** I think it comes back to that the growth of the Web and the shift from a print-based environment to this print-and-electronic-based transition period requires people who are very comfortable with ambiguity, who are willing to be very creative and very flexible, who are very quick at recognizing, oh, this thing that I'm trying is not working. I had better switch gears. So the kind of people for whom coming in and—not to try to get into the old sort of technical services-public services split—but people who got a lot of pleasure in the past out of the kinds of things that precise cataloguers do, for example. I think that's a difficult temperament to find comfort in the current information world.

People who mastered a set of online databases and who were highly skilled at doing online searches for people within a confined set of databases and knew that they're going to come in and have 15 or 20 complicated searches and are very comfortable because they know this area well.

People who got a lot of satisfaction out of that, I think, find the current setting difficult because the tool they had mastered this year is gone or radically transformed next year and they have to learn a whole new set of skills.

**IO:** If any of our readers read your description of the newly required temperament or the evolving temperament for librarians and realize that they're not in that group, that they don't have those skills, what should they do?

**Plutchak:** All I can say is I think that that's a real dilemma, I really do. And I have a lot of sympathy for my colleagues who find the current environment tremendously frustrating.

But it is a fact that that world is changing. And there's not anything that is going to create a stable environment within the information world. If your heart is set on continuing to work within the information world, you have to find some way to become comfortable with terrain that's not going to stabilize during your career.

And I think that that is true for the 25-year-olds who are just coming into the profession as it is for those of us who've been there. I don't think things are going to stabilize in our lifetime.

**IO:** So the 25-year olds coming into the profession will see changes just as profound as the 40-year-old people who already established in the profession?

**Plutchak:** Absolutely. If you're 50 and you're uneasy with the current situation, I think maybe you try to build on your skills and accept that it's going to be pretty ambiguous and really do some self analysis—what are the things that I'm really good at—and try to shape your career along those lines.

If you're 30 and you're uncomfortable with the degree of ambiguity in the field, then I think you need to think about career change.

**IO:** You've done some writing on open access and its tension between publications that are controlled by information providers. Which way do you think this tension is trending?

**Plutchak:** It's very hard to tell at this point. To approach the question from a slightly different angle, what has distressed me the most about all of the open access arguments is that a wedge has been created between the librarian-information specialist community and the not-for-profit sector of the publishing community, particularly the scholarly societies.

That is tremendously unfortunate, because we have tended to paint all publishers with the same brush. And, in fact, there are many different types of publishers doing very many different types of things. And there are some that we should really be partnering with very, very strongly.

I think if we did that, and did that effectively, we could perhaps create a shift, at least within the scholarly publishing area, that would weaken the grip that the for-profit companies have.

And I really think that one part of the problem is that the scholarly community has lost control of its own production. I don't think that we can get that back unless there's a real partnership between the scholarly societies and the information community, and we don't have that right now.

As editor of the *JMLA*, I am a small society publisher. So I'm in both camps, and I understand the frustrations that the society publishers have. And in this institution, we have many of the editors of leading journals and people who are very involved in their societies, and I talk with these people on a regular basis, and I understand their concerns and their worries.

And a lot of them have been extremely annoyed by the open access discussion because they feel it has not taken into sufficient account the very hard work that they do trying to be good citizens.

There's a potential there for us to really take a look at what is the role that the for-profit publishers play and to what extent do we need to pull

back some of the scholarly production that's been turned over to the for-profits and control it within the societies and within universities.

**IO:** Which would be a huge change because there are so many associations and societies that are dependent on those kinds of partnerships?

**Plutchak:** Yeah. So, I'm uncertain how that's all going to go. (Note: *JMLA*, the *Journal of the Medical Libraries Association*, is at [www.pubmedcentral.gov/tocrender.fcgi?journal=93&action=archive](http://www.pubmedcentral.gov/tocrender.fcgi?journal=93&action=archive).)

**IO:** What do you see a corporate or institutional library being like in, say, 25 years when that 25-year-old librarian just coming into the workforce turns 50?

**Plutchak:** I think it depends somewhat on the area that you're in. But I think for many of the people who are within the SLA community or the MLA community, almost all of the information that we need to deal with is going to be electronic in 25 years. It's going to be electronic in much less than that.

What that means then is that you're not going to need a physical space to house the material. Libraries do many different things in their organizations. They're also meeting spaces. In an educational institution, they're often a place of refuge. They are places where you come to consult with information specialists.

So those kinds of functions will continue. But I would suspect that in many of the settings—particularly where your readers work—the information specialist is going to work out of a relatively small office, perhaps, depending on the nature of the building and the enterprise, and is going to spend much of their time outside of that office, spending time sitting with the people that they're working with.

Maybe there's going to be a room called a "library" or called the "information center,"

but I don't think people are going to come there to get information and to use those resources. If it's a conference center or a classroom or a space where you need to interact with people, we'll still have those spaces.

But you're not going to need a space to go to to interact with information. It's hard for me to visualize it more than that.

Now when you look at a big research library, when you look at public libraries, when you look at some other kinds of settings, I think print is going to continue to play a strong role. So the need to house print is going to continue. But it's going to depend very much on the particular sector that you're working with.

More information on the 2005 SLA annual conference is available at <http://www.sla.org/content/Events/conference/ac2005/index.cfm>.



# A Brief but Intense Job

## At Work in the Main Press Center Library at the 2004 Olympics

By Eva Semertzaki

In summer 2004, Athens hosted the world's most significant athletic event, the Olympic Games, which returned home to Athens for the first time since they were revived in 1896. Among the people who contributed to the games' success were volunteers who worked day and night to help stage the Athens Olympic Games perfectly.

Two libraries staffed by officials and volunteers operated during the games, one in the Main Press Center (MPC) and the other in the Olympic Village. As a volunteer librarian at the MPC library, I had an unforgettable experience for the 17 days of the Olympic Games last August.

