

EDITORIAL

In 1994 I attended a talk entitled "Imagining a World Transformed by Networking" by Paul Evan Peters, the Executive Director of the Coalition for Networked Information, Washington, DC. He talked a lot about "just in case" juxtaposed with "just in time". This was the first time I had heard this concept, so succinctly stated. Having spent a great deal of my professional life as a cataloguer this phrase has given me much cause to pause.

Could it be that all the bibliographic description I had ever done had been for nothing? The authority control and the endless discussion on the ascription of Dewey numbers, were they part of a mindless "busy-ness babble"? Was what I had been so adept at a useless artefact of a by-gone age? I mean, if you can get a piece of information *just in time* and it is stored in a form invisible to the naked unaided eye, what is the point of providing multiple access points to it *just in case* someone else, later, wants the same piece of information – especially since it was found in the first place?

We are not really talking "cataloguing" here. It is simply a metaphor for value adding; for, what are we, librarians, doing, are we still necessary? This issue of the journal contains some interesting reflective contributions. I wonder, do all professions constantly have what they do and how they do it under a microscope? I value reflection and I also value closure and moving on. I first heard "just in time" versus "just in case", knowledge manager versus information service provider (versus "librarian", heaven forbid) five years ago and I am certain they were not new then. Could it be that for a decade we have cogitated but not moved on?

What do librarians really do? What is our product? We don't have a monopoly on information, let alone knowledge. We don't own the Internet. We don't own technology. People can now find out most of what they want without the help of a librarian and without ever coming to a library. What should we be doing?

One of our problems I think is that we don't know what our product is, and we don't know what we cost. Librarians give a highly personalised service. For years this was free, an adjunct of freedom of speech, democracy, etc. But now everything is valued in monetary terms and if what we do falls outside this paradigm then, in a sense we are also marginalised.

We are enablers, intermediaries. We do not actually produce anything marketable (*en masse*). We don't really have user pays libraries do we, but we might be moving towards that. We fall right outside the demand and supply economic model. If we are present then someone might accept our assistance but if we are absent they will get by as best they can.

We can value add, but is that what our customers want? What are these people that we deal with anyway? Are they customers, users, clients, readers? The Oxford Dictionary defines "customer" as "a person who buys goods and services from a shop or business"; "user" as "a person who uses a thing"; "client" as "a person using the services of a lawyer, architect or other professional person; customer"; "reader" as "person who reads".

People take business management principles and attempt to apply them, unmodified, to libraries. Whatever else they are libraries are not businesses. They do not make profits. Except for public and state libraries, libraries are adjuncts to other activities and services. So it is difficult to imagine what it is we do outside the context of the particular thing to which we are adjoined, law firms, educational institutions, providers of some other service.

Then maybe it is that elusive concept of "knowledge" and/or "information" and its organisation and dissemination that will ultimately truly define us.

In this issue we have some thought provoking contributions. **Yvonne Butler's** "Six Months in a Leaky Boat" is truly inspiring and motivational, while **Rachel Pergament's** "Outsourcing in Law Firm Libraries" is truly terrifying. **Katherine Sampson's**

article gives us an insight into a future potential contextual environment **Rosemary Bunnage's** report of her survey of Harvard legal academics provides a microcosm of that thing we are always interested in "feedback"; while **Paul Von Nessen, Keith Hair** and **Francis Johns** provide us with some useful material on which to hone our skills

In a way, the targets of these last three pieces gives me a sense of well-being and security about what it is we do. Yes, we want to know about how to research American law, because someone will want us to help them find some one day (the just in case ethos is not diminishing), and yes, we want to know how to locate Western Australian legislation and how to use LEXIS effectively so we can in turn pass this knowledge on to someone just at the time they want it. We store knowledge that no one else's brain can retain. Who else knows the intricacies of searching the *Australian Digest* and has an opinion on whether the title and square bracket number is better than using the index. Sorry, folks, reality bites: I have finally discovered it – we, librarians, accumulate and store knowledge about *stuff* in our brains, *just in case*, someone wants to use it sometime, later, maybe, never but we have it there ready for them to tap into, *just in time* when they want it!

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