

DIRECTLINE

ADVOCACY ON THE FRONT FOOT

Having worked in a number of industries, I'm very aware of the fact that there are recurring stories in the media for which you need to have a prepared comeback. These are the stories that journalists and commentators tend to fall back on when there's a slow news day or they can't think of a topic for their column.

In the packaging industry, the easy (seemingly shocking) story used to be

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that manufacturers are short-changing consumers such as, "the contents of cereal and washing powder boxes are only ever 90% the size of the box". There's actually a perfectly simple

and reasonable explanation for that – the contents settle after filling. In the restaurant industry, the expose was (and probably still is) consumer outrage at the price of mineral water and the profit margin on wine and coffee. It's a fair cop, but have you ever tried to make money in catering?

The next stage in ALIA's ever-developing approach to advocacy and lobbying is to try to work out what the media is going to throw at us, before they take aim. We need to identify these stories by type of library, by geographic region and by issues (copyright, education, budgets). We have a fair sense of this, but we haven't yet set it down in a plan.

Having a strong sense of what's coming enables us to have the evidence

and the answers ready and it will help us create advocacy materials to assist our members. It will also form the basis for a proactive media campaign schedule.

I'd like to think we can really get onto the front foot and start to piggyback news items that are not necessarily about libraries but that can give us a platform from which to talk about value, contribution and impact.

It would be wonderful if all the media coverage of libraries was positive, but it is a sad fact that negative stories are out there, and try as we might to be proactive, we will need to be alert and reactive too.

One such example of this occurred last month. Below is our response to a typical 'death of the traditional library' story that appeared in the Australian Financial Review: www.alia.org.au/news/1626/alias-letter-editor-financial-review-published.

Sue McKerracher
Executive Director



Libraries are early adopters, not lemmings

Geoff Hanmer's article in Monday's *AFR* left our members wondering how someone who clearly has such a poor understanding of the subject could have been granted so much editorial space. Take this line:

"Universities and their librarians need to accept that knowledge is moving inexorably to an online format." No kidding. Academic libraries started moving into electronic journals and databases in 1976. Or this one: "In the 1970s and '80s . . . libraries struggled to accommodate the 'information

explosion'." Struggled? We embraced new technologies. But we have perspective. We're early adopters, not lemmings. We're not running towards the edge of the digital cliff crying "Google and Wikipedia will save us", love 'em as we do. Heaven forbid that a major multinational organisation such as Google should go broke unexpectedly, but what if it did?

Don't get us wrong, we love Google's ambition, we just want to make sure there's a back-up, and that researchers have a choice of print and e-resources.

Another quote from Mr Hanmer: "I believe that nearly all books or journal articles will eventually be available online." Agreed. But at what cost? At some point in the next 50 years, everything is probably going to be available online, but how will researchers be able to afford all the resources they need if it sits behind a paywall?

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