



Virginia Walsh
Executive director

A recent study of users and non-users of state and public libraries claims to be the 'first national "market research" based survey of its kind'. Unlike previous studies by the likes of Ralph Munn and Ernest Pitt, Allan Horton and Barry Jones, this new study is based on a systematic survey by telephone of 725 non-users and by face-to-face contact with 868 library users. Earlier studies concentrated on data pertaining to registered library users, book stock, staff numbers, funding and the like and, as a result, suggest the researchers, were primarily inward focussed.

Navigating the economy of knowledge is the title of the new report which was prepared for the Libraries Working Group of the Cultural Ministers' Council by the Institute for Cultural Policy Studies at Griffith University. Importantly the study stresses the position of libraries within the cultural, social, economic, educational and recreational fabric of Australian society and, accordingly, recommends that libraries develop a strategic policy profile commensurate with this broad cross-portfolio relevance. The researchers note too the high esteem with which libraries are viewed by users and non-users and urge the library service 'to abandon its modesty and claim its rightful place of leadership in the economy of knowledge'.

Most particularly, libraries should be repositioning themselves in the context of emerging infor-

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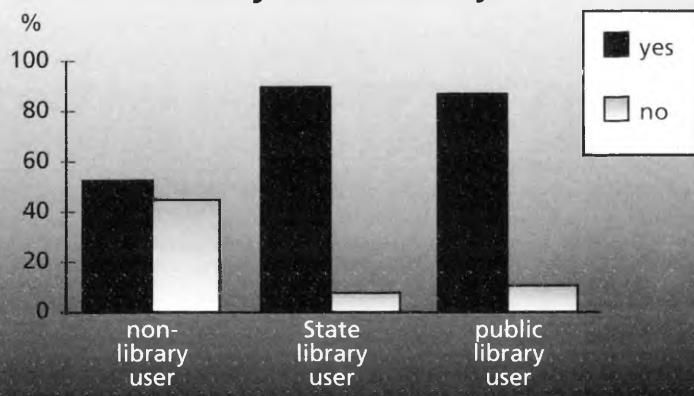
mation and communications technologies. To an extent this is already happening. Such a move is at the heart of much of the advocacy work that ALIA has recently undertaken. This report confirms that we are on the right path but sends the strong message that we must more actively and urgently pursue these interests.

What is probably most valua-

spondents). Nine per cent of non-users indicated that they use other libraries. This last cohort is characteristically aged 15 to 29 and are either students or professionals. An interesting fact to emerge from the non-users is that many were unaware of the broad range of library services on offer — illustrated in chart B — suggesting that we are not very good at promoting ourselves.

The survey also tells us something of the image of librarians. When asked what librarians remind them of, non-users associated librarians with school teachers and government officials. Library users responded similarly with the exception that 24 per cent of users replied that no category reminded them of librarians or that they didn't know. Fifteen per cent of non-users responded this way. This response is best illustrated in the following chart.

If you wanted to find something out would you automatically use the library?



able about the report is that it gives us plenty of up-to-date ammunition to fight with. It reveals that 60 per cent of the Australian community are users of library services. Of the remaining 40 per cent of non-users, certain clusters are identified which, with some strategic marketing, could be converted to library users. For example 54 per cent of non-users said that they would automatically use a library if they wanted to find something out. Chart A illustrates the response to this question from users of state and public libraries as well as from non-users.

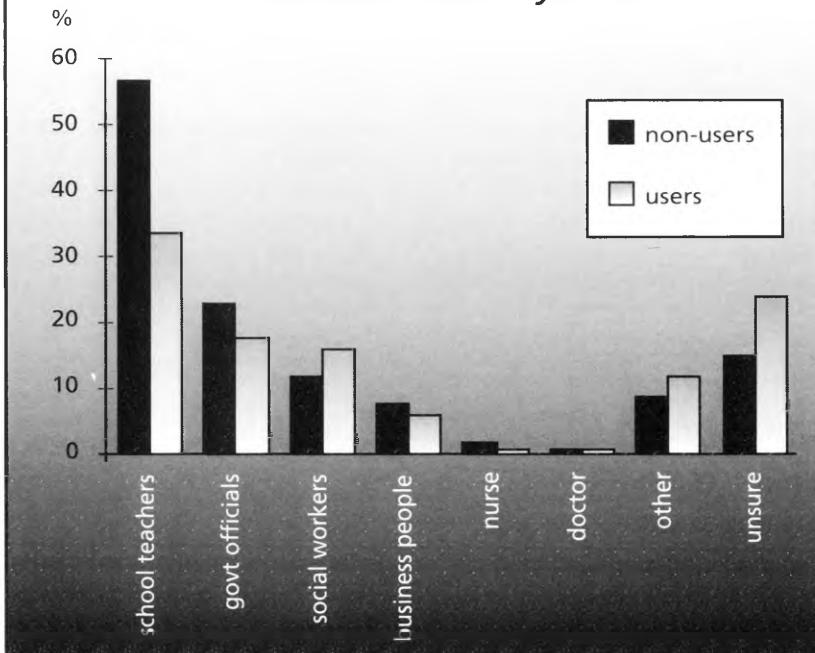
The survey reveals that the main reason non-users advance for not using public or state libraries is because they buy or have their own books (30 per cent of re-

