

## **Queensland Department of Emergency Services Library - three years on**

Jill Don, BA (Asian Studies) (ANU), Graduate Diploma in Library Science (QUT)

*This report will compare certain "benchmarks" from 1997 and 2000, and will describe developments since the 1997 review. These developments are:*

- *The Department's move to a suburban location*
- *Client activities which might impact on the Library's activities*
- *An Intranet presence for the Library*
- *Under new management*

*Most attention will be given to the Library's move towards a virtual library. We are in the early stages of this project.*

### **Background**

The Department of Emergency Services is a Queensland government agency, consisting several client groups, including fire, ambulance and counter disaster divisions. The DES Library is within the Support Services division, specifically within Information Services.

My 1998 inFIRE presentation "A customer-defined library service for emergency services personnel" detailed a library review and its basis. Generally, clients and the Department were happy with the Library. However, The Library was struggling to provide basic services, and couldn't afford to bring in more business by marketing or through innovation.

The Internet with its instantaneous wonders had arrived. In comparison, the Library had very little to offer.

Two years on, virtually none of the recommendations of the 1997 review had been implemented. Several minor items (a reduction in our indexing effort, reduced collection development in favour of reliance on Internet resources and loans, desk-top Internet access for Library staff) had been addressed. Generally speaking, the review had little impact, and the impetus was lost.

Some comparisons, three years on:

	1997	2000
<b>Clientele</b>	6000	6000+
<b>Library staffing</b>	2EFT	2EFT
<b>Email</b>	Restricted	Statewide
<b>Intranet</b>	No	HQ at present Rest of state within 6 months
<b>Internet</b>	3 terminals	Limited trial selected persons
<b>Library catalogue networked</b>	To 1 site	HQ Intranet at present Rest of state within 6 months

### Significant impacts

#### *Headquarters move from city building to suburban location*

The idea was to bring a geographically scattered department to one location for the purposes of cost savings and efficiency.

However, employees are housed in a structure of five wings, and another large onsite building. Several groups are still in other locations. This limits interaction between different divisions of the department. The "tribal" nature has become more marked. This affects all people, not just the library.

The library's location [at the very end of a wing where few people pass] limits our exposure to drop-in custom. People have to be really keen to visit us. Consequently, email, phone and fax contact has become more frequent. We are out of the way of casual contact with operational staff, so we have lost important networking opportunities that go with a centralised location. The Library also has an unattractive appearance. The layout was designed around fitting staff and furniture into a narrow windowless area. The noise from the adjoining areas, and freezing draughts make it unappealing to visitors.

#### *Client activities impacting on the Library's activities*

a. Creation of a knowledge centre

A "knowledge centre" is being planned by one client group. This may have no impact on the Library. However, funds are being channelled into stocking it.

b. Better access to medical literature

There has been a tremendous improvement in the range and quality of Internet-accessible medical literature, aimed at the end-user. This change has coincided with a broader focus for ambulance personnel, and higher-level training requirements. Good-will arrangements with a tertiary institution will provide specialist information to research specialists. Ambulance officers who are studying will have excellent resources available to them as tertiary students. The Library will continue to address the prehospital facets not covered by these arrangements. Full-text and bibliographic services such as those provided by Ebsco will be

essential for the officers who are not enrolled tertiary students, and the administrative staff who support them. We will have an information-literate client base attuned to lifelong learning.

c. Enhanced training for fire fighters

A hot fire training facility is under development, with commissioning date in mid- to late 2000. Training will be provided to both fire fighters and on a commercial basis. A resource centre will be developed to provide materials for enrolled personnel. The Professional Development Unit are also updating their extensive range of publications.

***Intranet presence***

A headquarters Intranet trial was launched in 1999. With a bit of under-the-counter work, my Library's catalogue was linked to it. From December, we were able to advertise.

People began searching the WebOPAC as soon as it was launched. This brought in a new clientele who actually come in to get material off the shelves themselves and make their own photocopies. A training skills session was held recently, with follow-up small group lessons and phone help for the people who weren't able to attend. I plan to reduce the amount of catalogue searches I do for headquarters clients (who all have WebOPAC access).

Enhancements to the WebOPAC will allow clients to email requests which include the bibliographic record. This will probably mean a huge increase in requests and cause some heartache - we already have to prioritise our time, and we give priority to people on-shift and off-site. Unfortunately, the Internet has engendered a general expectation of immediate delivery full-text. - we cannot do that - yet.

We are also publishing our library bulletin on our Intranet page as a substitute for headquarters emailing. We hope to reduce the amount of printed copies distributed once the Intranet reaches around the state.

