Not Your Traditional Librarian Anymore!

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The “traditional” special librarian role constantly changes. Jobs in traditional library settings, with books all around, are giving way to ones in which the librarian joins a team of information gatherers. The librarian sifts through and analyzes information in advance, rather than just waiting for questions and giving back searches with minimal input. To survive and thrive in the corporate world, more and more librarians have moved out of the library — and often away from the title of “librarian” — and into the research operations in their organizations. I know many examples of librarians, whose titles and roles have drastically changed from the ones they envisioned in library school. Two of the best examples, epitomizing this trend, are Debbie Hartzman of Walt Disney Pictures and Shari Morwood of IBM.

Disney’s Magic Asset

Debbie Hartzman came to her current role via a rather traditional library route. She always wanted to be a librarian. She went to the University of Denver library school. Her first job was at Bendix Oceanics Division in Sylmar, as assistant librarian to Arlene Motz, who Hartzman cites as a great influence in her career (“She taught me how to throw things out.”). She participated in automating the library, using Bibliotech. When Bendix started going through downsizing, she went to NIAC-USC [NASA Industrial Applications Center, University of Southern California] and turned to online searching, mostly on NASA Recon and Dialog, with an emphasis on small business development.

Disney, one of her NIAC customers, hired her when they wanted to start the Research and Development Library. After getting the Research and Development Library at Disney started, Hartzman left for the new challenge and non-traditional role that AIM (Advanced Information Management) offered. She did outreach marketing and career workshops for AIM, a company that provides library personnel placement service. Then Disney’s New Technology Division wanted an information person to work on team projects at the corporate level, a person with their fingers on the pulse of the companies, who could bring different work groups together to work on issues or standards effecting the company. One of the librarians at Disney headquarters recommended Debbie for the new position.

Debbie Hartzman is New Technology Analyst at Walt Disney Pictures and Television’s New Technology Division. When asked how her new role differs from her previous library positions, Debbie said many studios are looking for ways to promote corporate synergy and finding emerging technologies that help improve the quality and types of products they provide. Companies need to stay up, and, hopefully, surpass their competition. As New Technology Analyst, Debbie receives a salary she wouldn’t have gotten with the title librarian after her name.

Many people have begun to understand that librarians can do a lot more than the traditional image of the profession among non-librarians would suggest. In her role at Disney, Debbie has her own new technology research area, evaluating potential new resources and search agent technologies. She not only searches for information on an industry or research area, she culls through, evaluates, and filters the information. Her role is proactive. She identifies the appropriate managers and brings them the information without waiting for them to request it.

Hartzman continues to work closely with Disney librarians. She refers searches to them, where appropriate. Both sides share information and divide the work among themselves regarding who handles which niches. Debbie sees her role as a knowledge management function. She works on special projects, such as developing the corporate Intranet site for internal communications. Currently, she is investigating cable technology and HDTV (High Definition Television). Usually she needs very current information. The two biggest sources she uses are Newspaper and public relation releases. Cost is not a worry because of the evaluative nature of the work she’s doing.
Big Blue's Marketing Resource

Shari Morwood is program manager of Market Analysis and Strategy at the Thomas J. Watson Center, IBM's premier research facility in Yorktown Heights, NY. Like Hartzman, she started her career in a traditional way. Upon graduation from San Jose State University with a B.A. in English Literature, she went into the graduate library school program, getting her M.L.S. degree.

Morwood's first job was as a nuclear librarian at General Electric in Sunnyvale, CA. Her husband was transferred to Oregon. With no appropriate library positions available at the time, Morwood took a job in product marketing at the Advanced Products Division in Hewlett-Packard. The engineers there knew of her library background and were asked to set up a Technical Information Center from scratch. Originally, she worked with electrical engineers and computer scientists, doing patent and chemical searching and the like, but soon the company started hiring M.B.A.s who began asking marketing questions. She expanded her searching arenas, helping with questions such as how big the market would be for new products like real estate calculators.

Morwood was asked to run the Market Research Information Center back at Hewlett-Packard in California. In the center, she had clients all over the world in all divisions of Hewlett-Packard with market-related needs. She dealt with a wide range of areas, from the market size of gas chronographs and minicomputers, to marketing factors for PCs, workstations, and networking. Recognizing the ever-increasing importance of PCs and networking and wanting to move into primary market research, Morwood moved to managing her own entity. Her group dealt more with consultants such as Gartner Group, IDC, and Dataquest and online searching than traditional book and periodical sources.

After six-and-a-half years of building the Market Information Center into a world-class organization (if she does say so herself), Morwood was looking for new challenges. She also saw a lot of downsizing among mid-level managers. To gain more skills and make herself more marketable in the long run, she took an individual contributor role as a primary market research analyst. She was then recruited to work directly for the clients in the Personal Information Products group, conducting primary research projects on pricing, positioning, naming, feature trade-offs, and product concepts for new and existing products such as wireless LANs, handheld information appliances, and small business PCs. For the first time, Morwood found herself involved in focus groups, statistics, and survey research. She still found her library science background came in very useful.

With the word librarian no longer anywhere in her title, Shari soon doubled her salary, holding her own and shining in a research environment. Word even spread to the competition, who recruited and lured her to her current position at IBM as program manager of market analysis and strategy for the Thomas J. Watson Research Center. Morwood now studies the future from a market perspective. Where will technologies and customer needs be 10 years from now? How is the nature of work changing? What will businesses and consumers need and want in the future? Market research can often better predict the demand for products than the scientists creating them. In her environment, an M.L.S. is respected. She is respected for what she knows and what she brings to the company. She finds that a marked contrast from the usual perception of librarians.

Morwood advises those seeking to move up in their company or enter more into the mainstream of the company's business to evaluate their skills and decide what other people in the company have or need those skills. Information retrieval and navigating the Internet take skill. She thinks librarians don't often aspire as much as they should to the big-ticket perks like stock options, bigger titles, and more money. For Shari, moving up the corporate ladder means networking, befriending those with job positions to which you aspire, learning from others, getting up on terminology and lingo, reading the literature in the field, and communicating ideas succinctly and crisply, both in writing and in speaking. Morwood advises librarians heading out of the library to be single-minded of purpose and to not let anyone stop them from achieving their goals. Success may not come in one quick step. It might take many steps until you reach your goal.

Looking back, Morwood considers that perhaps the best thing she did to help herself define where she wanted to go was teaching marketing in the at the San Jose State University Library School. Teaching basic marketing skills to the students helped her focus on how marketing skills could be applied to libraries and how to improve her own marketing knowledge. It helped her define marketing and how her skills could transfer to areas outside of the traditional library setting.

Word to the Riser

All librarians should look at Morwood and Hartzman as examples of how to put the wonderful research skills librarians have to profitable use, how to gain full respect and better pay for the incredible knowledge librarians possess. In an Information Age, where everyone thinks they can find all the information they need instantly and free on the Internet, people who actually can find, evaluate, and make sense of tons of information coming across the desktop will become increasingly vital to their organizations. Who better than librarians to lead the charge? No matter what the title, a rose by any other name would smell as sweet (and probably be better paid)!