LIBRARIANS 2.0

Terri Pamment

Librarians are no longer just recipients of information but are now actively generating and disseminating it, as TERRI PAMMENT reports.

At the recent ALIA National 2016 Conference, the keynote speaker, Lorcan Dempsey, spoke about how 'the library in the life of the user' has evolved into 'the user in the life of the library'. The classic library, he said, was built on an outside-in model, in which information materials were brought to the institution and made available for use. It was an appropriate model in an age of information scarcity and high transaction costs, but today's information abundance and reduced transaction costs make a locally assembled collection less central to readers' lives.

Institutions are generating new forms of data that they want to share with others. Research data, learning materials, videos and learning guides are some of the resources that need to be managed and disclosed in order to be discoverable by others. Predominantly digital, these resources do not require a physical visit to a library. The 'inside-out' perspective has generated a need for different skills from our profession.

There is enormous scope for us to be active in the life of the user. Many professionals are realigning their skills to meet these new demands. In academic libraries there has been a shift to library materials, services and staff being less fixed in one location and becoming more embedded in and around the university. New initiatives include pop-up shops operating in busy areas of campus, media editing, makerspaces and research data management.

Just as the old model required professionals with well-developed skills in acquisitions, cataloguing and information searching to meet the information needs of the user, research data management now requires professionals with well-developed skills that support researchers. Enter the repurposed librarian; the new model is one of engagement, in which professionals collaborate with other units to develop and deliver new services across the organisation. Participation in the entire life cycle of the research, teaching and learning processes enables librarians to understand and support all aspects of instruction and scholarship.

This engagement is not limited to academic libraries; public libraries have long reached out to the communities they serve. Mobile libraries and home-delivery services are active in the life of users who may be geographically isolated or housebound. Partnerships with schools, local service groups and businesses bring the library to the community. The library is no longer a building primarily housing books but has become a space for community activities. The safeness of the public library space enables people from a wide range of backgrounds to feel comfortable entering and participating in library-led activities.

This new model of being active in the life of the user has opened up a need for skills not traditionally associated with librarianship. Marketing and event management are highly valued in public libraries. Research is a natural step for academic librarians, but it's not limited to that group; research also offers an excellent opportunity for professional and self-development. It enhances your reputation and career prospects, builds external and internal relationships, adds to the body of knowledge and encourages continuous improvement in professional practice. ✦

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