This 150-page report contains many gems of information which we can use to better target the marketing of our public and state library services and to reposition libraries as a key player in the so-called "information society". This study alone has justified the establishment of the Libraries Working Group and those members of that Group most closely involved in the management of this study (notably Des Stephens and Ivan Catlin from the State Library of Queensland) are to be congratulated for their commitment to this task. The principal author was Colin Mercer from Griffith University who, it would appear from a recent presentation he gave to the Asia Pacific Libraries Conference in Brisbane, found the

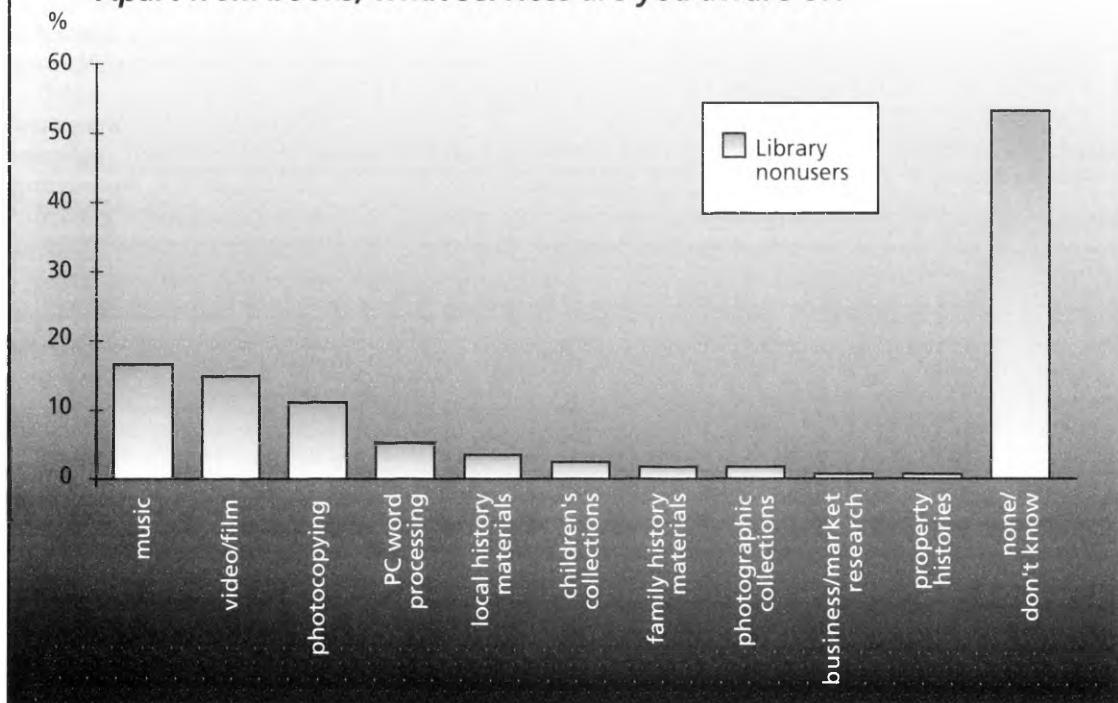
project very stimulating and worthwhile. He noted that, as a non-librarian and objective researcher, his team was able to provide 'as independent a piece of research as can ever be expected in dynamic policy contexts'. Copies of the report will be available from Ivan Catlin in September.

Further research is underway by the Libraries Working Group and includes an evaluation of the current status of the funding of public and state libraries. The recent report *From bushtrack to superhighway* provided a valuable analysis of the status of online communications developments in public libraries. Together with recent Federal Government initiatives such as the Community Information Network (see August *inCite*, pg 6), the reports emerging from the Libraries Working

What do librarians remind you of?



Apart from books, what services are you aware of?



Group provide us with a vision of what services libraries can offer and objective data and case studies which will enable us to argue our case that libraries have a key, if not critical, role in the 'knowledge economy' especially as the means of delivery of information are revolutionised by technological advances. ■

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Vamosi Information Publications,
PO Box 1719, Wollongong N.S.W. 2500
Tel: (042) 26 2662. Fax: (042) 28 7121



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