

## MAKING THE LEAP: OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE THE LIBRARY WALLS

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Librarians are valued for their ability to review large amounts of information, analyse, evaluate, and organise information to meet specific client needs. More and more, librarians apply their information management and research skills to positions outside of libraries. Library skills are valuable in areas such as, IT, archives, law firms, museums, publishing, library vendors, marketing and communication. To make the leap from a library setting, librarians need to think in terms of skill sets and the transferability of these skills. This paper will reflect on the various roles that I have found myself in, including metadata, thesauri, web content systems, indexing, web accessibility and assessing websites. Some of the areas I will cover include how I made the leap from a library setting to the various roles I have undertaken. How does one ensure that your new employer recognises the value of your library skills? How do you break out of the stereotype of being a 'librarian' and what do you market yourself as? Once in a new role, how do you stay connected with the library profession? Working outside of the library setting can be an exciting and rewarding experience. I will share my thoughts and tips and hope to broaden your horizons.

*Disclaimer: This paper does not reflect the views of, nor my experiences at the National Archives of Australia.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Technological advances, changes in the focus of library school education and changes in the way society views information (Gordon, 2008) are creating new opportunities for librarians to sell their skills outside of the library. As Grossman has remarked “much of the compilation, organisation, management and dissemination of information is currently happening outside the walls of the traditional library and this phenomenon will continue to proliferate” (2006, p.29).

Studies in the US (Colvin, 2009) and Australia (Genoni & Smith 2005, Weech and Scott, 2005) have found a growing trend in the number of graduates in non-library jobs. According to the *Occupational Handbook, 2010-11 Edition* “jobs for librarians outside traditional settings will grow the fastest over the decade” (Bureau of Labour Statistics, 2009).

This paper explores how to find a job in another field and how to transfer and market your skills in non-library terms. It looks at a range of useful resources which will help you to make the transition. Stepping outside the library walls may seem a little daunting, but with some self awareness of your skills, interests and limits, the change is possible.

## WHY WORK OUTSIDE A LIBRARY?

The findings from the neXus census survey found that nationally, 32% of senior managers with information management professional skills plan to retire within the next 10 years, 39% planned to retire in the coming 11-20 years, and 31% planned to work for at least another 20 years (Hallam, 2008). So why would a new graduate want to work outside of a library when there is increased career opportunities for librarians due to the ageing workforce?

There are many reasons why librarians want to move out of libraries. Some of these may be for personal reasons such as career dissatisfaction, better salary, needing a change/challenge, or the need for flexibility. External forces may also cause a change in focus, such as budget cuts, downsizing, lack of jobs, difficulties breaking into the field and increasing and exciting opportunities with technology (Gordon, 2008; Weech & Scott, 2005).

The *US Placements and Salaries Survey 2009* (Maatta, 2009) found that there were fewer graduates in full time library jobs compared to previous years. There was also a decline in the total number of jobs reported in some types of libraries and information agencies. This was a result of widespread hiring freezes and budget cuts across all types of libraries and information agencies in the US. There is anecdotal evidence that this is occurring in Australia. In Australia there is also a concern over the low staff turnover which may affect the number of jobs available to librarians in Australia. There is also a concern over salaries. The neXus survey found that 58% of respondents believed that the current librarian salaries were not competitive with other discipline areas (Hallam, 2008). With fewer jobs and non competitive salaries graduates are becoming disheartened. There are a range of opportunities outside the library walls for graduates.

## CAREER CHANGE PLAN

Some people fall into alternative career opportunities through taking up opportunities, whilst others plan for the change. To make the leap you can ease into it by keeping your permanent job and picking up part time work, undertake freelance or volunteer work, or move from a library setting into an alternative.

If you are seeking to change careers it is important to plan for the change. There is a range of literature that provides ideas in how to change your career. Wright-Eastley, Bonin and Watson (1997) suggest that you do a thorough analysis of your skills and talents and prioritise them in accordance with their importance and enjoyment for you. Some issues to consider are whether your goals and skills match the career change and where you want to work.

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Dority suggests that you create a 'career map' that captures your "goals, strategies, and tactics within a timeline of execution" (2006, p.171). The career map can be used to evaluate new opportunities to see if the possible new job fits with your career or steers you away from where you want to be (Dority, 2006).

## **HOW TO FIND WORK OUTSIDE OF THE LIBRARY WALLS**

To find work outside libraries you will need to change how you search for positions as job advertisements don't necessarily use the position title 'librarian' for positions outside a physical library (Gordon, 2008). I scan the job descriptions by looking at the skills to see where my skills match.

If you are looking for work in library related fields, library recruitment agencies, such as One Umbrella and professional associations, such as ALIA often advertise vendor, records management and knowledge management positions. Email discussion groups are also a great resource. For indexing positions, the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI) list server is useful. For records management positions, the Records Management Association of Australasia (RMAA) list server is useful.

If you are intending to move to other related information positions job searching sites such as SEEK and JobNet for IT jobs are useful starting points. For public sector jobs the Australian Public Service Gazette is an invaluable tool.

Networking with other librarians at professional development events may also help you to find work outside of the library. Some of the people that attend events are librarians working outside of the library, with an interest in what is happening in the library and information space. I have found that the knowledge of where librarians are working is useful as it is much easier to sell your skills to someone with a library or information management background when a position becomes available in their team.

