



**Jan Richards**

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## Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

Email: [feedback@alia.org.au](mailto:feedback@alia.org.au) with your comments.

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In the days before Christmas, media outlets across the country reported that traditional gifts were outselling electronic items, with 70 per cent of consumers buying books. This is great news from a social and economic perspective.

Post-Christmas, retail giant Amazon.com described how customers had continued to shop on Christmas Day, though for the first time ever the focus turned from hard-copy to electronic books. Amazon also said that its e-book reader, the Kindle, had become "the most gifted item in Amazon's history". This would suggest to me that a lot Kindles had been received as Christmas presents, then recipients needed to load something for it to be useful (a bit like the 'remember the battery to go with the toy' scenario). Either that or a whole swag of people had left their gift buying until the very last minute!

On New Year's Eve, one of my friends waxed lyrical about a Kindle given to a mutual acquaintance. I was intrigued by her reaction: an avid reader and a visual artist I would have anticipated that an electronic book would have been too 'cold' for her, but it was in fact the tactile nature of the device combined with the availability (read: quick downloads via Amazon) which so appealed.

I shouldn't have been surprised. My library gave itself a Christmas present of three different e-book readers and we too have been seduced. They're currently being trialed by our staff so that we can get a feel for the medium, talk about them with some authority, and let our clients discover what all the hype is about. It has been suggested that the exercise is a case of 'know thine enemy', but should we see these as a threat or as a future we need to embrace? For does it really matter what format the book comes in? What is important is the role of libraries in making this and other enabling technologies available.

Speaking at *The big issues: public libraries, learning technology and social inclusion* symposium in Melbourne during November, Bill Thompson, one of the UK's most popular and highly regarded technology commentators, warned delegates to ignore new technologies at their peril. He maintained that in an ever-evolving world to do so would leave us limited in our relevance. I would recommend time spent listening to his discussion. <http://slv.vic.gov.au/programs/events/2009/big-issues/big-issues-in-libraries/>.

In the 'slow' time of January (I wish!) traditionally many of us have the luxury of being able to explore new tools and evaluate how these can be used to enhance and/or alter service delivery to our clients. Such exploration can no longer be seen as an indulgence or something limited to quiet times, but an essential, ongoing component of the development of our profession.

The map of where we're going is constantly changing and to navigate a successful path for ourselves and for our libraries we need to relentlessly survey the terrain. Our world is an amalgam of the new and the traditional with the balance shifting from one to the other and back again. I'm currently reading Clotilde Dusoulier's

*Chocolate and Zucchini*, a book based on her website of the same name. In the introduction she explains why she pulled her web musings into a book:

the book ... has a personality and a charm that a web site can never hope to achieve. It's hard to take a web page into the kitchen with you, or curl up on the couch, a mug of tea by your side and the cat on your lap. You cannot scribble things in the margin of a web site, or accidentally smudge a little batter on it, forever marking that recipe as the stupendous cake you made for your sister's birthday.

It will be interesting to review this musing in time. Already some of Clotilde's 'book pluses' are possible in electronic form. The smudge I'm not so sure about!

The one constant in this changing environment is the importance of the physical library as a safe haven, a neutral space, and the living room of the community, whether your community is a school, college, university workplace, or public library. In considering new technologies we need to consider how we can build upon this reputation to offer trusted but exciting services.

I live in Orange on the NSW Central Tablelands. For us December through to April is backpacker season as young people from across the world descend for seasonal picking of stone fruit, apples, and wine grapes. Every available seat (and power point!) is given over to internet access whether through our PC network or Wi fi. I know from experience that many of you have similar experiences. Safe in the knowledge of the 'library as a safe place' we know that libraries around the world are providing the same welcome to young Australians.

From my office I am afforded a wonderful view of the public spaces on the floor below. I can't let talk of the library as the community living room go without reference to an incident which occurred a few days before Christmas. My attention was caught by a woman who had pulled together a couple of our large tables over which she had neatly laid navy fabric with pattern pieces pinned in place. Her sewing basket was on a chair nearby. Without fuss, and totally unaware of her amazed but approving audience she calmly set about cutting. Are our tables bigger than the domestic model, was it a Christmas gift she wanted to construct in secret, or was she a grey nomad who was taking advantage of our space? Who cares, I was just delighted that she felt comfortable enough to be able to do so.

If one of your New Year's resolutions was to keep up with what's happening in your Association, I remind you that there is an ALIA Board Blog <http://www.alia.org.au/blog/>. It's a good place to go between editions of *inCite* to keep abreast of what's happening.

Until next month

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