

Information Overload-new Graduate perspectives

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I want briefly to offer some of my thoughts and observations from my first 18 months working in information management. I spent a year at CDU library as a trainee while completing my Graduate Diploma, and have been at the National Archives for 6 months.

Firstly I just want to offer my support and thanks for the trainee program at CDU – it was not only enormously beneficial to my study, but gave me the skills and experience to get the job at the National Archives. Studying a unit on cataloguing while working in the cataloguing department has its advantages.

What struck me first as I started with the liaison librarian team was the centrality of technology to the work of librarians. And I don't mean spreadsheets and databases and information systems, which are standard in any office these days, but the bewildering array of applications and programs - endnote; captivate; jing; tumblr; flickr; smart phones (often smarter than some operators it seems); qr codes; library thing; audacity; GIMP; camtasia and on it went.

I soon realised that I really didn't know very much at all about information technology applications and their use, and even less about how they all worked.

At this time I was struggling through an assignment comparing Fez digital repository management systems with other open source applications, and slowly sinking into an awareness that I had no idea what I was talking about.

While for me the immediate solution lay in abandoning the subject and changing to another more interesting, the future of information management and libraries is thoroughly linked with technology, and the option of abandoning technology is not available.

This is not to say that such archaic media as books, posters and photographs will no longer be important. They are much loved by people, young and old, and will continue to be important means of communication and enjoyment.

There are a lot of stereotypes about Gen Y and their desires to have everything they want, in the form that they want it, and now – how much of this is true and how much is simply other generations being old and grumpy is hard to say.

But the current generations have grown up with technology and have a different relationship to it and are demanding we adapt our services to fit their needs. Information needs to be mobile, varied, interesting and easy.

The questions that struck me given that there are so many applications around, with new ones being invented and taken up almost daily – which applications do you use, how much time do you spend learning them, and where do you find the time to do it?

An advantage of the traineeship was having the time to explore things and play around; constructing templates to publish information in e-book format, for example, which had nothing at all do with the fact that I had just been given an e-reader.

But generally speaking it is difficult to find the time at work, and I'm not sure it's always seen as a productive use of work time, much like heading out for a coffee is seen as having a break rather than the incredibly important professional conversations we know they really are.

I know that I need to learn more about information technologies, and that professional development is to a significant degree my personal responsibility, and this means using my own resources – particularly time and effort.

I admire the librarians who blog about their experiences, and who spend time immersed in the world of information technology; they have a passion for it and willingly share their knowledge.

While colleagues are easily the best source of information, these librarian bloggers were next best for me, including Sally Cummings from CDU. They are a valuable source of up-to-the-minute information, provide great links to important documents and research, and are eager to help out if you have a question. Sharing of knowledge is essential to the job that we do.

Librarians are firmly at the centre of where technology, people and information meet. Universities are very competitive places, facing increasing commercial pressures and must give students what they want. Public libraries, while less commercially competitive need constantly to show governments and councils that they are relevant and providing a service that is used and valued.

This differs a little from archival research where perhaps its nature is more sedate, but it might also suggest that archives can be more proactive in reaching out to people and also in embracing multiple technologies as the means to communicate.

Whatever the medium and whatever technology is used however the purpose is to provide information to people.

One of our most important roles at the National Archives is as a result of the Bringing Them Home report. We hold many records relating to Aboriginal

people in the NT, and our job is to connect those records with Aboriginal people. It is an incredibly moving experience to be a part in however small a way of such a profound thing, and a reminder of the power of information.

Whether we are connecting people with their past, or at universities providing people with the information for their future, information management is about people.

Connecting with colleagues is also vital, not just for new graduates who are looking for support and guidance, but as members of the information, cultural and education sectors in Darwin it is important to share our knowledge across institutions.

It is often easier to connect with someone in Melbourne or London online than a colleague here in Darwin. Bernie, Sally, Michelle and Julie from the Liaison team and I tried to organise to catch up for one of those aforementioned professional development cups of coffee, but abandoned the process when the logistics proved too difficult. Hopefully in about 2 minutes we will finally be able to.

Finally, while here at CDU I had the great benefit of fortnightly meetings with the Associate Director Anne Wilson, where we discussed anything and

everything to do with libraries and information, not to mention some questions from upcoming assignments. These mentoring and support roles were of enormous benefit to me, but I think to Anne as well because new people have a different perspective, and perhaps new enthusiasms and enables conversations to take different turns.

Mentors are important for professional development, and I have been fortunate firstly to have Anne and now my current boss Phyllis Williams, to both share their thoughts and insights and to support my initial steps in a new field of work. I have been very lucky and am very grateful for the opportunities that are available here in Darwin.

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