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Me, Myself and IM

CATHY MILLER

Information Officer

education.au and Department for Families and Communities
Adelaide, South Australia

THERESA McGINLEY

Information Officer

education.au and Department for Families and Communities
Adelaide, South Australia

Abstract

Information Management (IM) is an increasingly viable career option for Library and Information Studies (LIS) students and graduates. The presenters Cathy Miller and Theresa McGinley both work in the IM industry, having graduated from the University of South Australia's LIS Bachelor of Arts in 2004. Their jobs provide them with the opportunity to apply and extend their LIS skills in an exciting environment of new technologies, including blogs, wikis, RSS and more. Although such positions may sound IT focused, LIS is a highly appropriate background for those interested in pursuing careers in IM. Based on their experiences, Cathy and Theresa will outline the actions that can be taken to tailor study, work experience and job seeking to IM pathways.

Once upon a time...

We decided to title our paper 'Me, Myself and IM' to emphasise the narrative aspect of this presentation. The following is not meant to be a step-by-step instructional career manual, but an account of our experiences, and our thoughts on careers in Information Management (IM). Today's students and new librarians do not need to limit themselves to the library; there is a wealth of job opportunities out there that you may be overlooking if you have confined your job keyword search to 'library' and 'librarian'. Since graduating with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Information Studies from the University of South Australia in 2004, we are now both working in the IM industry. We would like to share with you how we fell into the profession, what we do, why we like it and some tips for those interested in moving into IM.

Information management at the Department for Families and Communities

After working part-time as a library officer during university, and undertaking a volunteer role at the Adelaide University Archives, Theresa applied to the Government of South Australia's graduate program and obtained a graduate position within the Web and Internal Communications unit of the former SA Housing Trust in early 2005.

Theresa currently works as an Information Officer in the Information and Knowledge Management unit of the Department for Families and Communities (DFC). DFC is the parent Department for various agencies including the Housing Trust, which is now known as Housing SA. In this role she undertakes a wide range of projects and tasks. Currently she is working on the development and implementation of a knowledge management framework, assisting in the ongoing redevelopment of the departmental intranet and piloting blogs, wikis and forums as online collaboration and communication tools for staff. Previously she assisted in the completion of an information audit of the Department and subsequent development of an information management framework.

The aim of the Information and Knowledge Management unit is to "create and manage an environment which encourages information and knowledge to be visible, shared, learned, enhanced and organized for the benefit of the organization and its customers."

Theresa's work requires her to have a sound understanding of information and knowledge management theory and best practice, and to keep up to date with the latest developments in technology. Her position is a combination of strategic thinking and development and computer based work, and in her role she acts as an interface between her clients and technology. Her role also involves change management, and working with staff to improve their work practices for the benefit of themselves and the organization. Her work is similar to traditional library work, in that her unit provides information to its clients, with the ultimate aim of empowering them to source, assess and use information for themselves.

Information Management at education.au

Cathy began working in public libraries whilst at university, as well as undertaking work experience and some contract work with the Information Services team at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). In 2004 she applied for the National Library of Australia graduate program, and although unsuccessful, she was later offered a job with the Library as a cataloguer within the Legal Deposit Unit. Cathy worked at the Library in 2005 and subsequently returned to Adelaide in 2006 to take up her current position with education.au.

Cathy is employed as an Information Officer to work on edna, (Education Network Australia), which is an online information hub for the education sector across Australia. Specifically she works on edna for the Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) and Adult and Community Education (ACE) sectors. edna provides a free repository of resources, news items and events which are entered into the database by the Information Officers. The database is built on open source software called DSpace. Cathy's role as an Information Officer is to keep up to date with what is happening in the VTE and ACE sectors and then document this in the database through DSpace using metadata. The edna metadata standard is unique but it is largely based on Dublin Core and the Australian Government Locator Service (AGLS). It provides an interoperable standard for education related online items. This is of particular importance as edna also provides access through its system to harvested resources from external collections.

Cathy's position is largely computer based which requires an understanding of information technology. The job role requires daily Internet use in the quest to find new items for the database. Cathy subscribes to RSS feeds, reads blogs and listens to podcasts as part of the process of monitoring developments in the VTE and ACE sectors. In addition to this, the job requires contact with a number of practitioners in the VTE and ACE sectors around Australia. With so much information flooding in everyday, one of the most useful skills in this job is organisation. Managing time, priorities and correspondence is paramount. Service level agreements regarding the number of news items, resources and events to be entered each week means that, in order to meet targets, it is important to use effective searching, evaluation and resource management skills.

In keeping abreast of developments within the VTE and ACE sectors, Cathy also spends time networking with teachers and trainers through attending and presenting at conferences and professional development events. She keeps in contact with edna users through responding to email queries and edna resource suggestions. Cathy particularly enjoys this part of her job, because it provides her the opportunity to interact with edna's users and get feedback on the services provided.

