Frontline

Derek Whitehead
ALIA President

People ask me two main questions about being President of ALIA: was it what you expected, and would you do it again, knowing what you know now?

After almost a year as President, and a year before that as Vice-President, I think that I am almost in a position to give clear answers to those questions and also to the unspoken ones that people are too polite to ask, like: did you actually achieve anything, and, when Roxanne said at the beginning, "It'll be a hoot, Derek", was she right?

When I stood for election in February 2007, in the 100 words I was allowed, I suggested that the main issues were:

- building bridges with other information players,
- standing up for our core values, copyright issues, and more,
- library education and training – our future workforce, and
- innovation in a changing information world.

I am also very interested in the future of libraries, and brought a serious (but not panicky) interest to the role of President.

I, like any other president, aimed to achieve such things as a sustainable association with steady growth in membership and support. We have certainly not got there – the Global Financial Crisis has not done us any favours, and the membership has not increased.

So what has been achieved?

First, we have been very successful in building bridges with other players in the crowded information sphere, although this is due much more to Sue Hutley's assiduous and time-consuming efforts than to me. ALIA is working with public, school, TAFE, special, and many other categories of librarians to provide a common and collaborative approach. A strategy to umbrella-ise ALIA – remake it as an umbrella group which provides a home for a wide range of smaller groups which also inhabit our space – is well under way, to the benefit of everyone.

Second, ALIA has maintained a strong public profile and engaged in lobbying and advocacy. We have worked on issues of concern to us, and which involve our values. We have taken strong stances on issues like copyright and censorship, and we have begun an advocacy campaign through the Public Libraries Summit (on 16 July) and its predecessor, the **Education and Workforce Summit** held in 2008.

Third, the future workforce has been a strong preoccupation. In March 2008 we held an Education and Workforce Summit in Melbourne. This brought employers, educators, library professionals, and researchers together, and had a number of action spin-offs. Some of the other achievements during 2008 came from the Summit too, and it has had a rippling effect through a number of ALIA activities.

So the focus on **professional development** in the July 2008 National Advisory Congress was a clear outcome, and there will be further development of our thinking in the future. On the meantime, a newsletter of PD opportunities has been started.

Regular meetings of **library educators**, convened by board member Damian Lodge, have been held in 2008 and 2009. These were added to the meetings of library technician educators which had begun several years ago. Further, ALIA began a review of its course recognition (accreditation) processes in 2008, to be concluded in 2009.

A concern with **recruitment to librarianship** was a major outcome of the Summit. The Summit goal of getting educators and employers together has been met in part by the recruitment and careers working party in Victoria chaired by Chis Kelly, and the Destination Library wiki that it has developed.

Finally, innovation. The other major enterprise of ALIA in 2008 was the member survey held in October and pushed by Board member Katy Watson. We hope that this will help to transform the Association and lead to much stronger member involvement. In the end, the Association will be as strong as its membership, and without an increase in membership, and member involvement and participation there is not much chance of a flourishing future.

In 2008 ALIA's efforts to achieve financial sustainability were the least successful feature of the year, and the Association ended the year with a substantial deficit. This was partly the result of the Global Financial Crisis, which reduced the value of our investments; partly a consequence of a small but significant decline in membership numbers; and partly the costs associated with maintaining and refreshing ageing physical and technical infrastructure (our building, software, and computer systems).

Was it what I expected? Absolutely not – I had no idea what to expect, and the huge diversity of groups, environments, problems and people was a great surprise. Would I do it again, knowing what I know now? Definitely, but differently. Unfortunately, it has taken some time for me to work out what I would have done differently. But yes, it was a hoot, Roxanne.

Thank you to the hundreds (maybe thousands) of ALIA people I met in various places around Australia (and New Zealand) during 2008, and for their enthusiastic participation in so many ALIA activities. And in particular, to the ALIA staff in Canberra and around the country. We couldn't have done it without you.

And as for the future of libraries, you can read all about that in *The Australian* – **http://www.swinburne.edu.au/magazine**

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