One event that I will always remember came one

afternoon before the closing ceremony. The staff of the MPC library had the brilliant idea of presenting a farewell gift to our guests, the journalists in the main work area. We made folded boats of blue hard paper and put rolls of a photocopied poem by Odysseus Elytis, a famous Greek noble, in each blue boat. The idea came from the theme of the opening ceremony: a white folded boat with a child as a captain sailed in the big lake in the Olympic stadium. When we entered the main work area carrying trays of the boats, the journalists stared at us and, surprisingly, asked the meaning of the gift. We wished them a nice trip home and thanked them for coming.

### The Volunteers' Contribution

Both paid officials and unpaid volunteers contributed greatly to the success of the games. They all looked alike in their beautiful, colorful uniforms. Some 45,000 volunteers worked during the Olympic Games and 15,000 during the Paralympic Games. These people were selected from a pool of 160,000 applicants. Their behavior toward the athletes and the visitors to the city was paramount to the success of the games.

They were smiling, gentle, and kind, and their eagerness was remarkable. As George Vescey reported (2004), "the organizers found thousands of the best and brightest of their society and put them in uniforms. They were working in a tolerant and worldly way."

The volunteers took part in every aspect of the opera-

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tion of the games in all competition and non competition venues—2,428 in the opening ceremony and 3,691 in the closing ceremony, for example.

## Previous Games

The idea of organizing a library during the Olympic Games is rather new. A variety of users needed a library's services—a knowledge center—for a variety of reasons. The athletes in the Olympic Village sometimes needed a break from their athletic activities and wanted to visit a relaxing area to browse through a book or listen to their favorite music, to navigate the Web, to request copies of recorded competitions. The reporters, journalists, and photographers needed information to include in their reports.

The first time a library was provided at the Olympic Games was in Barcelona in 1992 (Barcelona Committee, 1992, vol. 4, p. 369). A document center holding 700 publications was provided in the main press center, and a library equipped with books and magazines in various languages was organized in the Olympic Village (Barcelona Committee, 1992, vol. 3, p.195). A video library also provided 12 viewing rooms for recording and watching the sports events. For the residents of the village, a record library was available where they could listen to music or watch musical videos.

In Atlanta in 1996, a library in the main press center offered research and reference materials at no cost, and reporters and journalists could review previously recorded games in video footage (Atlanta Committee, 1997, vol. 1, pp. 98–99). In the Olympic

Village there were five information stations designed to answer questions and distribute information (Atlanta Committee, 1997, vol. 1, p. 347).

The Sydney Organizing Committee (2001) established the Sydney Olympics Research and Information Center more than three years before the games began. It was housed in the Sydney 2000 Olympic headquarters and contained a collection on Olympic history, all post-games reports since the first of the modern Olympic Games in 1896, rules and regulations of international Olympic federations, newsletters, handbooks, and media releases. It was open to the Australian public, and it provided access through the Sydney Olympic library network that included the major public libraries of Australia and other libraries overseas such as the IOC Olympic Museum in Lausanne (IASI Newsletter, 1998).

A library operated in the Sydney Olympic Village. It included facilities for viewing videos and listening to music, designed as a relaxing area for the athletes who lived in the village. The library held 1,000 books and 200 newspapers and magazines. Individual music listening stations and compact discs were available for use by the athletes. They also could watch footage of Olympic competitions at the video viewing area. Another library operated in the Main Press Center to provide the information reporters needed for filing their reports.

## Relevant Libraries

Libraries specializing in the Olympic Games and their history, the Olympic movement, and sports exist in many places around the

world; many of them are similar in subject coverage to those belonging to the organization committees of the Olympic Games:

- The library of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is in the Olympic Museum at Lausanne, Switzerland, the home of the IOC, which is the governing authority of the Olympic Games. The library is one of the departments of the Olympic Studies Center (International Olympic Committee, 2004). The users are scholars, students, librarians, journalists, professionals, artists, and sports fans (Maxwell, 1998, pp. 38–40).
- The Amateur Athletic Foundation of Los Angeles (2004) houses a sports library containing Olympic information. The library is free and open to the public; it has built a digital collection of sports publications.
- The Nisioti's Library at the International Olympic Academy (2004) in Ancient Olympia, Greece, is open to the public during from May to September. It promotes the educational and research aims of the Olympic family.
- Several education or research centers deal with the Olympic Games, including the Inje University International Research Academy for Olympics and Intercultural Studies, in South Korea; the Centre for Olympic Studies at the Autonomous University of Barcelona; and the Centre for Olympic Studies, University of Technology, Sydney.

## The Committee Library

The library of the Athens 2004 Organizing Committee (ATHOC) was established about three and a half years before the games began and is housed in the ATHOC headquarters. It was staffed

with professional librarians, document specialists, archivists, and historians. Its main function was to assist ATHOC in its operations and serve as an information center on Olympic Games organizing issues. The library was open to the public and welcomed hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students, researchers, historians, professors, and journalists from Greece and abroad.

The collection consisted of materials on Olympic Games, the Olympic movement, the history and culture of Greece, Athens, and sports. A significant part of the collection consisted of “transfer of knowledge” materials in print and in electronic formats. These materials were a compilation of the knowledge gathered by the Sydney 2000 organizing committee for the Olympic Games; they were contributed to the ATHOC library. The library also held a collection of Greek, American, English, French, German, and Spanish newspapers.

At the end of the Olympic and Paralympic games, the library had as its main task to organize the archive of the 2004 games by collecting information from all of the operational areas. The ATHOC library was responsible for the organization of the two libraries operated during the Olympic Games: the Main press center and the Olympic Village. The library will operate until ATHOC winds up its operations.

The creation and organization of this library was of great importance. It had its own dedicated budget, a specialized staff, and an ending date. It was a special information center to serve the staff of ATHOC, the athletes, and the journalists, and its collection was built to meet the needs of those categories of clients.

## Volunteering

On February 21, 2002, I submitted my application form to be a volunteer. The next step was an interview on March 3, 2003. I said the library was my first choice in the list of potential positions. On signing an agreement in January 2004, I was given the position of assistant librarian.

In June 2004 the manager of the library made appointments at the ATHOC headquarters with all of the library volunteers. Next, all of the volunteers who would work at the MPC attended an orientation session on July 10. The MPC complex looked like a colony of bees.

