

# If you leave the library do you leave librarianship?

Jennifer Novak, Information Centre co-ordinator, NEMMCO (National Electricity Market Management Co)

In taking on a job outside the traditional library environment I was taking on a genuine risk. Could I provide real value to this organisation? Could I learn about another industry in-depth? Would my library skills and experience provide me with adequate grounding to achieve what I claimed I could accomplish for the company? What if I didn't like it and wanted to get back into libraries — would I have diminished my career prospects?

After a number of years in various roles in university and special libraries I decided to try my hand in the corporate world. This led to my current role as information centre co-ordinator at NEMMCO, the company that manages the national electricity market (NEM) (a market for the wholesale trading of electricity) and which operates the national power grid.

NEMMCO's pressing need when hiring me was the establishment of an InfoLine and the development of products and services required for the company to meet its legal obligations for publishing market data and information about our operations. Despite being very sure that they wanted to hire a librarian, NEMMCO had no real idea what librarians do. Partly as a result of this, I have been in the fortunate position of being able to define my own role and activities within the company.

My job has four main areas of responsibility, all of which depend on the skills and experience I have gained through work in libraries: managing the InfoLine; managing a corporate research service; providing an internal consultancy on knowledge and information management; and managing the website.

The InfoLine is an information service available to all interested parties and provides a wide range of information about NEMMCO's activities and the electricity industry generally. The information we provide is often highly technical. The librarianship skills that I use in providing this service include:

- creation and management of a customer-focused service;
- database design and development;
- classification of all queries;

- analysis of the information being sought by customers and identification of gaps in the information available; and
- design and development of information products/solutions to fill these gaps.

The corporate research service draws upon all the typical reference services skills, and is essentially a mini-library. It has resources to conduct research using a basic selection of online and document delivery services, and at this stage we have a very small core collection of reference material. We also provide inter-library loans to libraries including requests for time series data from NEMMCO's market management systems.

Acting as internal consultant on knowledge and information management basically means that I am involved in all decisions and processes relating to information. This part of my role is intensely political, and uses skills such as:

- understanding the benefits of structuring information in order to maximise the awareness and sharing of resources;
- knowledge of information management processes and strategies;
- understanding of knowledge and information management systems;
- negotiation skills; and
- in-depth understanding of the information needs and uses.

Our website is a primary mode of communication with market participants and the external world generally. We have legal obligations to publish certain information to the public and a requirement to operate the company in as transparent a manner as possible. Everything we do ends with something published on our website!

The greatest challenges in running the website are:

- providing structure to the content;
- keeping it up-to-date with a high turnover rate of material;
- determining the gaps in the information provided and finding ways of

filling them;

- fending off the eternal bids from IT to take over the site; and
- maintaining the time-series data and developing value-added means of presenting the information.

Now that I am known in the company I am also called upon to assist in a range of other information related activities such as: writing and designing information booklets and brochures, developing glossaries of technical and industry terminology, editorial work, and creating presentations at NEM information forums on information-related topics.

In moving out of the library environment there are some challenges to face. First, it is a big move away from one's comfort zone. Probably the hardest aspect of this is being professionally isolated. Your colleagues stop thinking of you as 'one of them' and in your new environment no one understands what someone in our profession does. I have had a number of our engineers say to me: 'you know I don't think I have ever come across a ... ummm ... you know, a librarian before'. You have no support, and have to approach the new environment on your own and on their terms.

Another enormous challenge was the need to develop an in-depth and highly technical understanding of a new and (exhaustingly) complex industry while trying to establish and deliver services to this new organisation. I had to learn fast. Before I started at NEMMCO 'electricity' meant 'push button, light goes on'. The first three months were sheer hell!

Having said this, moving outside one's comfort zone can also be incredibly rewarding, and can result in having the freedom to explore ideas and offer services that you might not have had otherwise. If people do not know what you can do, they will often leave you alone to do it. I still regard myself as a librarian, and use my librarianship skills every day in a myriad of ways. The context is different, but at the end of the day, my focus is still on the management of information and the provision of information services for the benefit of my customers. ■