## **TRANSFERRING YOUR SKILLS**

Librarians are valued for their ability to review large amounts of information, analyse, evaluate, and organise information to meet specific client needs. Librarians can apply their information management and research skills to a range of positions outside of libraries. Library skills are valuable in areas such as, IT, archives, law firms, museums, publishing, library vendors, marketing, communication, business intelligence, bookstores, records management, knowledge management, indexing, and web site design and maintenance.

To make the change to an alternative field you need to identify your skills and abilities and how these relate to the position you are applying for. To find out what skills are required for a particular field, research the company, examine job ads and phone the contact officer in the ad. If you are moving to a library related field it is easier to show how your skills transfer and easier for the employer to value your library skills. On the other hand, outside of the library industry, the term 'librarian' is still seen as a person who reads books all day. When applying for positions which are not library related it is important to use the right terminology for that field, rather than library terms. Perhaps as Grossman (2006) suggests, dropping the 'L' word and adopting the term such as 'information specialist' may increase your chances of obtaining a non-library position.

ALIA (2005) lists core knowledge, skills and attributes for the library profession. The list of generic skills and attributes for library and information professionals include communication skills, project management skills, problem-solving skills, business acumen, ability to build partnerships and alliances, teamwork, self management skills, IT skills and information literacy skills. These generic skills are transferable to many different jobs. Maule (2009) also suggests that skills in research and synthesis, knowledge and information management, multitasking and managing

time are also transferable to other jobs. I have found that training and marketing skills are also transferable to many other positions. By identifying your generic skills you are in a better position to assess whether your skills match non-library job descriptions and you are able to market yourself more effectively.

## **MARKETING**

You need to be able to sell yourself and your skills in non-library terms. Heye (2006) offers the advice, that you sell yourself by explaining what you do in your role and how this benefits the customer. For example, if you are a literature searcher you express this by saying you provide a good overview of published and grey literature on a topic which helps the customer to solve a problem or make a decision (Heye, 2006).

One way to sell yourself and your skills is to find a 'champion'. A champion is someone who is willing to promote your skills and services. To find a champion look for someone who has wide networks within the organisation, senior managers or people with key roles in the organisation (Heye, 2006). Perhaps it is a past client of the library who has witnessed your skills and abilities. Finding a champion in an organisation can be a key to opening up non-library positions. The champion would need to be aware of the value of your skills and services so that they can promote your skills effectively to non-library positions.

Your resume is an important tool in applying for jobs outside of the library. Consider using a functional resume, which groups together skills and accomplishments, rather than a traditional chronological resume (Gordon, 2008). Hansen provides some useful examples of a functional resume and how to emphasise generic skills in your resume and cover letters to support the desire to move into another field. Align the terminology of your resume with the terminology used in the job advertisements, so that employers can see how you fit into their line of work.

Develop your own marketing plan based on the principles of developing a library marketing plan. Newman's (2006) marketing plan guide is a useful starting point. Once you have landed a position outside of the library you need to continue to market your skills by mentioning your skills or providing advice when colleagues are discussing work. People may appreciate the help or remember you when they need require the skills (Maule, 2009). This technique could also work when liaising with clients from the library if you are looking for an alternative position in your current organisation.

ALIA's career development kit is a useful tool for analysing your professional development needs, setting objectives, building and maintaining a record of your knowledge, skills and experience, as well as your professional development priorities for the future.

Another useful tool is an e-Portfolio which allows you to record your achievements, reflect, learn, store information, network and plan your studies and career path. New graduates (Hills, Randle & Beazley, 2010) trialling PebblePad as part of the ALIA/AeP2 Pilot Study lead by Gillian Hallam have found the tool to be a valuable resource whilst trying to emerge in a new profession. ePortfolios allow you to create a searchable database of skills that can be matched against selection criteria by pulling in all the information into a new document. This would make it easier for aligning your skills set against selection criteria.

## **STAYING CONNECTED WITH THE PROFESSION**

After making the leap into an alternative career it is important to stay connected with the library profession. This is especially important if you want to work back inside a library. I stay up to date in the library profession by maintaining my membership of ALIA. As well as being a member of a library association, I also join another professional organisation related to my current role. For example in my role as indexer I was a member of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Indexers (ANZSI).

Staying connected to the profession also serves as a marketing exercise as it allows you to show your new skills and knowledge to prospective employers. The transfer of skills works both ways. The skills you learn outside of the library setting may be invaluable when you return to a library setting. Librarians who move back into libraries bring back a wealth of new knowledge, skills and attitudes, which in turn enriches the profession (Gordon, 2008).

## CONCLUSION

Whatever your reasons for looking at an alternative library career, embrace the opportunities. With the advent of ever changing technologies and new ways of doing things, there are a range of opportunities outside the library walls for graduates. Working outside of the library you acquire new skills and knowledge, which opens up new doors. By doing some forward planning, re-adjusting your resume, examining your transferable skills and networking you will be ready when the opportunities arise. As Mark Twain said "twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did. So throw off the bowlines, sail away from the safe harbor, catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore. Dream. Discover".

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