Construction workers, electricians, and network engineers bustled about, working intensively to get everything ready. The manager welcomed us for a tour of the building and explained its functions. We also saw where the library was going to be set up.

The training of the volunteer librarians followed on July 27. By that time, the appearance of the MPC was totally different. The library was ready, with the books on the shelves and the equipment installed. The director of the library welcomed the volunteers, and the manager of the library introduced us to its services. He gave us written regulations covering how we were to behave in relation to the users and how to find out what they needed from the library. Our main job was to respond to the users' requests by delivering the research materials they had requested. We were told that the journalists would be demanding clients. The staff demonstrated the library's online public access catalog and gave us hands-on experience with it. They showed us



**Staff, volunteers, and journalists joined a Greek dance in the information center to celebrate the end of the games.**

the electronic resources, mostly Info 2004, the internal database of the Athens 2004 Olympic Committee. They familiarized us with the book collection and the classification system and let us browse or ask questions. Each of us was given our time schedule.

## The Press Center

The MPC was the heart of the news operation. It was the workplace of more than 5,500 representatives of recognized media organizations and news agencies and of 1,500 representatives of photographic agencies worldwide who were responsible for transmitting the news and images of the games around the globe. It was the longest-running operation other than the competitions themselves; the MPC remained open from July 13 to September 3. It was the biggest Olympic Games MPC ever, a complex covering a surface of 52,000 square meters. Its main objective was to provide a comfortable

working place for the representatives of the international media. Both MPC staff and members of the international press corps worked in a multinational and multilingual atmosphere. Once you entered the building, you might forget you were in Athens.

The MPC library was on the second level of the MPC building, in a prominent place in the vast main work area, with 850 seats equipped with computers for journalists. The library operated from 7:00 in the morning to midnight every day; the peak hours were from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

The MPC library was a convenient, warm, colorful room furnished with green wooden shelves, a blue carpet, two rows of tables and chairs for library users, and desks for the staff. It offered a study room, provision of specialized information, and video viewing.

It was a subject-oriented special research library. Its collection consisted of about

2,000 books, mainly on the history of the Olympic Games from ancient to modern times, books on previous Olympic Games, on individual sports, on the Olympic movement; books on Greece, its civilization, history, culture, tradition, cookery, art, literature, and economy; and 30 titles of periodicals. Its collection also included official publications of ATHOC, official publications, and official reports of previous Olympic games. And finally, databases, the library's online public access catalog, and the Internet were available.

The video viewing service was designed specifically to inform the coverage of the games. Two video viewing stations were available for the journalists to watch previously recorded athletic events and to focus on specific images and athletes.

Both the MPC and the Olympic Village libraries enabled access to Info 2004, an internal news agency organized by the Athens 2004 organizing committee. The



Flags wave in front of the Olympic Village in Athens, Tuesday, Aug.10, 2004. The Olympic Village provides accommodation for 16,000 athletes and officials during the 2004 Olympic Games which are scheduled to begin on Aug.13. (Associated Press Photo/Thomas Kienzle)

database was updated daily with competition results, sports, medals, biographies of athletes and referees, press releases, press conference highlights, International Olympic Committee news, schedules of the games, and much more.

## The Village

The other library that operated during the games was located in the Olympic Village, where 16,000 athletes and team representatives lived for various periods from July 30 to September 1. The goals, the settings, and the size of the Olympic Village library were different from those of the MPC library. The users were the residents of the village, and they visited the library in their leisure time to get information on sports and on life in Greece. The national Olympic committees also used the library as a place for team meetings by reserving one of the two specially equipped projection rooms

for viewing footage of the games. The services provided at the Olympic Village library were reading and relaxation activities, music for listening, and footage of games for viewing and copying.

The library was open daily from 8 a.m. to midnight. At the reading and recreational area, athletes could find entertainment materials such as books, international press materials, magazines, maps, guides, audiovisual materials, and Internet stations. The subjects covered were Olympic Games, the Olympic movement, sports, international culture and literature, and Greek culture and history. In the music listening areas, a TV set and CDs with various kinds of music were available. The games footage viewing area, with 14 individual viewing stations, enabled users to watch previously recorded games and to request copies for personal use, free of charge.

## The Staff

Because I worked at the MPC library, I will concentrate on that. I visited the Olympic Village library only to get an overview of its operations, the area, and its services.

The MPC library personnel worked in two shifts, one from 7 a.m. (8 a.m. for the volunteers) until 4 p.m. and the other from 3 p.m. until midnight (11 p.m. for the volunteers). A total of 25 people, mostly women, worked at the library—five paid staff and 20 volunteers. Four of the paid staff members were librarians, and one was a historian. Half of the volunteers were professional librarians and students from library schools; the rest included historians, a retired university professor of classical studies, teachers of French and English literature, and students from schools of history and archeology. All staff members were Greek nationals, except for one volunteer librarian

who came from Spain. Most people spoke English, and a few others spoke French, German, or Spanish.

The volunteers' instructions were to fill out a request form for each user, covering the user's occupation (job title) and country of origin (nationality), as well as what information the user was requesting. Response time depended on the difficulty of the request. The shortest response time was a few minutes and the longest was one day. When we knew it would take a while to provide the answer, we informed the user in advance.

Reacting to each request was not one person's job but teamwork. There was a short discussion among all staff members in order to assign pertinent tasks: search the library's catalog, the Internet, books, or databases. Of course, the responsibility rested with the paid staff, and no one acted without reporting to the manager of the library. Despite the pressure involved in each research assignment, we did not stop searching until we had covered all aspects of the inquiry. For statistical reasons, we took notes on the request form about the steps followed and the sources consulted. All of us were pleased and relieved each time the user left the library satisfied with the outcome of our research.

It is the nature of a reporter's job to be a demanding client. Reporters requested precise and up-to-date information and they needed to have it delivered on time. Therefore our role at the MPC library was crucial. The library provided specialized services—we carried out the research for our clients and handed them the result, processed knowledge,

instead of giving guidance for their own searches. In most cases the whole process was highly stressful for our clients, our library officials, and our volunteers, who were unfamiliar with a sports library.

