

Frontline



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Feedback to *your* Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, a compliment or a concern about your Association? Contact any Director and your ideas will be reviewed at the next Board meeting.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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By the time this first issue for 2007 reaches your mailbox you will undoubtedly be well into planning and delivering services and programs for 2007. However I do hope that you had a relaxing and enjoyable break over Christmas and the New Year with your family and friends and that this is not a too-distant memory.

For ALIA, 2007 promises to be a busy and challenging year with an interesting and varied schedule of conferences and activities, which are such an important part of any professional association's communication with its members. 2007 will bring many additional challenges for the profession to consider.

As indicated in my December column, I plan to begin discussions on education for the profession, with a view to encouraging some new perspectives and strategies for action. I believe education is a key issue for the future health of the profession.

In an increasingly networked and digital learning and information environment, the question of a new or revised vision of the services provided by libraries should be high on the list for discussion and debate.

Service provision has been one of the most challenging things that I have had the opportunity to 'wrestle' with in the various roles that I have held in my career. In the early 1970s, when automated systems were first introduced, the focus was initially on the benefits to libraries of using automation to simplify processing, for example in cataloging sharing automated cataloging records. Some of the debates in the literature at that time centered on whether cataloging from other libraries including from overseas was acceptable, up to standard! I know this is hard to imagine today's environment.

Now, when change in the area of automated systems is far more rapid than it was at the beginning of my career in the 1970s, we can all remember comments of a couple of years

ago, such as 'no one will scan whole libraries...' How quickly things move on!

You will know that in 2006 the major players, Google and Yahoo, signed up new library partners to scan whole collections. We do not yet know what the implications of these new digital libraries are, in terms of new service models. We can perhaps get some idea of possible business models if we look at the development of pay TV.

During the early days of library automation I worked in public, special and university libraries and the impact of automation on the future of library services was extensively discussed. In special libraries and also in the scientific/university research environment there was interest in designing and developing systems directly for the end user, with much debate about the role of, or even the necessity for, an intermediary or librarian. While I was teaching in the school of Librarianship at Kuring-gai College of Advanced Education, in the late 70s and early 80s, these were among the hot issues that challenged both students and staff.

Today we are all in the position where, professional and user alike, we check out the web first and – depending on the results – may consult other sources including libraries.

So how will libraries define their roles and plan their future models of service to meet the needs of their readers/clients? As a profession we need to be much better informed of business and commercial sector research into user/client behaviour, as well as being aware of our own LIS research. We will need to share this knowledge to inform the development of new service models.

In libraries, new technology was soon deployed in areas outside cataloguing, most notably in library circulation where processing was revolutionised. Significant progress continues in this area today, with new high-tech self check-out systems and, in some cases, a much more open

and liberal approach to users. At the new and very modern Brisbane City Library, for example, users pick up their reserved items and check them out themselves in an area specifically designed for this purpose.

Another interesting trend in service provision is the move towards establishing consortia of libraries, not only for purchasing data sets but also, I suspect, to allow more strategic approaches to shared service provision across current institutional boundaries.

Current federal initiatives in the collections sector, with the establishment of the Collections Council of Australia, are an indication of how government envisions a more streamlined and co-operative approach to services across sectors.

These developments raise interesting questions for the profession, including the need to ensure creative leadership which will explore new models and test benefits for all stakeholders, users as well as funding bodies. To achieve this leadership, we will need to define the service framework for libraries in this fluid technical and political context.

An OCLC report published in 2006, entitled 'A Service Framework for Libraries', provides an interesting perspective on these issues. The report recognises the work done by libraries but goes on to say that 'these efforts lack a unifying framework, a means for libraries as a community, to gather the strands of individual projects and weave them into a cohesive whole...' The report continues 'most importantly, a framework would assist libraries in strategic planning. It would provide a tool to help them establish priorities, guide investment, and anticipate future needs in uncertain environments' <http://www.dlib.org/dlib/july06/lavoie/07lavoie.html>

In Australia, libraries in CAUL and NSLA are addressing these issues. I look forward to interesting debate and discussion in the literature over the next 12 months.