VENDORS' VOX POP

What better way to wrap up our business feature issue than with a few words from folks in the library business? This month we gave the Last Word column over to our vendors and asked them just two questions: what do they think is the key issue or challenge facing LIS business right now, and what do they love about working with libraries and library and information professionals?

Let's start with the challenges. One way or another, money and the digital world are on everyone's minds. Nick Wright, National Marketing Manager of Tag-Alert Pty Ltd and Ezi-Scan Pty Ltd, told us 'the challenge facing LIS business at the moment is the reduction of library budgets and the gradual shift from books to digital media.'

At RMIT Publishing, 'reaching out to the new generation of researchers who are digitally enabled, and who use all forms of media in their research, and who may not physically visit the library or institution subscribing to our company's products,' was nominated as their key challenge right now.

Library supplier ALS Library Services has a slightly longer list of challenges in mind. Managing Director Patricia Genat and her team told us top of their list is the uncertainty of the future landscape for books and ebooks in libraries, a situation 'in constant flux with no sign of settling.'

'[This] makes it tricky to plan and requires constant adjustment and manoeuvring to keep up with service levels,' they told us.

Additional cost pressures on libraries, which reduce the ability to expect integrity in data and service, and the system changes working their way through libraries now as we migrate from the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules to Resource Description and Access (RDA) and introduce new library management systems, are also seen as challenges by the ALS team. The fact that some libraries are adapting faster than others adds to the complexities.

These are significant challenges, arising from a working environment and profession evolving alongside technological capabilities that are expanding at unprecedented speed. All three companies notably have their library customers and end users at the forefront of their thinking. There's a strong sense of the need to face the future together with their customers.

And because those library customers are so obviously pivotal to their businesses, our second question was about the things that inspire and motivate vendors to keep going in the face of such challenges.

At ALS, they love our love – our 'genuine desire for information-sharing and collaboration to develop and promote the library sector as a whole.' ALS also cited positive feedback and communication, and 'hearing about the wonderful things our clients are doing with new libraries and new services, and challenging their own services to be better every day,' as characteristics they appreciate in LIS professionals.

ALS gave us an example of a new service that had inspired a library user too, sharing the experience of a taxi driver who spontaneously shared how wonderful he found the new one-card system [in South Australia] because he could borrow and return books all over the city.

The Tag-Alert/Ezi-Scan team agreed with ALS on positive feedback and good communication. 'We love working in the library industry as we find most library professionals to be friendly and easy going,' Nick said. They also get a particular thrill out of seeing the evolution of a new library.

RMIT Publishing cited innovation and progressiveness as characteristics they enjoy in their customers, along with our ready embrace of new technology and ways of doing things.

'This is so at odds with the stereotype librarian that still prevails in society,' they told INCITE.

'Also, they are, with very few exceptions, always fun-loving and the most delightful customers to work with.'

Now, that's nice to know.