Chapter 12

From Lackey to Leader: The Evolution of the Librarian in the Age of the Internet

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Today hybrid libraries extend beyond physical walls. Librarians organise and facilitate access to information whether it is from print collections or new digital sources. To complement information management skills and technical expertise, they have developed strategies that lead their clients into effective access to, and use of, information.

Librarians are now teachers, research partners, and web designers. Through partnerships with faculty, and by fostering the integration of information skills into the curriculum, they are contributing to the teaching, learning and research processes.

Librarians in the digital age are people of intellectual flexibility, who embrace change and constantly update their knowledge and skills. They are people-oriented and able to interact closely with their clients.

This paper discusses the evolution of librarians in the age of the Internet, with specific reference to the roles of librarians at the University of Queensland Library.

INTRODUCTION

More information is available to scholars today, more quickly than ever before. A researcher can publish to a world-wide audience and at the push of a few keys a researcher on the other side of the world can retrieve the work. This work
may be in colour and include sound and video. Information available changes by
the second and it may be accessed 24 hours a day regardless of location. Of
course, it does not work perfectly all of the time - there are still various technical
issues to consider but there is no doubt we are in the brave new world of the
digital age.

Today’s libraries are no longer mere collections of resources, or places to sit
and study, or even places to ask questions. They extend beyond physical walls
and librarians organise and facilitate access to the “right” information. Librarians
have gone beyond the role of mere intermediaries to where they are teachers,
research partners, and web designers.

This chapter discusses the evolution of librarians in the age of the Internet with
specific reference to the roles of librarians at the University of Queensland Li-
brary.

THE LIBRARY IS HERE TO STAY

Despite what some writers have predicted there are numerous reasons why
libraries as both physical and organisational units will continue. Not with old style
facilities, but with ones designed to meet the new ways of accessing information.

Material may be housed and information sources of all formats accessed.
Academics still value very highly publication in recognised (print) journals, housed
in libraries. Discussions with academics and researchers at the University of
Queensland have shown that they are not quite ready, yet, for the fully electronic
library and want print resources retained. They want the best of both worlds but
are moving very quickly and, depending on the disciplinary basis, are already at
the cutting edge of information technology. However not everything is on the Internet
and some things probably never will be. Print on paper, as opposed to words on
the Web, in some cases is the most economical, efficient and effective way to
distribute information. Students still need to access print materials and to work in
appropriate study spaces. The physical concept of the library remains important.
In 1999 the University of Queensland Library lent 1.5 million items from physical
collections and shelved 3 million items.

In 1998 the University of Queensland Library completed a successful, award
winning AUD$9.8 million refurbishment of its largest library. Spaces were created
everywhere for computers (there are over 500), as well as group and individual
study areas. Comments from clients, and increased usage, indicate the success of
redesign. In 1999 the Library had 2.9 million people through its doors.

Organisationally, as Rowland (1998) notes, “libraries remain the appropriate
structures through which to take decisions about the distribution of budgeted funds
for the purchase of information resources.” The University of Queensland Library
subscribes to over 5,000 electronic journals. Contract negotiations to obtain ap-
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