

## Changing Trends in LIS

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IT, networking, and the expanding information market-place represent a combination of factors affecting librarians and opinion of administrative decision makers about libraries. Technological advances affect the fundamental library operations, and can possibly even change the basic social role of libraries.

A revolution in IT, however, is generating a convergence in interests and an environment for interesting and necessary collaborations. A less visible, but significant collaboration is the one between librarians and engineers. Engineers and librarians are two groups that generally are not expected to have any collaborate interest. Librarians have been quite secure in their own world of collecting, cataloguing, and disseminating information; whereas engineers have likewise been contented in their domain. The tremendous rate of new developments in computing and telecommunication technology has forced a transition to new modes of operation for libraries. Increasingly, information is being created and offered in a digital format without ever migrating to paper format. This change calls for expertise beyond the domain of library science and involves collaboration and interaction of librarians, computer scientists, engineers, and others.

Lancaster predicted that we will soon be entering the era of paper less society, an era in which print on paper will be replaced by electronics. Thus library will not contain any printed material at all. It may become a room

containing a computer terminal only. But this prediction seems to have overlooked the fact that libraries are repositories of the recorded knowledge of many generations. A library contains books, journals, newsletters, reports, video tapes and magnetic tapes each created in a different era. The future of libraries is a mosaic that will make libraries more complex. In addition to book stacks and reading tables, there will be carrels and computer terminals. Besides this, there may be remote computer terminals with databases which have been locally developed viz., online public access catalogue (OPAC) of resources in the library.

The rate at which all of this will happen is difficult to predict. The diffusion rate of new technologies is slower due to many constraints such as technical, economic, marketing, copy right, government regulations, priorities, and personal attitudes.

Once libraries and their users are electronically linked through networking, libraries may provide electronic reference service. Librarians are aware that users cannot acquire and maintain the skills necessary to search the hundreds of available databases. They have already started serving as searching intermediaries in most of the libraries. In future, the user and the librarian may search together even though they might not be in the same room. This can be possible through the development of 'conference search'—an electronic linking of the two distant terminals searching the same database. The librarian providing the searching expertise and the user providing the knowledge of the subject matter.

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As full text databases with reference information become more common, users find that they are getting conflicting information from different sources. The users are, therefore, turning to the librarian to perform a new role that of validation and evaluation.

We must understand that technologies come and go, but the skills of librarianship would survive. When we talk of the effect of IT on libraries and librarians, the following questions arise if we presume that IT may replace library professionals:

- (a) Who will assess the ensemble of material that is available and determine whether it is complete; if it is not, what is missing?
- (b) Who will do the price verification of material?
- (c) How to find in advance whether or not valuable information is available?
- (d) How to use the expertise and skill of information manager at conceptual phase in compiling thesauri and setting up databases that are useful to information seekers?

Information technologies and librarians both define themselves as dealing in information. It is commonly understood that advances in IT will undermine librarianship through automation and even elimination of libraries in the present form. If this is the case then the librarians will have to reorient themselves from the management of physical information to digital information media.

LIS professionals have the main challenge of recognising and grasping new opportunities that are already available for those who like to notice the changing trends. While we cannot deny the fact that the ground under our feet is changing, the LIS professionals have a unique competitive advantage over non specialists trying to enter the new information world. Some even proclaim the wonderful new age of electronics librarians, intelligent agents, and natural language searching, in which machines will do all the work, including abstracting.

In the changing environment, the risk to information professionals may be self inflicted

due to their failure to be entrepreneurial and seize opportunities. Information professionals are uniquely qualified amongst all the professional classes to adopt to changing times and survive. Many libraries are already in the automation race and a lot of interesting work is emerging. Many librarians have seized the opportunities offered by IT enthusiastically and are using it to offer new and improved services to users and raising their profile. In the long term, the challenge may be to move from information system supporting primarily retrieval of bibliographic references to information systems supporting information use.

With the libraries on the super highway, a question arises whether librarians will be needed any longer? History is full of documentation about various classes of information elites, who were wiped out on the arrival of new technology. What technology can give, technology can also take away.

Many of us are aware that utilising technological innovations such as Mosaic and Netscape to cruise the Web changes the way we experience knowledge. It permits participation with others in adding incremental to what is known. Many documents are now more of a collection of perspectives rather than something that are patentable to one individual. Browsing on the Web constantly brings one in contact with information that one never knew he wanted. We may conclude that librarians should abandon the ideology of information in favour of networking.

The emerging communications technologies, especially the interactive digital devices will drive the information future. The technology can handle the data overload but a human being cannot. It is the use of IT that will give librarians an audience, an attitude, an amplification of self that will raise their status in life.

IT is a strong force, but it is not an independent agent. IT provides librarians with a range of tools to help in providing efficient and effective services to library users. In future, use of such libraries may go up, but the number of users visiting the library buildings may go down.