Re-defining the role of university libraries, Or, earning a place at the big table

University libraries have been challenged over recent decades as they attempt to redefine themselves in light of the new environment emerging across the higher education sector. It is clear that the library's traditional responsibility of storing, cataloguing, and exercising control over access to scholarly information is under threat. The digital revolution has transformed scholarly communication, increasing scholarly output faster than the library's ability to collect it. The digital environment has enabled researchers to share vast quantities of research data and to publish in alternative forums made accessible through a wide range of interfaces and search strategies. Rapidly evolving publishing and discovery models have changed the process by which content is accessed forever.

In this new environment the library profession has an opportunity to cement its place in the new world, by using its core competencies to deliver valued outcomes to the scholarly community. Griffith University is responding to these challenges by redefining core library services to provide an integrated end-to-end service to support research outcomes. These services support researchers throughout the research life cycle: from idea discovery, grant application, research data management, e-research, and the management of research outputs, to drive accessibility, discoverability, and impact. Rather than identifying lists of services, Griffith is meeting specific needs at the individual, school, or faculty level.

To effectively operate within the new research environment it is imperative that a researcher be critically current with changing journal trends, impact factors, publishing choices, discoverability options, research data management strategies, profile management, and any legislative requirements for reporting research outputs. How researchers navigate through this environment significantly contributes to their overall research impact.

A clear understanding of the academics' requirements is being developed longitudinally, through the Contact Librarians, a new role responsible for building and maintaining relationships with the community, informing academics of existing services, and referring them to specialist staff as appropriate. This knowledge in turn ensures that Griffith's services are not static but are evolving over time to meet changing requirements.

This model brings together the competencies from information management and library science so they no longer exist in parallel silos. The joining of technical and professional expertise focused on research outcomes provides both benefit and efficiency.

There is growing interest across the academic community for web, portal, and content management toolsets that can work within the framework of a particular research project. These services identify data storage requirements, security, or ethics issues that may relate to the data sets and provide strategies to increase accessibility. Collaboration toolsets are being integrated into single portal or public websites, providing enhanced functionality such as email lists, customer relations management (CRM) modules, group calendars, and streaming options. Content management systems are being integrated to store documents, audio, video, image, learning objects, etc; to provide version control; deliver sophisticated search and retrieval functionality; and access management capabilities.

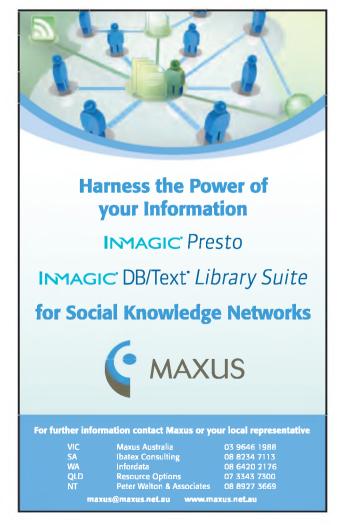The traditional library skills of building complex systems and standards are being re-purposed for this new environment, providing the librarian or information professional with the opportunity to contribute to the research cycle at every level.

For the library to realise these new opportunities a radical reconfiguration of research library organisations and services is required to provide strategic leadership and technical skills to respond to this rapidly changing environment. It is imperative that libraries once again find a legitimate, valuable, and relevant role to play within the institution and find a way to clearly articulate this value proposition to its community.

Academic libraries believe they are in the information gateway business but in fact they are in the learning and scholarly productivity business. This new role supports the entire process of scholarship where skills in information management, discovery, curation, and technology will serve to become critical assets supporting the research community to ensure it understands the new rules of engagement and the secrets to achieving maximum impact.

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