

Internet Librarian International: The Think Tank for Information Professionals

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Internet Librarian International (ILI) 2017 took place at Olympia in London on 17th-18th October.

“The power of an international think tank of highly skilled librarians should never be underestimated.”

Jan Holmquist, Co-Chair of ILI

Information professionals wear many hats. They are leaders in tech, organisational influencers, expert marketers, change managers, Internet super searchers, and much more. Last year’s conference tapped into this impressive range of skills and experience, featuring almost sixty presentations and case studies from many different library and information settings, taking in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Italy, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the USA as well as the UK.

Making a Noise about a Quiet Revolution

ILI’s keynote speakers each contributed to the theme, “Celebrating Librarian Super Powers.” Opening keynoter Kate Torney is the CEO of State Library Victoria, Australia’s oldest and busiest public library. Kate joined the Library during an exciting period of transformation, overseeing its evolution into an innovative contemporary centre for knowledge, learning and culture. Previously News Director for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, she led ABC News through a critical period of change in the global media sector, radically transforming the news model of a national broadcaster.

In her keynote “Making a noise about a quiet revolution”; Kate celebrated the transformation that has occurred within libraries, acknowledging the sector’s embrace of disruption and suggesting that the time for modesty is over. She explored how we can find and communicate our value to ensure the success and sustainability of our institutions, and how we can lead necessary transformation while staying true to our founding ideals.

Expertise in an Era of Easy Answers

ILI’s day two keynote came from David White, Head of Digital Learning in the Teaching and Learning Exchange at the University of the Arts, London, where he researches online learning practices in informal and formal contexts. David has coordinated and been an expert consultant on numerous studies of the use of technology for learning in the UK

higher education sector, and will be familiar to many as the originator of the Visitors and Residents paradigm which describes how individuals engage with the Web.

In his keynote, “Expertise in an era of easy answers”, David argued that abundant online information provides easy answers to easy questions. Unfortunately it can also provide easy answers to complex questions, potentially eroding our ability to interrogate, evaluate and synthesise sources. David explored the role libraries can play in countering the “think-less, find-more” mentality encouraged by the Web and the corresponding mistrust of “experts.” In a time when we can Google our way to almost any answer, access to content has become less important than access to people who understand what that content means, and where to head next.

Six Tracks Highlight Changing Services

ILI delegates moved freely between six conference tracks across two days, which together highlighted the extent of the information professional’s role, sharing invaluable knowledge, skills and experiences to promote, and help secure, the future of information services.

Each track comprised multiple sessions addressing issues that are changing our libraries right now:

- **THE NEW LIBRARY, THE NEW LIBRARIAN** explored the strategies, teams, skills, services and collaboration that global librarians are using to ensure they stay at the cutting edge
- **USERS, UX AND USAGE** looked at the ways how libraries are working with users to redesign services, spaces, and understand usage
- **CONTENT CREATIVITY** investigated how libraries are creating, curating, publishing and marketing digital collections, and how they are driving collaborative content creation
- **FIGHT THE FAKE, FIND THE FACTS** celebrated two information professional superpowers - advanced search techniques and nurturing information integrity - in a post-truth/multi-truth era
- **MARKETING THE LIBRARY** shared stories from information professionals who are influencing use and expanding audiences, from the DJ librarian to the digital storyteller
- **NEW SCHOLARLY COMMUNICATIONS** looked at how the scholarly communications landscape is changing, and what this means for libraries and information professionals

In addition to the six main tracks, **ILI EXTRA** offered a series of supplementary one-hour workshops and activities covering a wide range of specialised skills, from tech topics to personal development.

Session Highlight: Open all Hours - the 24/7 Library

Among the hot topics explored is the trend for libraries to open their doors all day every day - and all night too. The “Open all hours” session brought together two case studies from services doing just that.

In Allerød, north of Copenhagen, the library is always open to its citizens. Library Director Annette Wolgenhagen Godt explored what they have learned so far, how the members of her community use the library during self-service hours, and included a number of amusing anecdotes.

Jane Mansfield of De Montfort University discussed how one year ago, in response to student feedback, Kimberlin Library at De Montfort University became a 24/7 service. She articulated the challenges of staffing 24/7, how the transition was managed, and about student use and expectations of the service.

Track highlight: Users, UX and Usage

ILI devoted a whole track to understanding how libraries are working with users to redesign services and spaces and to understand usage. Led by users' expressed needs and their observed behaviour, libraries can totally transform their service offerings, and new and innovative ways of understanding the user experience can have a profound impact on service design. The case studies discussed at ILI included:

- How a library refurbishment programme was led by student behaviour and resulted in a new zoning system - and a “love where you learn” campaign
- How a library renovation project used a variety of methods to gather data from library users to provide insight to staff, the architect and the designers
- How an academic library found new UX-inspired ways to develop real insights into user behaviours and service use after it stopped surveying students!
- How a public library service used customer journey mapping to gain a deeper understanding of user needs, expectations and behaviours
- How a traditional hospital library service transformed itself to support and reflect the 24/7 NHS
- How data visualisation is being used to convey complex library usage data
- How every single question asked in a library over two years has created a unique collection of user data that continues to inform service design

Topic highlight: Fight the Fake and Find the Facts

Two of the information professional's most important superpowers are super searching - the ability to use advanced search techniques to find the most relevant, timely and impactful information for our communities, and fostering information integrity - the librarian's role in nurturing information literacy and source evaluation in a post-truth/multi-truth era. Both were explored in detail, and ILI delegates were encouraged to “Fight the fake” and “Find the facts.”