## User Requests

The number and variety of the requests were amazing. The library became a knowledge center, a pool of information disseminated to its users. The range of requests varied from research questions to directions to a place.

As an example, let me describe the handling of a query that attracted my interest. A researcher from Georgia requested the following: In 1896 Sir George Roberson, professor of classical studies at Oxford University, composed and recited a hymn in ancient Greek, dedicated to the first modern Olympic Games as a tribute to Athens and written in the style of an ode by Pindar, the classical Greek poet. The researcher was unable to locate the original poem in ancient Greek, although the translation in English was available in the literature (Mallon and Widlund, 1997, pp. 143–144).

It is worth noting that a similar Pindaric ode in praise of Athens was composed for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games in ancient Greek by Armand D'Angour, classics fellow and tutor at Jesus College, Oxford University. The ode was recited at the closing session of the International Olympic Committee on August 29, 2004 (Oxford University, 2004). The fact that the original language of the requested poem was ancient Greek motivated some staff members to persist in searching for the answer. We visited two other libraries and were victorious.

The researcher was very satisfied with our endeavor.

Many people were interested in finding information on ancient Olympic Games, their origin, historical background, names of athletes, rules, sports, and history of ancient Olympia. The largest numbers of queries were about the Olympic Games in 1896, on subjects such as their founder Pierre de Coubertin, Panathinaikon Stadium, and prices of tickets. A large number of other requests related to the past 27 Olympiads, mostly on summer games (because the 2004 Athens games were in the summer) but some on winter games. Some other common issues concerned scandals during the games, numbers of athletes expelled from them, programs of individual games, opening and closing ceremonies, special social or political events, and special details—for example, the name of the ship that carried the U.S. team to

Athens in 1896 (the answer is *Fulda*).

Various queries dealt with the sports and the competitions: numbers of medals won by category (gold, silver, bronze), by country, by individual Olympic Games, by athlete, and by sport. Other queries covered the results (semifinals and finals) of various sports events during the games in different cities; biographies of athletes or prominent people dealing with the games; and information on competitors, such as their records, numbers of athletes by country, by age, and by rankings of medals. An interesting spectrum of topics was on sports in conjunction with various disciplines such as science, technology, marketing, or psychology, or on the relationship of sports and women, the media, culture, politics, or performance of the games. Technical and historical details for each sport and event, the rules and reg-

ulations of individual sports, the history of a specific sport in a specific country, the vocabulary used for individual sports (e.g., tae kwon do) were some topics of research interest. We will all remember Wallechinsky's book (2004), which we relied on heavily as a reference source.

It was evident that many users were interested in the home of the Olympic Games: the history of Greece, especially ancient history focused on events related to the games such as the Marathon battle in 480 B.C., the marathon race, the Olympic gods, ancient drama, Greek mythology, and prominent classical writers, poets and philosophers such as Aristotle, Aristophanes, and Socrates. People were also interested in diverse aspects of the modern face of Greece: religion, introduction of the euro, social life, cookery and food, the olive tree (source of the wreath to crown the win-



The Olympic Rings are shown in flames in a pool of water at the Opening Ceremony of the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Friday, Aug. 13, 2004. (Associated Press Photo/Julie Jacobson)

ners), culture, islands, language (e.g., the meaning of English words of Greek origin, rules for transliteration from Greek to the Latin alphabet), participation of Greece in various modern Olympiads. Staying in Athens, journalists wanted the history of the city, the origin of its name, its monuments, modern art, sightseeing, and instructions and maps to several places. Such questions gave the library the chance to promote Greek history, culture, and civilization to the world.

Another group of questions concerned the organization of the Olympic Games, the Olympic charter, the International Olympic Committee, the national Olympic committees, the participant countries in the games, the Olympic movement, and the Olympic truce. Several queries related specifically to the Athens 2004 Olympic Games: how they were organized, statistics (e.g., quantities of food and water consumed, participant countries, numbers of staff and of volunteers, numbers of spectators, of journalists, of athletes by sex), progress of ticket sales, description of competition and non competition venues, security, broadcasting of the games, expenditures, the world torch relay, the design of the torch, music heard during the medal ceremonies, mascots, sponsors, history of the five Olympic cities.

A day before the marathon race, a photographer came to the library asking us to indicate a place near the starting point of the race or along the route where he could take a picture combining the ancient Marathon battle and the modern runners. He was ask-

ing about the orientation of the place and the angle of the sun in order to catch the right light for the picture. By opening books, calling people who knew the Marathon area, and searching the Internet, we managed to suggest a suitable location.

## Impressions

Although we got some training before the Olympic Games, we all were anxious about the unknown. I was quite worried about what I would face, but I was armed with a strong will. I went to a very special place to work intensively for a short time. I was not familiar with a sports library. The volunteers and the staff alike acquired an enormous amount of knowledge by replying to the reference questions.

Despite our reservations, we all adjusted quickly to the working conditions. The manager of the library and the staff embraced the volunteers with patience and eagerness to cooperate. They respected the volunteers and regarded us as their colleagues. The responsibility was enormous because the library had to deliver the right answers to the users. The teamwork, the smiles, the willingness made for a pleasant and warm atmosphere in an excellent working environment. Although the team of volunteers had different backgrounds, we all worked closely on our common task.

This attitude emanated from the management of the main press center and beyond that from the organization of the Olympic Games, under the strong and skillful personality of the president of the Athens Olympic Committee. The press center manager, instead of staying in his office giving

orders, walked around, wearing the same uniform as his co-workers, greeting and talking with people and getting a personal overview of the smooth operation of the venue. He rewarded the volunteers during meetings, where he made observations but also congratulated them for their performance and behavior. This was how he motivated people to keep on working with the same high quality standards throughout the games.

A few times the press center management offered volunteers tickets to sports events. One morning I had the opportunity to watch a water polo competition at the Olympic stadium complex. The evening before the closing ceremony I had another turn to get a ticket and watch athletic events at the Olympic stadium. I also bought tickets for a basketball competition. But the most surprising event was the invitation to the volunteers and the staff to attend the opening ceremony dress rehearsal three days before the games. That was a spectacular evening. And after the games the ATHOC organized a concert in honor of the volunteers at another splendid venue.

