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Why this book?

In these turbulent times, library and information service (LIS) staff at all levels need constantly to keep one step, or more, ahead of the users.

Today's LIS users do not behave like those who used the services ten or twenty years ago, and today's user behaviour will change again, probably even more rapidly than we have seen in recent years. Having the strategies to deal with this is not just an issue for senior managers and the leaders of the profession. Nor is it just an issue for the public library sector. It is an issue for every type of library, and for library and information professionals at every level – and in every country.

While we recognize that nothing stands still in this information world of ours, we believe that the focus of all our attention remains (and always has been) the user. Without users there is no real reason for a library and information service to exist. Experience will give the manager an advantage – but do we need to get older to be able to assess and forecast what the users will do next as far as information searching, retrieval and subsequent usage of the data is concerned? LISs worldwide spend enormous sums of money on staff, purchasing services, materials and other systems, but do they really understand what exactly makes the user tick?

In recent years many ideas, often from other sectors, have taken off and been exploited in new and exciting ways. They are being communicated in real time to world wide audiences. Many new applications are being developed quickly on the back of this for

services such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Google Maps. Major trends are emerging and converging, such as Twittering and mash-ups, conversations and open linked data. And at last the semantic web is becoming a reality as more organizations publish their data in open formats that these new tools can access and exploit creatively across the web. Everyone in the marketplace can participate, including publishers, library and information centres and users. Many people who never entered an LIS are participating and the information world of ours must shift its dynamics to embrace these new types of users. The barriers to entry are minimal – the costs of participating zero.

LISs must look for exemplar cases from around the world and renovate their services to meet the demands of 'new world information users'. You may already be involved in creating new applications for Twitter, Facebook, MySpace, Yahoo! or Google, and you may have made the move to the semantic web to deal with the digital explosion and the need to derive greater 'intelligence' from information. You may have found new ways of giving your users the LIS they want, not what you perceived them to need. And have you used new ways to transform the way your organization does its business? Do you have difficulties in changing your management processes to cope with this 'always connected' world?

Whether you work in an LIS in business, government, academia, the law or the public sector you must now be on constant alert to see if good ideas being used elsewhere can be readily transferred to your own LIS.

Defining your users

First, you will need to *agree* who are the users, so as to be able to cater adequately for their information needs now and in the future. A number of factors may influence the definition of a user of any LIS. This could be affected by agreements between your organization and others, for example agreements between local authorities, colleges or universities or businesses on a bilateral basis or as a consortium. For

example in the South Yorkshire area of the UK registered open access ticket holders who live and work in the area can access all the libraries, information centres and learning centres of the local universities, colleges and public libraries. It becomes more difficult to define users, and particularly the rights they acquire through being users, when the definition lies around an organization such as a company or a college rather than a geographic area. As we shall see, licensing rules *may* make it impossible to provide full services to distance learners because of the rules imposed by the rights owners. So, not only may we find some potential users excluded, but there may be different classes of user within the same organization.

Here, for example, are some of the possible groupings of users for some of the major LIS sectors. Each will have particular requirements for potential components of an electronic information service, and the conditions of use of the service must cater for those groups.

Users in the academic sector include:

- university faculty staff
- students – on campus (undergraduate, postgraduate, doctoral)
- students – off campus (e.g. accessing university network by dial-up from local area)
- distance learning students
- disadvantaged staff and students
- research workers located elsewhere
- consultants
- information seekers who are not affiliated to the university.

Users of public libraries include:

- members of the public, including students and children
- people who work in the area
- businesses
- researchers

- users of specified collections
- distance learning students.

Users of private sector information services include:

- own staff, in principal business premises
- own staff, in other business premises (e.g. overseas offices)
- own staff, on business travel (e.g. dial-up from clients' premises or hotel)
- users from other information centres and libraries belonging to a local co-operative with whom there is a reciprocal agreement; use may be granted – perhaps in a limited way
- secondees working for the company or organization (employees of other organizations on the company's premises).

Users of government information services include:

- own department or agency staff
- researchers working for the department or agency
- other government departments' or agencies' staff
- consultants
- the general public.

Some of these groups will contain users who wish to find information in order to republish it, e.g. in research documents or as journalism. This will also have an impact on the level of service that can be offered.

We must not forget the results of recent research into the information seeking behaviour of students that can be found in the CIBER briefing paper *Information Behaviour of the Researcher of the Future* (CIBER, 2008). CIBER conducted this research for the British Library and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC). The report focuses on information seeking behaviour of students born after 1993 (the Google Generation). The paper also ties in research from OCLC's study on students' perceptions (OCLC, 2006).

So what are the main challenges to libraries and their information

services in meeting the needs of tomorrow's scholars and researchers?

