

# Information Overload

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## Welcome:

As an information professional I have been asked many times to justify the existence of the Information Centre or Library where I have worked. Management wanted to know why they should continue to pay for literature searching, articles and Inter Library Loans when they could find everything they needed “on the web”. They also wanted to know why they should continue paying me when everyone had access to the Internet through their desktops.

Have you ever had to justify the existence of your library and information centre, and just as importantly – your job? Or are you the kind of person who occasionally uses your organisations library – but give little or no thought to the work that goes on to create the service you sometimes use?

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding this edition onto friends, colleagues and other interested readers. Please note that all back issues of this edition, as well as our registrant resources edition can be read and/or downloaded from our web site – <http://www.iea.com.au> should any of the topics be of interest and use.

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## In this Issue we will be looking at:

- Where did it go?
- Marketing and promotion
- Service delivery in a web 2.0 world
- A Thought to ponder.

## Where did it go?

Could you cope without your organisations library? You walked into the space where it used to be and discovered to your dismay – it was no longer there. What happened? Where did it go? Now where are you going to read the newspapers and journals?

Unfortunately – it’s not such an idle statement – floor space is expensive, and if an organisations library (information centre) is not THE place to be seen, does not have the support of management, OR the members of staff, does not have a budget that allows the purchase of new material, and barely covers the cost of the person tasked with looking after the collection then the “bottom line” figures and the perceived lack of “return on investment” ratio will be the death knell when money gets tight (as it sometimes does). So what can we do as information professionals?

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## Marketing and Promotion:

It should come as no surprise that marketing and promotion of the library and information centre should be high on the agenda if you are going to survive. But that is only part of the scenario – and we will be looking at the other essential aspect of service delivery in a minute.

One of the first rules in marketing (if I can call it that) is to provide your customers with what they want. You need to find out what it is they need and then find a way of answering that request in the best, most cost effective and efficient way possible.

For those of you who work in a busy library or information centre, you could argue that you do that on a daily basis – simply by answering customers and clients requests when they ask you a specific question. But what happens when you don't get asked a specific question? What happens when your user base is (in reality) a non-user base?

In every organisation you will have specific categories of library user. You will have your regular users, the occasional users and the non-users. If you keep any kind of statistics at all, you should know what the percentage of employee / user ratio is, although the more observant amongst you – may be able to “guesstimate” what this is quite accurately. The more non-users you have the higher the risk of losing the service becomes.

Your task as a librarian / information manager is to convert as many of the occasional users and the non-users as you can into library champions – those kinds of people who help promote you because they can't stop raving about the service they always get. These walking library ambassadors are the kinds of people you want backing you when it comes to budget time. Although it also helps if these same people are quite high up on the organisational ladder!! OK, you can also call me cynical if you like – but believe me it does help if your managers can see the benefit of having an onsite information service and are willing to fund it.

So how do you get these people on your side?

One of the best ways to do this is to make sure you know where the organisation is heading in the medium to long-term. Your collection development policy (your road map) should reflect new areas of interest and also highlight those areas you are moving out of. Standard thinking, but you will be amazed at how many librarians and information managers are not privy to this kind of long term strategic information.

So a task for you.

I'm going to make the assumption that you have a regular meeting (hint – you should) with the person to whom you report. Tell them you want to revise the collection management policy (and therefore the collection) to reflect the strategic business directions. You will advise him / her that space is a consideration and you want to be able to offer improved return on investment in terms of space, storage and utilisation of materials. How can a manager not go for that one? And if you are a manager reading this, perhaps you could speak to your librarian / information manager about the same.

At the same time you need to speak to your users – why don't they use the library / information centre?

Where do they go for information? And please don't cringe too badly when they say "google". Instead you could always ask - Would they like training on how to maximise their search strategies, and find out how to go directly to the better sources of information? As well as - What services would they like to see the library provide?

Now you can do this in person of course – face-to-face is a great way of meeting your client base. But maybe impractical if you work for an organisation that employs hundreds or thousands of people! So what do you do then?

Well there are always surveys. These can be paper based or web based. The key is to know what answers you want and to frame the questions accordingly. No this is not cheating, this is designed to find out who uses the service and why, what you can do better...and of course, why people don't use the service and what can you provide for them so they will.

It may be that you don't know who is coming into the organisation – in which case you need to speak to HR and get the library (inductions, borrowing etc ) onto the OHnS and day one starter induction...and again as part of the leave process, as you don't want half your collection walking out of the door when they leave.

What you are looking for is another opportunity of proving your worth.

## Service delivery in a Web 2.0 world

Believe it or not, you don't need a massive space to create a brilliant information service. All you need to do is think creatively.

Don't get me wrong, I love libraries. I love the rows of books and bound journals. But I love to see people actively using them too. Busy people will always find time to do what they want to do, but if we can help make the information centre go to them, rather than insisting they come to the library / information centre to undertake research, speak to the librarian, read the current journals or have to wait for the circulation of same – I think we need to have another look at the services we can and do provide. Remember the major caveat – return on investment and the biggest time waster (and therefore money waster) is time spent trying to find things only to discover someone else is reading the "thing" you want to read...and having to either wait or reserve the item, or go back to your desk and hope it is not being read the next time you go back to the library and so on.

So a few suggestions (and you would be disappointed if I didn't propose some now wouldn't you):

- Make effective use of the corporate intranet. Links should be provided to all electronic resources such as standards online and the library catalogue. But in addition to these kinds of materials (and every library / information centre will have a different set of e-journals, e-books and e-resources they will have subscribed to...just make sure your licensing agreements are appropriate and make any changes that need to be made. Multi-user licences can be purchased for most things), you should also consider adding links to some of the deep web websites we know of. This of course is the perfect way of promoting the services that we can provide to our users – namely – e-bulletins highlighting links to new sites of interest. For instance – the Directory of Open Access Journals - <http://www.doaj.org/> and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) – who provide free online access to over

200 years of medical research -  
[http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2006/04/digi\\_medical.aspx](http://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/stories/2006/04/digi_medical.aspx)

- Promote the use of online forms – an “ask the librarian a question form”, forms for book purchases (assuming they don’t purchase their own material of course), or links to sites that allow users to do just that. Forms for Inter Library Loans and provision of journal articles, with again, links to sites that provide these services.
- Provide links to Table of Contents services. Most journal publishers will provide TOC’s to registered users. Some are subscription based, some of them are free, but most are delivered electronically – straight to a requestor’s email address. Link these services to Document Delivery Services and you have created a massive time saver for your organisation. Of course there may also be an increase in money spent – so try to ensure there are back charges in place so they don’t all come out of the library budget. Unless the library budget is SOOOOO good it can handle the increase of course.
- Use closed communities in applications such as Twitter (<http://twitter.com>) to promote discussions within your user base (in 140 characters or less). Blogs can be a great way to provide access to information and news – users can subscribe to news feeds (RSS) so they don’t have to go to the website to find the information – the information goes directly to them in the form of an email.
- Online training – provide hints and tips for effective searching. Provide online training course modules (much as is happening in the Records Management world).

By all means provide hard copy versions if that is what your users want, but with time poor people, the more we can provide direct to their desktops, the better our standing will be within our organisations.

With many thoughts  
Lorraine

### A Thought to Ponder:

“Emergencies have always been necessary to progress. It was darkness which produced the lamp. It was fog that produced the compass. It was hunger that drove us to exploration. And it took a depression to teach us the real value of a job”

**Victor Hugo (1802 – 1885)**