## Reactions

All workers and volunteers at the MPC library did their best to satisfy the users by providing them the information that met in their needs. We were pleased with the behavior of the users, who cooperated with us, but in my opinion the satisfaction was mutual—they thanked us for the services we provided. Some expressed their gratitude by writing kind words in the visitors'

book. Here are some quotations:

- "Many thanks for excellent service." (Reuters)
- "A wonderful luxury to have a library, especially at Olympics to deepen in history. A fine collection of books in English and a friendly and helpful staff." (The News and Observer, U.S.A.)
- "The staff managed an impossible task I requested—I can't thank them enough—I just wish we had the same service in the UK." (PA News)

The "topic of the day" displayed every day at the library entrance attracted the users' attention. They stopped by to have a look at the books, printouts, or regalia displayed on topics related to the games or to Greece such as the marathon race, ancient Olympia, or ancient theater.

The clients who visited the MPC library most frequently came from the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Pakistan, India, Brazil, Georgia, Russia, and Spain. We had clients who visited the library every day. A team from India preferred to stay in the library, silently writing or reading, instead of working in the main work area. Some days they were dressed in their traditional costumes, a very nice picture indeed. One was a person with disabilities. He sometimes sat in a chair for a long period, but he demonstrated a strong will to overcome his disability and do his job.

In addition to the users, many celebrities visited the MPC. One day we were astonished when all of a sudden Queen Sophia of Spain entered the library and shook hands with us, speaking in Greek.

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## Conclusion

These are unforgettable moments and memories of our experience working as volunteers at the MPC library. On the last day, nobody wanted to say good-bye. We wished this dream could last longer. We all were touched by our unique experience of the great Olympic Games and promised each other we would communicate after the games.

The experience of contributing to the success of the Athens 2004 Olympic Games filled us with the satisfaction that "I was there too." We had the opportunity to experience hosting the ultimate sports event, the Olympic Games, in Greece, the birthplace of the games. The operation of a special library in a place that served reporters in a global event like the Olympic Games proved a good chance for projecting the image and culture of the host country to journalists who shape public opinion worldwide with their writings.

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Fireworks light up the Olympic stadium during closing ceremonies of the Olympic Summer Games in Athens, Sunday, August 29, 2004. (Associated Press Photo/Paul Chiasson)

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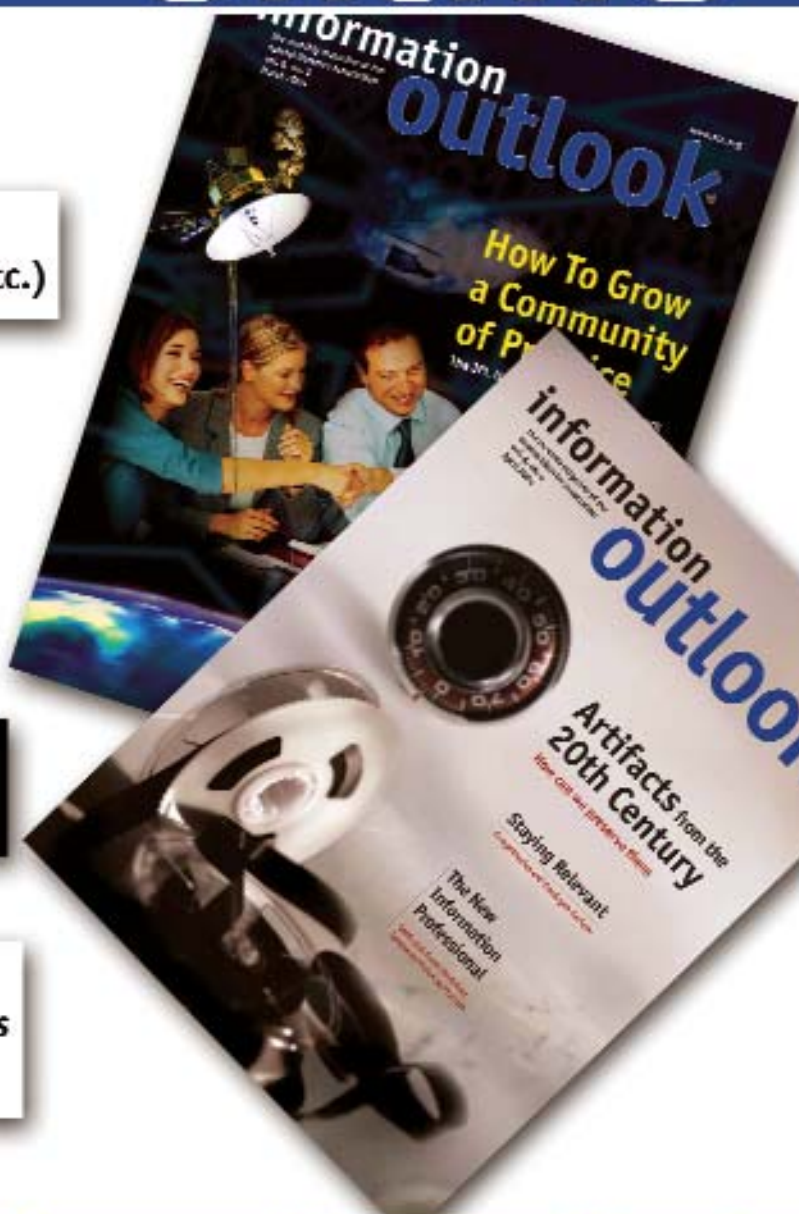
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**Weblogs: Opportunities for Special Libraries**

**May 11, 2005**

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm ET**

**Part II**

**How to Start a Weblog: Tools, Tips and Techniques**

**May 25, 2005**

**2:00 pm - 3:30 pm ET**

**Speaker:**

**Darlene Fichter**

Data Library Coordinator,  
Univ of Saskatchewan Library



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## May 2005

### 14th International World Wide Web Conference (WWW2005) IW3C2

May 10-14  
Chiba, Japan  
<http://www2005.org/>

### Part 1: Weblogs- Opportunities for Special Libraries

May 11  
<http://www.sla.org/virtalseminar>

### Map and Geographic Information Collections in Transition

Library of Congress  
May 12-13  
Washington, DC, USA  
<http://cuac.wustl.edu/newAnnounce.htm>

