

Downsizing is just a state of mind...

... when less is more

Join any group of special librarians and someone's library will have recently been downsized, had the collection moved off-site or are in the midst of facing these challenges.

Instead of feeling overwhelmed and under-appreciated, the maxim that 'every cloud has a silver lining' may help to achieve an invigorating outcome.

In December 2005, it was announced that the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry would move from its locale of over 50 years in Barton, ACT to the city centre.

The Library had enjoyed ample accommodation in Barton, but was out-of-the-way and difficult to find. Staff saw the move as an opportunity to re-locate to a prime position with maximum visibility; however our new location on the ground floor of the 12-storey building meant having half our previous floor space, requiring additional off-site storage. The Library is now two spaces either side of a glass-sided entryway running from the front to the back of the building - challenging on the design front!

However, once we settled the shelving layout we calculated the degree of weeding required - about 50%. It was over ten years since we had seriously weeded, so despite the fact that we were proud of our extensive historical serials collection (late 1800's for some titles), we were less distressed than you might imagine. It was 'time'.

Reducing 2.5 km of collection to 1.0 km with a staff of four and limited contractual help took every bit of the 11 months at our disposal, particularly whilst maintaining all of our usual services and re-organising material selected to go off-site.

As a special library, serials are our 'lifeblood'. We had been gradually increasing our online access so that by 2006, many of our 'scholarly' titles were arriving in both print and online format,

or some online only. We therefore took 'one giant leap' for our 2007 serial renewals, announcing that henceforth, no journal that existed in online format would be received in print. Interestingly, approximately one-third of our titles continue as print subscriptions because much 'trade' literature is not available online.

We have a static IP address which simplifies authentication, so whilst there are issues of 'link rot' from time to time, our researchers have embraced this decision enthusiastically. It is particularly helpful for our regional staff across Australia, providing them with a far better service than was previously possible.

Clients have been equally excited due to our success in obtaining 'one-off' funding to purchase online backsets of many core journals. The funding bid was justified by the downsizing exercise and our aim to increase online content. Twenty-three bays of serials were replaced with instant, reliable desktop access to both current and historical research resources. No waiting for print issues to arrive, no interlibrary loan costs to obtain an article from an issue that never arrived or was lost on routing or loan. Our online backsets negate future interlibrary loan cost increases that would inevitably occur if we had simply discarded print issues. We have gained full-text access to a far wider range of material than we actually subscribe to due to the fact that many backset services are 'bundled'. Clients 'help themselves' and we can concentrate on assisting them by sourcing the 'really tricky stuff'.

Now we have a wonderful new library space; a fantastic location that has already seen new clients come and borrow material they didn't realise we had; shelves that are tidy and only 2/3rds full; serial storage boxes that are re-labeled to alert clients to the fact that for some titles, older material is offsite and newer material is online; and, an e-journals list that is satisfyingly replete with current links, reflecting updated catalogue records that mirror Libraries Australia holdings. Add to this the fact that we have the latest 'multi-function' devices that allow us to scan an article

or chapter and email it to our clients in PDF format in the blink of an eye. In the words of one client who recently discovered the range of online material we now have - 'this is so cool!...'

So yes, for us, 'less is more'.

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In search of the 'Page Three' librarians

In early 2007 I had an epiphany. I realised that a far bigger and better kept secret than my city's hip laneway and basement bars was the fact that there are a disproportional high number of extremely sexy special librarians working in Melbourne.

Not found in your conventional public or educational libraries, special librarians are harder to locate because they are dispersed around the CBD - in corporate high rise offices and throughout our government agencies.

Special librarians often shun the limelight, given little opportunity to bask in the glory of success; unlike their business or public facing colleagues who take the credit for contract wins or new services that the library not only support but are integral in the conception.

I decided I needed to reverse this injustice and showcase the hidden talents of hardworking and dedicated special librarians - unsung heroes. Drawing inspiration from 80's pop idol and Page Three icon Samantha Fox, the *Page Three Librarian* was born.

It is my pleasure and privilege to present to you the Victorian Special Libraries Page Three Librarians for 2007.

Ms March: Jill Bartholemeusz,
Melbourne Athenaeum Library

Jill is the Librarian at the Melbourne Athenaeum Library (The Ath) - a subscription library on the Paris end of Collins Street. The Ath is arguably the