The subscription agent who supplies our journals scans the table of contents for each suitable title. We hope to make that available soon on the Intranet.

***Under new management***

This is the most interesting development, and I'll describe our approach very briefly.

#### *A new library management system*

When I last purchased a system in 1991, I was given a blank cheque with one stipulation - must run on Ultrix. I had no technical help, and as I was running the Library alone, no knowledgeable support. We didn't go to tender. I drew up specifications that probably raised a laugh or two, and ended up purchasing a good-quality system. For this current project, I have help with the project management, and there will be expert assistance with technical aspects and infrastructure.

We need to prepare a business case in order to obtain funding. We will be identifying:

- new services, or
- existing services which can be provided more efficiently.
- 

Otherwise, change for the sake of change is pointless. A preliminary meeting has been held with clients, and a number of enhanced or new uses identified. It is really difficult for clients to do this when people don't know what the possibilities are, they don't know what to ask for and you cannot really explain. You too are learning, and product development has raced ahead while you were busy running your library.

We already have a list of applications, with some idea of the resourcing needed, the uptake time, and an indication of the strategic importance. From this, we will draw up the specifications and also develop a priority list for implementation. I am still trying to work out how things fit together, how features operate and how we can use them.

An opportunity like this usually involves a steep learning curve. There are some excellent Internet resources to help with this. The serendipitous nature in Internet searching turns up items you might otherwise overlook, like the problems of URL checking for the web items you have catalogued.

<http://LibraryHQ.com> is a good place to start. It provides checklists, a sample "request for proposal", relevant articles, industry overviews, and a glossary, links to other sites including:

Integrated Library System Reports [www.ilsr.com](http://www.ilsr.com)

"ILSR provides an on-line database of citations to articles or reviews that have been written during the last two years that cover the integrated library systems in use today. "

Bibliotech review at [www.biblio-tech.com](http://www.biblio-tech.com) is an electronic journal concerning "library automation, software, business and reviews." There are sections on tech briefings, tech stories, and news. It links you to systems, vendor sites, and the articles published by various vendors. All these add to your store of information and ideas.

The papers from the 2000 VALA (Victorian Association for Library Automation) conference [www.vala.org.au](http://www.vala.org.au) and from previous years have been very useful too. The papers are generally practical, and as the focus is automation, highly relevant.

There are other sites, including some good personal sites provided by people who have had experience in the software/library system supply industry. One of these is Maree Millard's tips and hints at [www.home.aone.net.au/libauto/Tips.htm](http://www.home.aone.net.au/libauto/Tips.htm)

In contrast, my first reference point, the formal literature, seemed rather cumbersome. The references I turned up from a DIALOG search and a manual search were unresponsive, unexciting, and not very recent.

DBTextworks predominates in Brisbane special libraries, and few people are in the market for anything new. However, several special libraries in Brisbane have made the move to a more "virtual" presentation, and have been very happy to demonstrate their facilities.

What's around in 2000? Multimedia capabilities, emails from within the system, profiling, fuzzy logic, relevance ranking, results refining, imaging, document supply, email and telephone overdues, Z39.50 interfacing... all types of features new to library systems.

There are various ways of testing the products and some of their features:

- Demonstrations by vendors - you get a thorough run-through, and the chance to ask some curly questions
- Test floppies and CDs, possibly dial-in - these may step you through the features or simply let you browse. I think it is very important to test-drive.
- Webopacs - you won't get the chance to alter data, but it is worthwhile looking at these to see how others have configured the product.
- Visits to libraries using products you are interested in - to ask more curly questions and watch the activity

Company attitudes vary. Some are very open. Their websites have links to their customers' OPACS, they are willing to provide names and addresses of sites and happy for people to make independent visits. Others are unwilling to provide such details. Some provide excellent test opportunities. Others don't provide it as a matter of course, but will, if pushed, allow us to do some hands-on experimentation. The documentation ranges from excellent and detailed system documentation to scrappy blurbs. The more I read, the more I seem to have to find out and understand.

No-one is hounding me. Some just keep in contact. Others seem to have forgotten I'm in the market. The relationship is important to me, and my feeling is, that if the courtship phase is uncomfortable, then there's a possibility it won't improve once the vendor has your money.

The choice? There are lots of good systems. A lot of factors will decide the winner - the mix of clients, the depth of expertise in the company, the company's attitude, the existence of users' groups, and my willingness or not to be a pioneer.

The investigation for the new library system is turning up some interesting prospects for both Library staff and clients. I can't predict the shape of things to come, but the future is definitely more promising.