### ASI 2005 Annual Conference

American Society of Indexers  
May 12-15  
Pasadena, CA, USA  
<http://www.asindexing.org/site/conferences/conf2005/index.shtml>

### Globalization of Information: Agriculture at the Crossroads

IAALD and USAIN  
May 13-22  
Lexington, KY, USA  
[http://www.ca.uky.edu/AIC/conf\\_home\\_2.htm](http://www.ca.uky.edu/AIC/conf_home_2.htm)

### MLA '05

Medical Library Association  
May 14-19  
San Antonio, TX, USA  
<http://www.mlanet.org/am/am2005/>

### Special Library Conference 2005

PETRONAS  
May 15-17, 2005  
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
<http://www.slib-petronas.com>

### AIIM Expo

May 17-19  
Philadelphia, PA, USA  
<http://www.aiim.org/>

### WILU 2005: 34th Annual Conference on Instruction in Library Use

University of Guelph  
May 18-20  
Guelph, Ontario, Canada  
<http://131.104.66.12/wilu>

### PIUG 2005 Annual Conference

Patent Information Users Group, Inc.  
May 21-26  
Arlington, VA, USA  
<http://www.piug.org/2005/an05meet.html>

### MER 2005: Managing Electronic Records Conference

Cohasset Associates, Inc.  
May 23-25  
Chicago, IL, USA  
<http://www.merconference.com>

### Part 2: How to Start a Weblog: Tools, Tips and Techniques

May 25  
<http://www.sla.org/virtalseminar>

## June 2005

### CoLIS 5: Fifth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science

University of Strathclyde  
June 4-9, 2005  
Glasgow, Scotland, UK  
<http://www.cis.strath.ac.uk/external/colis5/>

### SLA 2005 Annual Conference

June 5-8  
Toronto, Canada  
<http://www.sla.org/toronto2005>

### Joint Conference on Digital Libraries 2005 (JCDL)

June 7-11, 2005  
Denver, CO, USA  
<http://www.jcdl2005.org/>

### 2005 CLA Conference

Canadian Library Association  
June 15-18, 2005  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada  
<http://www.cla.ca/conference/2005/proposals.htm>

## July 2005

### 7th ISKO-Spain Conference: The Human Dimension of Knowledge Organization

University of Barcelona  
July 6-8, 2005  
Barcelona, Spain  
<http://bd.ub.es/isko2005/en>

### AALL 2005 Annual Meeting

American Association of Law Libraries  
July 16-20, 2005  
San Antonio, TX, USA  
<http://www.aallnet.org/events>

## August 2005

### Sixth World Conference on Continuing Professional Development—Preparing for New Roles in Libraries

IFLA  
August 11-13  
Oslo, Norway  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71/calls-e.htm#cpdwl>

### World Library and Information Conference: 71st IFLA General Conference and Council

IFLA  
August 14-18  
Oslo, Norway  
<http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla71>

## September 2005

### Hypertext 05

Association for Computing Machinery (ACM)  
September 6-9, 2005  
Salzburg, Germany  
<http://www.ht05.org>

### 9th European Conference on Research and Advanced Technology for Digital Libraries (ECDL 2005)

September 18-23, 2005  
Vienna, Austria  
<http://www.ecdl2005.org>

### Your Career: A Straight Shot or a Shot in the Dark?

September 21  
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### SARC III: Experience a Timeless Information Journey: Revolution and Evolution Continue

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[http://www.sla.org/conf/conf\\_sar](http://www.sla.org/conf/conf_sar)

## October 2005

### Part 1: The Principles of Conducting a Library Benchmarking Project

October 12  
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### Part 2: Integrating Benchmark Findings Into the Information Product Development Lifecycle

October 26  
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## November 2005

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November 15  
<http://www.sla.org/virtalseminar>

### Part II: Case Studies and Implementation Roadmap

November 29  
<http://www.sla.org/virtalseminar>

## December 2005

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December 7  
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## Auditing Your Copyright-Protected Works

By Lesley Ellen Harris

Libraries regard themselves primarily as consumers or users of copyright-protected materials. They often overlook their role as creators and owners of such materials. However, they may be overlooking a valuable asset. A regular copyright audit will ensure that your library and organization keeps records of your copyright-protected works and other intellectual property. An audit will help you identify your non-tangible assets and may suggest opportunities to derive new revenue from these assets.

However, creating an inventory of your copyright-protected works may not be as simple as taking an inventory of your tangible goods. It's best to approach this task in a systematic fashion. First, you should identify the copyright-protected works in your library and organization. Next, you must determine who owns these works – you or someone else. Finally, you should examine how the works are being used and how you might be able to exploit them.

### Identify Your Copyright-Protected Works

The following are some of the many types of copyright-protected works that may be in your library/organization:

- Manuscripts and research documents
- Books
- Brochures and pamphlets

- Reports, discussion papers, corporate documents
- Artwork
- Sculptures
- Photographs
- Presentations
- Motion pictures, videos
- Computer software
- Musical works
- Web content

Ensure that works that are part of your copyright inventory are still protected by copyright and are not in the public domain. Keep in mind special rules; for example, U.S. government works are generally not protected by copyright. In the United States, most works are protected by copyright for 70 years after the death of the author of the work. However, this is a complex area of U.S. copyright law. For a very helpful chart by Lolly Gasaway on the duration of copyright protection in the United States, go to [www.unc.edu/~uncclng/public-d.htm](http://www.unc.edu/~uncclng/public-d.htm). Also, see the U.S. copyright publication at [www.copyright.gov/circs/circ15a.html](http://www.copyright.gov/circs/circ15a.html).