We think it worth dealing fully with the challenges for us all that were identified as the conclusions of the CIBER report (33–4):

1. Taking full advantage of the popularity of scholarly information and at the same time dealing with the fact that UK users are the **minority group** for many UK-funded, cash-strapped information services.

2. Reversing the process of **dis-intermediation** in a full-blown do-it-yourself consumer marketplace. As they say 'we are all librarians now'. For instance, how to sell the key library role of a safe and authoritative information haven and the need for digital information literacy training. Libraries are handicapped here by a lack of brand, although there is evidence that the BL has a good international presence. Publishers are better able to offer something here with their strong commercial and academic brands and their rapidly expanding 'walled garden' information products, and strategic partnerships should be considered.

3. Becoming much more **e-consumer-friendly** and less stodgy and intellectual. Few digital library offerings make any real attempt to connect with the larger digital consumer world: they simply do not chime with people's experience of Facebook, YouTube, Amazon or even for that matter, ScienceDirect. Why, for example, don't academic libraries try to emulate personal/social searching guidance offered so successfully by Amazon for many years?

4. Avoiding the **decoupling scenario** – libraries being decoupled from the user and the publisher. With the arrival of the e-book libraries will become even more remote from their users and publishers will become even closer as a result of consumer footfalls occurring in their domain. The fall out with publishers over open access and institutional repositories has caused a schism between librarians and publishers and the increasing willingness of the user to pay for information (a trend noticed by all publishers) will increase the isolation of libraries.

5. Introducing robust, fit-for-purpose mechanisms for monitoring and **evaluating their users** (and information services). Faced with the prospect that the future scholar will only ever want to use them remotely it is absolutely crucial that libraries have a means of monitoring and evaluating what they do. Furthermore, it is not sufficient to just listen and monitor it is also necessary to change in response to this data. Otherwise libraries will be increasingly marginalized and anonomized in the virtual information world. No private sector corporation would survive on the basis of failing to invest in consumer profiling, market research and loyalty programmes. No library we are aware of has a department devoted to the evaluation of the user, how can that be?

6. Really getting **information skills** on the agenda because clearly people are having great difficulties navigating and profiting from the virtual scholarly environment. To succeed it will be necessary to lead on outcomes/benefits (better researchers, degrees etc) and work closely with publishers.

7. The library profession desperately needs leadership to develop a new vision for the 21st century and reverse its declining profile and influence. This should start with effecting that shift from a content-orientation to a user-facing perspective and then on to an **outcome focus**.

So this book looks at a wide range of topics starting with Chapter 2: 'Understanding users – the what, why, where, when, how and who'. We ask what services users need or should have; why we in the information profession need to know about our users and their behaviour; where users are and how this affects their ideas of good service; when to talk to users about their information needs; how users obtain information and how to assess these ways; who you need to consider when planning and performing the audit – managers are customers too – and finally we ask simply: What next?

In Chapter 3 we look at the current knowledge of user behaviour and needs and ask whether it is really predictable. We suggest ways of discovering your users – who are they and where they are, and we give

some ideas by identifying some potential categories of user, e.g. students, lecturers, and business, technical, scientific and medical users.

The task of the LIS manager is to achieve defined objectives. A simplistic statement, perhaps, but it is rare that such objectives are set out in any terms other than the broadest – for example, 'to meet the needs of its users'. In fact, the definition of objectives in any service organization is likely to be an iterative process that both adds precision to and takes account of emerging requirements such as those produced by emerging technologies. But however these changing requirements are handled, the explicit responsibility to meet users' needs requires the manager and his or her staff to examine user behaviour as a first step to determining policy.

In Chapter 4 we discuss the levels of users and their expectations and where the role of the information professional and user training interacts. Throughout the book we are trying to encourage LIS managers and staff to 'think outside the LIS box' and look at your LIS with new eyes and new knowledge. Have you any new users or user groups that you could work with to track their information seeking behaviour? This is expanded to cover websites and digital libraries.

Chapter 5 asks: What information do you already hold about your users and what can you learn from their past behaviour? Past behaviour is no guarantee of future behaviour, of course, so is it worth keeping old data? There may be changes in the size or composition of your user group, and older reviews are unlikely to cover some of the services your LIS now offers, just as they may include some services that have since closed. Historic data will of course allow you to paint a picture over time of how the LIS is used, and how users regard it and its services, allowing you to track trends and comparative figures to support business cases and help with fund allocation. But there is also great value in reading the detail, because of what it tells you about the way that users have interpreted the questions put to them. You may be able not only to identify areas where jargon or lack of understanding is confusing your users (and maybe dissuading them from asking the LIS to provide a new service you would like to offer) but also gain understanding about the way

that your users work and how they involve the LIS in that work.

