Looking beyond the library walls

Library professionals don't always work in libraries. Patricia Kennedy doesn't. Her role, which centres on metadata, is a position in the web publishing team in a government department, putting her information management skills to use in a rapidly evolving technological environment.

Working in web publishing has provided me with the opportunity to be involved with, and learn from, cognate areas such as information technology, recordkeeping, and communications. Along with other roles such as graphic designer, my role has been viewed as that of a specialist within the web team. In addition to the basic skill sets of cataloguing and classification, I have developed technical expertise and gained experience in project management and broader information management roles.

Gartner's recent metadata definition and discussion represents the evolution of understanding of metadata. It's worth looking at. "Metadata is information that describes various facets of an information asset to improve its usability throughout its life cycle." (*Gartner Clarifies the Definition of Metadata*, 2010) The idea of metadata is much broader than is often stated, going beyond search and retrieval. Metadata is integral to business outcomes and has significant recordkeeping implications.

A Gartner recommendation led to my involvement in metadata. Departmental information technology managers had attended a Gartner seminar in 1997. At this seminar, the managers were told that if there was a librarian in the organisation, to involve them in the web team. Around about this time, I had begun reading about metadata and was ready for a change. So, the two events happily coincided for me and I was invited to join the fledgling web team in my department.

Those early web experiences now seem light years away. Technical experience such as learning basic html coding and marking up text has been replaced by providing value-added content within established systems, using workflows, and control processes. Compliant metadata, crosswalked to other applications, can be harvested for reuse in other systems.

Working within a Web Content Management System (WCMS) has included roles such as preparation of web content, quality assurance, and content reviews. Knowledge of the principles of thesaurus construction and skills in controlled vocabulary maintenance are integral elements for metadata work in web publishing. Related areas include image management metadata and providing metadata training to individuals and groups.

I believe that metadata mitigates disintermediation, by maintaining information provision regardless of client proximity and organisational location. Like many today, I work at a remove from the clients and I miss direct involvement with the people who access and use the information. However, a review of tracking statistics indicates the usage of the information across the various organisational websites. Metadata forms an integral aspect of the information chain.

Project work has included the *Right to Information* implementation, the development of functional specifications for publications registers, and the ongoing process of refinements to content information architecture. My skills in abstracting and indexing have been enhanced through metadata tasks.

A significant proportion of metadata is automatically generated from modern systems. Some metadata elements are added by the content owners, with value-added metadata, further enhancements, and a quality role performed by the web team. Analysing content to write succinct descriptions and add metadata for search is an important step in information provision, allowing content users to determine if the web page or document is relevant to their needs prior to connecting.

Relevant standards have evolved and include international, national, state, and approaches relevant to specialised disciplines. I have been involved in special interest groups and in the reviews of information standards and policies, such as the departmental Metadata Policy and the Queensland Government Information Standard IS34 Metadata.

An important change for me has been the need to review and adjust my perspective along the way. Rather than sourcing and providing external information, my focus is on the provision of organisational information to both internal clients and external clients. Although I don't work in a library, my work role is still very much that of a librarian within an organisation. I am involved with our profession's primary role of facilitating the timely flow of content and news and connecting people with ideas and information.

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