### Who Owns These Works?

Physical possession of copyright-protected works does not necessarily mean ownership of copyright. Determine whether you own the copy-

right-protected works in your inventory. Generally, the author of the work is the first owner of copyright in the work. However, there are a number of considerations, such as the following:

- Generally, if a work was created in the course of employment, ownership of copyright resides with the employer.
- Some countries have special rules for specific works. For example, in Canada a photograph, engraving, or portrait that is commissioned belongs to the commissioner as long as valuable consideration was paid.
- Pre-existing works: Do you own the work but not any copyright in it? Did you acquire a transfer of ownership when you physically acquired the work, or do you merely have a license (i.e., permission) to use the work in limited circumstances? For example, off-the-shelf computer software is not usually purchased outright; it is merely licensed. The same is often true of videos and musical recordings, for which public use requires permission. Licensed databases also fall into this category.
- Who owns the moral rights in these works, or

have these rights been waived? These rights protect the integrity of the work's author. Even if you own the copyright, you may not own the moral rights and may not be able to adapt the work or use it without including the author's name. In the United States, moral rights apply only to works of fine art; in Canada and elsewhere, moral rights apply to all copyright-protected works.

- Does the license or assignment of rights place restrictions on the use of these works? Did you sign an agreement when you acquired the work that puts limits on how you may use it?

### What to Do With Your Copyright-Protected Works

Once you determine whether you own copyright-protected works or have the right to exploit them, the next step is to determine which of these works have been licensed or assigned to others. Generally, this is a way to make money from your works or to let others use them free in exchange for a credit and promotion of

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your organization.

For each work in your audit, consider the following questions:

- Has the work been previously exploited?
- If so, what was the value of the work?
- What were the terms and conditions of the exploitation?

Brainstorm possibilities for exploiting the work by licensing or assigning it to others. Speak to your marketing people to see if they have any ideas. Ask those who generally provide permissions for use outside

your organization if they have suggestions for additional ways to allow others to use your works. Think creatively. Are others interested in using your images on their corporate documents or in periodicals or newsletters? Are your PowerPoint presentations valuable to others? Do you have a database that someone else could use for research or commercial purposes? Digital media and the Internet have opened up a whole new world of need for a large variety of content. What content or copyright-

protected works do you have that can help fill this need?

## When to Audit

Conducting a regularly scheduled copyright audit is a worthwhile exercise for any organization. If possible, conduct the first audit at or as soon as possible after the formation of your library or organization. If you have not done this, consider an audit as soon as feasible. You may also undertake your first audit, or update your audit, at the beginning of a large project

or when you create or acquire an important new work or set of works. A change in the copyright law may also trigger an audit. Inform others in your organization that audits will be scheduled on a regular basis, so everyone can keep track of copyright-protected works as they are created or acquired. ●

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## Next Generation Interlibrary Loan: Not Even Close to Dead

By Stephen Abram

Whenever I hear a powerful story about the impact of library services, I save it. Real-life stories bring richness to the information experience that is impossible to create with facts and figures. At the ILL Conference in 2004, two library users at the University of Colorado in Boulder spoke about their experiences with the library; specifically, with interlibrary loan services. Both speakers were totally engaging. Here are my memories of their stories.

William (Ned) Friedman spoke first. Friedman leads the University of Colorado Friedman Lab as well as being a professor in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology. His primary research interests are the origin and early evolution of flowering plants; heterochrony and plant developmental evolution; cell cycle activity during gametogenesis and fertilization; evolution of multicellularity; and anatomical complexity and symbioses in early land plants. Friedman has requested hundreds, if not thousands, of interlibrary loans; indeed, he has blown through any library rules and regulations about the number of ILLs one may request. He is very particular, too. Since he is collecting and converting to electronic format the earliest works on evolution, he specifically borrows the original copies of some of the most important works in the field. He exhorts the ILL department of the CU library to borrow the

original copies of Charles Darwin's books and notes, original lab books from the earliest scientists, and irreplaceable pages of hand-drawn flowers. He challenges these librarians to convince major research libraries and rare book collections to let him see and scan these precious works.

As Friedman discussed his research needs and goals, you could easily imagine the librarians' groans when they saw him coming: the ILL requestor from hell. But Friedman delivered the kicker when he asked his audience to think about why his research is important. This is not just the history of science, nor is it the capricious actions of a passionate collector. He told the audience that over 70 percent of global human nutritional intake today comes directly from flowers, one of the last items to appear in the biological record. If we can understand how flowers have evolved, we have a greater chance of improving the nutritional standards and capacity of the world. Each ILL Friedman requests contributes to that goal.

A lively discussion followed on whether a library should impose limits on the number of ILLs (e.g., three per day per user) and the unique challenges in acquiring access to original copies and rare manuscripts. However, what really hit everyone between the eyes was the large role that simple ILL transactions play in the overall research life of a scientist.

The next speaker that day

was Erin Robertson from the Center for Native Ecosystems. She spoke on the topic of "Doing Research Outside the Academy: How ILL Helps the Center for Native Ecosystems Protect Endangered Plants and Animals." Her story involved the complexities of getting information to support research and lobbying efforts to save precious biological resources. Ecologists and plant and animal biologists keep the location of rare plant and animal species secret to protect their lives and ecological viability. However, fellow scientists need notes and background papers. When scientists request the "real" background papers, they need a trusted conduit to acquire and return the works, so as not to endanger these living resources. ILL services are just such a trusted conduit. Robertson told a number of heart-tugging stories about protecting rare plants and animals with the support of ILL. This is another example of how an ILL transaction can be imbued with meaning beyond

the simple delivery of an item. The respect for privacy and confidentiality and the fine hand required to protect secrets without damaging the research process are all exemplified here.

I was reminded of these two stories when I went to a presentation at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Information Studies Research Day. Linda Quirk (MIST) gave highlights of her thesis research in "The Remarkable Bibliographic Record and Publishing History of Canada's Mohawk Poetess: E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)." Pauline Johnson is a famous Canadian poet. For her research, Quirk depended on ILL to view copies of almost every extant edition of Johnson's works from libraries around the world. She challenged ILL clerks and librarians to find specific editions, specific covers, and new versions of Johnson's work. She found some catalogs sorely lacking in key metadata to describe the work. She also found unique Canadian folk art (such as Boy Scout book covers for merit

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badges) in the discovery process. Highlights of Quirk's discoveries are included in the major work *History of the Book in Canada*, a three-volume set published in French and English. Volume I was released in August 2004 to much fanfare at an event at the Library and Archives Canada. We can see the role ILLs and libraries played in capturing information about this poet and Canada's cultural history.