An important by-product of reviewing what you already know will be to highlight other information stores in your organization, and this may lead you to consider whether these should be brought within your library and information service, or whether you should influence their management in any other appropriate ways.

If user surveys have been carried out before then what kind of questions did you ask in them? And most importantly what was the response? Did you make any alterations or adjust any of the services or even create a new one? This chapter gives examples of such results and offers suggestions as to what can be done to recognize future user information behaviour habits.

As always we must learn, learn and continue to learn about our users, so Chapter 6 looks at a number of opportunities: better strategic planning through analysis of user behaviour; better marketing. We discuss keeping the customers satisfied, keeping upstream management satisfied and why you should make sure that your organization recognizes the importance of its library and information service. Communications are important, too, and so is achieving cost benefits and making better use of budgets (especially in the eyes of your financial managers). We believe that all these strategic planning tasks can be better achieved using analysis of LIS user behaviour.

Library and information services do not operate in 'steady state'. They are – or should be – central to every organization irrespective of the field of activity (or 'sector' – such as academic, governmental, workplace, public, legal, financial, technical, scientific or medical LIS. In order to remain in that central role they need constantly to be assessed, evaluated and monitored, preferably by the LIS staff itself.

It will be part of your strategic planning processes for the LIS to track and evaluate the new and competing services and products that arrive on the scene. You should recognize that this is also part of your organization's strategic planning process, so user requirements should be kept in mind as part of your monitoring, planning and evaluation processes. How can this be done?

Marketing is one way that we discuss but it is also important to

make the leaders of your user community aware of the assumptions or decisions you have made, and to share the information with them. This can be done succinctly: you have no need to go into every detail. In this way you can be sure that these decision makers have a summary of your evidence in front of them, and could ask for further information about particular issues of concern.

'Keeping track of changes in what users want' is discussed in Chapter 7. Here, important steps are helping users to review their information needs, learning how to keep track of changes in what users want, and identifying how and where to find information about changes in the services provided by your suppliers. The use of surveys and statistics is covered as are wider uses of information professional skills, and we look at how reputation management fits into all this.

We cannot stress too much the degree to which you should know your users and build user loyalty and strive to keep it. Finally in this chapter we ask the question 'What next?' and offer solutions!

'Each URL is a latent community – the trigger for rich and engaging conversations – the launch point for new creativity,' said Clay Shirky in his Online 2008 Keynote address (Shirky, 2008).

In Chapter 8 we look at tracking the future. We discuss how you can keep a watch on the wider changing world and what your networks can tell you. Are you using other professionals, management and technical colleagues' skills and experience enough? What are the lessons to be learnt? High on your agenda should be not only your customers' continually changing requirements but also maintaining contacts beyond your community – for example with your suppliers to be aware of developments in their worlds and the products they offer. Making use of new ways of working and partnerships is essential if the LIS is to survive.

Our final chapter, 'Future perfect?', looks forward to new levels of achievement for your LIS. We particularly recommend that readers note the advice given in *Digital Consumers* (Nicholas and Rowlands

2008). They say a new mindset is required and offer the following recommendations for the future:

1 Live with the prospect of constant change
2 Establish a link with information provision and access/outcomes
3 Keep it simple
4 Do not be seduced by digital fashions, they will all disappear.
5 Get social
6 Hold on to the physical space.

So in our final chapter we take these ideas forward and look at what could make a real difference in the future of the LIS. We give some recommendations, and ask you to consider the levels of patronage or sponsorship and what financial support you enjoy. We consider the very current issue of library as place in the context of user satisfaction, and we comment on the proposal 'Shh, this is a digital library'.

Very importantly we cover the training and development of the LIS staff and as always we cannot stress enough that all staff must have access to continuing professional development in order to meet the constant succession of changes and challenges that present themselves. When all these issues are taken into account the LIS will be able to deliver user satisfaction.

Throughout the book we have identified many actions that will contribute to giving your users the LIS they want. There are frequent challenges and opportunities to rethink your service – this time stepping 'out of the box', but part of that initiative is getting the users to articulate what they need, engaging in open dialogue with them and setting the pace by designing services from their point of view. You have access to all the information you need to keep ahead of the game if you want!

Whatever sector you work in, your LIS should be central to your community. Otherwise as is all too often seen there are dire consequences, with services cut or even decimated because the financial decision makers could not see that core value to the users.

Our conclusions are many, all based on working in various sectors

during our professional lives, observing other successful organiz-
ations – but above all our desire is to see LISs (of all kinds, and in the
widest meanings of the term) continuing to thrive and grow as they
make the most of the continuing challenges in our information
world. Enjoy!