

Ch-ch-ch-changes

(turn and face the strain)

Technicians are used to change. If you have been in the industry as long as I have, you have seen many changes. Once, there were the shelves and shelves of bound newspapers, you searched *Books in Print* in printed form and in some cases reference queries were answered using great tomes. You developed great arm muscles lifting those titles on and off the shelves and blackened fingers from leafing through them all.

Just when you were getting used to using these materials in print and could distinguish where one style of entry came from compared to another (remember the old Library Procedure Unit in the Certificate course?), along comes a new format to make your life easier – microform. OK, so now you aren't developing those fine bicep muscles that you could compare with your brothers or male acquaintances, and there is more space on your shelves at work.

Now instead of rows upon rows of bound newspapers, volumes of Library of Congress subject headings, there are drawers upon drawers of microfiche/microfilm; at least you can fit more material in the library and you don't have to handle yellow

fragile newsprint. It shouldn't be too hard or give you too many problems, right?

Wrong! Along with new technology there are new hurdles to contend with – why is the print on the reader upside down and back to front? Have I wound the film on the right way after a patron accidentally let the spool drop and unwind? A drawer of microfiche is upended. Why can't I get to the globe in the reader? (I did it with no problems last time.) Oh well, you'll soon get the hang of it.

Into all this you add the introduction of computers for loans and OPAC terminals instead of catalogue drawers – they are not so bad! No more remembering which comes first, *Maine* as a surname, as a place, a thing or title or was that the other way around? No worries, the computer will file it for you, but don't rely on the spell check. Scan the patron's barcode then the book. What could be better? Do you remember sorting punch cards with knitting needles, and dot-matrix printers with continuous paper?

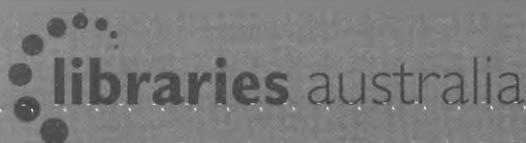
Not too many changes now! Computers get faster, take up less space and more of your work is done on the computer.

Then the internet comes along and it's pretty good. The only problem seems to be that the patrons (or clients as they are now called) still come in asking for a picture of this, or a copy of that, but they want it now! You reply 'yes'; we have it, but it can only be used in the library.

Questions are raised. How can we overcome this problem? Digitisation! Just when you thought you had gotten your head around the last changes, along comes a new buzz word. Now you have to learn terms like 'resolution', 'pixels' 'metadata', 'bits' and 'bytes'. Then there is new equipment to learn to use. Oh well! We have been there before and we can do it again.

Out go the drawers of photographs, slides and even the microfiche and microfilm. At least the server takes up less space than the drawers did. 'Get it online' and the clients can do it themselves. No more browsing through the drawers and coming across a photo of someone you know or a place you have visited. At least the items will be preserved for future generations... or will they?

Rebecca Evans, Tasmanian Fire Service



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