The highlights: Information Management and Information Technology

One of the highlights of our jobs is the opportunity we have to work with new technologies. If you are not particularly information technology (IT) savvy, do not let this aspect of the job put you off, as you do not need to be an expert in the field. Our workplaces encourage us to explore and experiment with different tools and technology trends. We both subscribe to various RSS feeds. RSS, or Really Simple Syndication, allows us to subscribe to news and updates through free RSS aggregators or readers. The latest posts are delivered to our aggregators meaning we can access news and updates from many sources all in the one place. Often RSS feeds are attached to blogs: web-based diaries or journals. The blogosphere is full of individuals and groups publishing information, thoughts and ideas. This tool is useful in the IM field to keep up to date with relevant developments around the world, but also within your own workplace. For example, the Department for Families and Communities recently launched a blog pilot project for staff to communicate and collaborate in the online

environment. Another collaborative web-based tool is the wiki. We are sure many people have heard of Wikipedia, the online collaborative encyclopedia. Wikis are versatile tools for pooling resources and building collective knowledge bases. For example, at education.au the use of a wiki has been simply applied as a solution to the company's need for centralized travel information. Staff members enter accommodation information into the wiki to build an in-house resource of hotel options. We also have opportunities to explore and use Learning Management Systems such as Moodle, Content Management Systems, and online conferencing software. Coming from non-IT backgrounds, our work has enabled us to build our confidence and abilities in adapting to new technologies.

Pathways to Information Management

If working in the IM industry appeals to you, there are a number of career pathways into and within the sector.

Study options

If you're a student, it helps to choose subjects that are appropriate to IM. If you have scope within your degree you could choose subjects which focus on corporate information resources or IT topics such as HTML coding and database management. Within our degree we were able to choose electives to compliment our core library subjects. We both took Electronic Publishing on the Internet, which enabled us to develop skills in HTML coding, web design and accessibility standards. If you have already graduated, there are various post-graduate courses available, such as the new Graduate Certificate in Information Organisation, offered by Charles Sturt University.

Volunteering and work placements

Look for volunteering or work placement opportunities at organisations other than the traditional public library, to enhance your understanding of the information sector and help develop broader information skills. Theresa volunteered at the Adelaide University Archives which provided her an insight into the government and education sectors. Cathy undertook work placement at the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). This work involved indexing items for the NCVER database, which

provided the opportunity to experience information services in a specialized, small corporate-type environment.

Networking

People often remark, it is not what you know, it is who you know. But it is also who knows you. Networking may, at times, seem a daunting task; it may not come naturally to you. Nonetheless, contact with other members of your profession is going to be beneficial to your career, whether it be face to face contact at a conference like this, or online through email list-servs, and the more you do it, the easier it becomes. Getting to know other people in the sector enhances your understanding of different job roles and enables you to learn more about what skills and experience future employers may be looking for. It also allows other people to learn more about you and your career aspirations, so when job vacancies arise, you are more likely to be at the front of their minds as a potential candidate. Who knows, you might even meet a future husband or wife if you introduce yourself to enough people!

IT skills

You do not necessarily need IT qualifications to work in IM, but it does help to be a bit of a computer nerd! If you keep up to date with new technologies then you are putting yourself in a better position to contribute to workplace innovation. You do not have to be a tech-head, but it helps if you can speak the language. Understanding that when the server crashes, it does not mean that the waiter has tripped over on the way to your table is a start. Similarly, searching for examples of web mashups on <http://del.iciou.us> is not about looking for the perfect mashed potato recipe. Ask questions and do not be afraid to make mistakes, read blogs and join forums, surf the Internet, befriend the IT staff, request training opportunities and be proactive about your professional development in this area.

Looking for work

If you are looking for a career in IM, think outside the library square. When you are searching for a job, online or in the newspaper, keep an eye out for job titles with keywords like 'information' or 'knowledge', not just the word 'library'. Also, look closely

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at the state or commonwealth government advertisements as they often hire in these areas. It may also be worthwhile registering with employment agencies that specialize in the area of IM. Most importantly be open minded, think laterally and investigate job opportunities. Do not be afraid to ask questions and find out more about a position even if you are not sure if it is appropriate for you, as it may turn out that you are the perfect candidate for the job.

Job applications

Your usual library applications will not be appropriate for an IM position, so you need to carefully consider how you tailor your CV and responses to the selection criteria. But just because you have not worked in IM before does not mean you do not have transferable skills. Think about activities at university, work experience and previous employment that can translate across to the IM industry and use these examples to highlight to prospective employers how you can fulfill an IM role. For example, customer service skills acquired through public library work or even from working at your local supermarket are still applicable in an IM role although the clients will be different. Similarly, being responsible for drafting a team roster shows planning and organizational skills, and working on a circulation or reference desk shows your abilities to think on your feet and problem solve. So before you discount positions based on the selection criteria, think twice about how you can use your experience to fulfill the role.

Passion!

Maybe it is obvious, but if you want a job in the IM industry, or any industry for that matter, you should be passionate about it! If you do not enjoy technology, working with people, and working with information and knowledge resources, then chances are the job is not for you!



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The end...

We have told you our IM stories in the hope that you might be inspired by the different possibilities that are available. There is no clear-cut way into the profession, but pathways are becoming more defined, as IM becomes an increasingly integral part of businesses and organisations in today's information society. There are actions you take to maximize your job opportunities and employability. As recent graduates, we have not always been clear about the direction of our careers, and have sometimes found it difficult to find role models and mentors in our field. But we hope that through attending networking events such as the New Librarians Symposium and sharing our stories we can connect with others working in IM and assist each other in building our careers.