

Transitions...



Naida Tattersall

ALIA Board of Directors

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Like many of you reading this column (after the event), I set off this weekend to our Association's biennial conference encouraged by the convenor's call to use this an opportunity to look ahead 'to how we can use the tools and techniques of the future, building on professional values that we've developed in the past.' For each of us, in our own way, we can ensure that it provides that and much more. To create the time in busy schedules to attend conferences and professional events is often compounded when we belong to more than one professional/industry association.

Last week I attended an evening seminar organised by 'another' professional association. On the rather long drive to the venue, I wondered why I still belonged to 'xyz' and retained a sense of duty to support the association's various activities even though it is now some considerable time since I had been involved in the professional area the organisation represented.

Glancing at my *curriculum vitae*, one could be excused for thinking that I had belonged (at one time or another of my career) to every professional association ever incorporated. I have managed to join (rejoin?) three of the organisations listed on a couple of different occasions. Does this mean I am terribly fickle or excessive about my affiliations? (I appreciate association membership is motivated by very many other reasons — so please, no analysis.)

I would prefer to think that it identifies me as a person wishing to sustain a wide range of interests and one who is extremely committed to exploiting the information and other services available from these associations for my employer's benefit.

In reality, the various memberships reflect a somewhat eclectic career that has encompassed four different professions in a few different geographic locations. From my perspective, the various 'disciplines' have added considerable meaning to each other, and at one stage combined, most fortuitously, into one job. To others, the range of positions I have held has represented quite separate careers (I know this because I have been asked to speak on the topic on a few occasions — usually in glowing terms of how my library/information management skills have facilitated taking on totally new challenges outside of previous experiences.)

The membership of a number of professional/industry associations at the one time

can also cause certain dilemmas. Which memberships can be sustained realistically both financially and from the previously mentioned perspective of 'duty' (albeit it usually an extremely pleasant one) to be involved in activities? The number of journals, seminar offerings and conference prospectuses, and e-mails arriving at many of our desks has the propensity to become an unmanageable, unusable, and undervalued torrent of information.

Hugh Mackay's claim in *Turning point* that 'information has never been cheaper, more plentiful or more accessible' can also be applied to job-related journals and electronically-offered professional knowledge. How do we get to enjoy and reap its benefits without being overwhelmed by it, especially when it is within our power to regulate the flow by simply opting out of memberships?

Rather than take this action, I trust the progress towards greater affiliations, liaisons, collaborations — call them what you will — between professional/industry organisations enable not only co-operation in organising various events and activities, but also in publishing, member services, and other areas. That is, that associations actively seek what one of my former chief executive officer called 'organisational serendipity.'

ALIA is a recognised leader in this respect. The Association already has several well-earned notches on its belt in this regard and it is part of our ongoing agenda. Hopefully it will mean lifestyle improvement (the great amounts of leisure time we have been promised do not seem to have been realised as yet) as well as those moments of excitement and achievement that can be experienced when we are able to realise synergies from combined professional efforts.

Discussions at Board meetings about retaining membership have touched upon those people who have/are travelling across various disciplines throughout their career. It is recognised that trying to maintain knowledge across those areas does create time and knowledge management problems not only for the individual but also somewhat of a dilemma for the sustainability of the various associations to which those people belong.

Meanwhile we can take considerable pride that librarianship/the information sciences prove such a good 'breeding ground' for flexible careers and trust that new dynamics are created each time 'old' skills and knowledge are employed as a basis for new achievements. ■