The **Fight the Fake** programme highlights included:

- **The post-fact landscape:** an invited international expert panel discussed the fake news phenomenon and explored the implications for the Internet librarian
- **Empowering the digital citizen:** a session explored the role of librarians in nurturing and empowering the digital citizen
- **Teaching students about information integrity:** explored how to develop information integrity in students

Find the Facts highlights included:

- **Websearch Academy 2017:** a pre-conference workshop explored the intricacies of research on the web, led by international experts
- **Super search skills:** a mini-keynote explored new and changed search features to help the internet librarian keep their super search skills refreshed
- **Experiments in search and discoverability:** two case studies from academic libraries sought to improve search and discovery in their institutions.

Looking round at all the animated conversations that happen during ILL, it's hard not to conclude that ILL delegates are experimenters who like to get things done, try things out and are happy to learn from and work with others.

Postscript

UKeiG Management Committee member Catherine Chorley, Senior Library Assistant St Anne's College, University of Oxford and Secretary to the CILIP North West Member Network submitted this article to [NLPN](#) - A network for new and aspiring library professionals.

"It has been remarked upon before - and doubtless will be again - that the Library and Information Services community really is a small world. In attending the first day of this year's ILL conference I enjoyed one of those 'meeting someone you know but don't really know' moments that only ever seems to happen at librarianship events. Not only did I meet a fellow former intern of Gladstone's Library (we knew each other by name, reputation and mutual connections, but had never previously met in person), I also found out later I had shared at least two sessions with the person who the following week became my new colleague.

Attending under the aegis of the New Library Professionals Network, I was there to assimilate as much information, advice and enthusiasm as possible about the insipient innovations in our profession, as it evolves to meet contemporary demands and anticipates what challenges may lie ahead.

The focal point of the day for those of us attending as 'new professionals' was the hour-long joint session by Natasha Chowdory and Ka Ming Pang, who both shared their experiences of forging careers in information services, and considered what faces someone entering the profession in the 21st century. The session was part of a breakout strand, ILL Extra, which is designed to offer more informal sessions on a range of pertinent topics.

Natasha's emphasis lay on the need for focus, self-knowledge and proactivity. Coasting is no longer acceptable (if indeed it ever was): the onus is on the individual to seek out new opportunities for professional development and growth, even if that means leaving a comfortable role when it no longer provides a challenge. Natasha candidly offered the following basic principle: 'If your job becomes too easy, you shouldn't be doing it anymore.'

In the follow-up question and answer session, an interesting point was raised by a fellow attendee: how to judge between the need to leave an unstimulating role and the responsibility to reshape it in such a way that challenges you afresh and allows you to meet your own potential. Though there is no definitive answer to this, as a group we discussed how important it is never to regard your role in the workplace as fixed, and to be open to taking on new and unfamiliar duties if they support the service provision you can offer. The 21st century acid test for library professionals struggling (as many do) to advocate for themselves and their service is to ask, ‘How am I better than Google?’

Both speakers advocated the importance of professional networks, and the opportunities these provide for experiencing your profession from a range of alternative perspectives. Natasha spoke of her positive experiences with the Special Libraries Association; while Ka Ming reflected on the benefits she had wrought from being involved with CILIP. Ultimately, though, no organisational membership will develop you while you remain passive; you gain benefit in proportion to your investments of work and energy.

The same goes for the workplace. You probably could breeze through the duties stated in your job description in a matter of hours, and then spend the remainder of each day looking at cats on YouTube. In that scenario, though, you probably aren’t likely to be any real use to the long-term sustainability of the profession you purport to represent. Nor are you likely to get any real fulfilment from your working day. Unless you really, really like cats.

Ultimately, library services may be changing materially, but in value they are more important than ever. The session closed with Natasha and Ka Ming anticipating the future of the profession in what they described as a ‘knowledge economy’. Libraries are no longer just book repositories, but as information portals they will continue to serve myriad user communities, and it is up to us as new professionals to keep shouting about this.”

Call for Speakers

[Internet Librarian International](#) (ILI) - The Library Innovation Conference, 2018 will take place in London on 16th-17th October. UKeiG members benefit from a 25% discount on the full conference fee. A call for papers has been issued on what will be ILI’s 20th anniversary. “We are looking for speakers to help us celebrate the very best of library innovation from around the world. Our speakers come to share their real-world projects, initiatives and transformations. Mostly they do this by presenting a 15-minute case study and we match them with one or more other speakers to create a themed session. We also welcome alternative styles of presentation. Let us know if you have an idea for a panel session, or a mini-workshop. Would you be interested in sharing your experience with an informal group or one-to-one? Would you be interested in doing a lightning presentation? Or running a teachmeet? Perhaps you could present an interactive demonstration of a library innovation? We really are open to your suggestions. Do you have a great story to share? Or do you know someone who you think has something worth sharing with international colleagues? We’d love to hear from you and welcome your ideas. Find out more about conference topics below, or [click here](#) to send us your ideas.”

The submissions deadline is 13th April 2018