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**A**LIA's vision for excellence in library and information leadership was certainly in evidence at the 6th Asian Pacific Specials, Health and Law Librarians conference held in Sydney last month.

True to its theme, *Synergy in Sydney*, the gathering of more than 800 delegates resulted in one of the most interesting mixtures of library technologies, traditions and trends that I have come across on the conference trail.

Full marks to conference convener, Jan Cree and program convener, Elizabeth Swan for three days of challenging ideas and polished speakers, with a most impressive line-up of keynotes.

Chris Nailor, based in Sydney with the Economist Intelligence Unit emphasised the increasing importance of the Asian economies and discussed the increasing need to be more selective, interpretive and perceptive about our markets and how information is used within those markets.

Boston's Jim Matarazzo gave an entertaining but pertinent message about the need to veer away from the warehousing concept of library management simply in terms of information storage. He also cautioned that our future is not in information retrieval, but rather in the knowledge of our customers needs and the information that will best meet those needs.

Mickie Voges was a polished presenter who demonstrated how technology can not only simplify

or enhance a process, but can also change the way we do things or open up new information markets. The use of scanning technology in her library gave off-site access to users, but also revolutionised her management structures and workplace procedures as well as providing a business application for increased funding.

Sydney futurist Clive Graham encouraged librarians to find ourselves a toll-gate on the infonet in order to survive. Other speakers indicated that this ownership could come with our knowledge of how information is used or the diverse information markets that resulted from available new technologies.

A very interesting session on researching native title by Nick Pengelley demonstrated the research doors that had been opened with new technologies but also highlighted the inherent weaknesses.

Equally challenging was a session on ethics; particularly the dilemmas of information ethics, including a thought-provoking commentary by advertising agency man John Blevins.

A line that really stayed with me was delivered by California's Bob Muir. He made the point that when most of us graduated we thought we were trained for life. The reality in this technological age however, is that our skills are out-of-date every five years.

It's a good punch-line to demonstrate the usefulness of these sorts of conferences and the other

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myriad of ALIA professional development activities.

We cannot afford to stop learning, nor can we afford to isolate ourselves from our professional colleagues. Conferences such as this one keep us at the leading edge of our profession and they give us renewed enthusiasm that comes with sharing time with professional colleagues.

But Jim Matarazzo also made the point we need to get beyond our own conclave and speak to the professional and business communities that employ us. It is a trend I would like to see us embrace.

A common complaint is that these employers will not come to our conferences, even when we construct programs aimed at attracting them. Perhaps, it is time we started getting on *their* conference programs.

As I sat through three days of my colleagues giving papers there was a goodly number of times I caught myself thinking that the paper would do so much more for librarianship if it was being delivered to a wider forum, instead of the already converted.

Yes, we have to educate ourselves — but we also need to educate our users and our employers.

Next time you're putting together a conference paper think about giving it a second run at a non-library conference!

The *Synergy in Sydney* conference papers have been published jointly by ALIA and the Australian Law Librarians' Group, ISBN 0868045195. ■