These are just three examples of the role ILL plays in the scientific and cultural lives of our world. Although electronic discovery tools played supporting roles in each story, the real star was the original document, and the costar was the ILL process and staff.

### Will the Internet Replace ILL?

I think we know the answer to that question: No. For certain domains and types of information, there have been great strides in delivering access to journal articles, books, and original documents in repositories. We will build greater and deeper and broader electronic historical collections, local history repositories, and databases of photos and original documents. But there will always be resources that remain only in print. Even significant, fairly comprehensive collections such as ProQuest's Early English Books Online (EEBO); major full-text-and-image historical newspapers such as the *New York Times* or the *Globe* or the *Mail*; or Gale's visionary 19th

century books project—despite their greatness—do not touch the unconverted masses of historical collections.

When we can find an electronic copy, we use document delivery shops such as Infotrieve or CISTI, or other libraries. Open URL is a great step forward, but each collection needs to have Open URL compliance built into the end user to provide seamless access. There are collections great and small in our national libraries, college and university libraries, public libraries, and special libraries that are accessible through such services as Ariel, Relais, and ILLiad.

### What Will Next Generation ILL Look Like?

Differences exist between the needs of the humanities research communities and those of the scientific, technical, and medical communities. The ideal—for many years to come—is probably some sort of nicely blended solution. Will we ever be able to search and discover all types of resources without needing to choose print over electronic at the outset? That would be ideal; after all, it's the item we need, and most users just want it fast and correct.

Ideally, interlibrary loan capabilities should be patron-generated from the point of discovery and should not require assistance or present any unnecessary hurdles. The process should be unfettered. On the other hand, this process can be quite complex, so users

should be able to find assistance easily from wherever they are for resource discovery, navigation, and ordering.

Payment systems—both individual and enterprise—must get simpler and cheaper. If your institution has already paid for an article, you should not have to pay again. If the architecture is so cumbersome that it costs \$30 to process a transaction valued at \$2, someone needs to make a change, but I'm not sure whether that's the vendor, user, or payment processor. Maybe it's all of us. In any case, the transaction fee

shouldn't exceed the value of the item.

Finally, most users want others to be able to request the ILL on their behalf. Intermediaries such as library staff, research assistants, and secretaries should be able to work on behalf of their teams and users.

There's a lot of life left in the old ILL and document delivery systems. The user stories on this article show that people value ILLs and have specialized needs that require the services of trained information professionals. Let's just make it better! ●

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## Stay Ahead of the Curve

By John R. Latham

If I come out of a presentation or seminar with at least two ideas to follow up on or a couple statements that inspire me, I leave a happy man. I cannot promise that I actually act on any of them, but I am full of good intentions, and they are there for future reference.

At a recent presentation on What Associations Can Learn from Google, given at SLA headquarters by Jeff De Cagna of Principled Innovation Inc. ([www.principledinnovation.com](http://www.principledinnovation.com)), two sentences stuck in my mind: “Why are we always reacting to crises or traumas?” and “Change has to be part of your culture, as we do not know when the S curve is going to go down.” The latter was a reference to the Sigmoid curve, which is not an invasive medical procedure but a graph with a horizontal S that shows that success is cyclical. Both these concerns can be applied to our information centers and to organizations in general, and they can both be addressed by staying ahead of the curve.

There is nothing inherently wrong with having to react to crises in the organization or traumatic requests from users. They will never go away. But if you or your staff are regularly dropping everything to deal with crises, it’s time to analyze why this is happening. By definition, if an exception happens regularly, it is no longer an exception but is becoming the rule. The problem can arise because the nature of the organization is changing or the working style or environment of your users is changing. The latter is clearly true because of the technological changes that have affected how users find information. The former is not so easy to detect, as organizational change is often a slow process.

### When Is There a Problem?

How do you determine that there may be a problem, and what can you do about

it? You are likely to have a problem if the time available to prepare your core products or services is significantly reduced and the quality of the services is affected. It is easy to say that there is never time to do the job as well as one could or would like to, but one generally knows when the level of service is dropping. If this happens, it’s time to look at the mission and goals of your information organization and see if they need revising. At the same time, look at the mission of the whole organization and consider whether your services are still completely relevant. This is when the networking you have done throughout the organization pays off: Chatting with managers in different areas, especially if they don’t use your services, can provide useful insights into how the organization is changing and where it is moving.

We all do the best possible job with limited resources, which makes it even more important to set aside time to look at the products and services we provide. Find time to have a brainstorming session with your staff or, if you are a solo, with a colleague or mentor, and justify every service or product, however fundamental it might seem to be to your mission. This process is a lot easier if change is part of the organization’s culture; if not, change can still become the culture of the information center.

The other side of the coin is addressing the S curve—making changes on the rising curve of quality and effectiveness. In many ways, this is a more difficult issue to address. If it’s not broke, do you need to fix it? Even if your organization does not appear to be adapting to its market, which is highly unlikely, the way employees do business almost certainly will change. How are these changes going to affect the information services you provide and your users need?

You may have to adapt the delivery of a current product or service rather than create new ones. If you have a system through which you regularly receive feedback from users, review the feedback and see if a trend of changing requirements is developing. Or have your users fill out a short survey on the effectiveness of the information center’s products and services, making sure to provide space for their wish list of services if money and staffing were not issues. Nothing should be considered too far out.

It may be stating the obvious, but we sometimes forget to give our users what they want, not just what they, or we, think they need. This came home to me recently when a friend who had recently changed jobs told me that in her “getting to know you” process, she found that the users rated the quality of the products and services delivered by the information center as excellent, but they were not getting the services they really wanted.

It is crucial that we remain relevant and, we hope, indispensable in our organizations. To do so, we need to regularly step back and assess our services and make sure we stay ahead of the curve.



*The Information Center is sponsored by Factiva, a Dow Jones and Reuters company.*



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