

Trends in Management of Academic Libraries in Digital Environment

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Skills sets required for Academic Librarian's in the Digital Era: A close look at the realities

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Abstract: *Libraries are the social institutions which are affected heavily by the impact of advancement of technology. It continues to change day by day the way the libraries work. It is very difficult for a library professional to be updated with everything that is happening around him and in his profession. But the present scenario warrants that the librarians should have the minimum skill sets to be relevant in his profession. The author briefly describes these skill sets in this article.*

Keywords: *Digital Library, Digital Skills, Technology Skills, Digital Awareness*

1. Introduction

Beginning of the 21st Century is witnessing revolutionary changes in the way people communicate and interact. Digital revolution has converted the globe into a small village removing the barriers of time and space. Information from one corner of the world reaches the other corner within no time with one or two mouse clicks. Internet, the huge ubiquitous network of networks is the reason for these revolutions. All sort of human activities happen on this network including commercial, personal, and scholarly interactions.

Libraries are social institutions engaged in transfer of information for centuries. Their role in the society as a means of information transfer has not yet diminished. But the influence of digital revolution has influenced in a big way libraries perform their tasks. The availability of enormous amount of digital information and the digital surrogates of traditional materials makes it very difficult for the libraries to manage the information tsunami. Since the libraries are handling analogous material along with the digital content the hybrid nature of our libraries also will prevail for some more years to come.

Software solutions to make available the digital content to the clientele who dwell beyond the four walls of the library are being produced and revised on a regular basis. Similarly new generations of hardware also are getting evolved every day. We have reached a scenario where people have started using mobile devices like tablets, mobile phones etc to access information. The convergence of technologies

into such single devices for information transfer again makes the scenario more complex.

In this juncture, the professionals working in libraries have to adapt on a regular basis to the changes happening around him. It becomes inevitable for him to get acquainted with the new hardware, the new software, have more creativity etc.. It's a challenge for the professionals to be in routine duties and to update everything there on. "Information professionals must understand their special role in society and why they do things as well as how they do things." (Greer, Grover, & Fowler, 2007) This write up explains the various skill sets required for librarians and information professionals in the present context.

2. Changes in the Academic Libraries

Academic libraries are the libraries highly influenced by the digital revolution. Research and education are the prime objectives of the academic institutions and the libraries of those institutions have to vehemently support the parent organizations.

The Integrated Library Management Software (ILMS) brought in huge changes in the way the routine works of the library are performed. They help in acquisition, subscription, cataloguing, circulation etc.. There are many proprietary and open source software's available in this category. KOHA and NewGenlib are major open source ILMS used on a large scale all over the India. They also help us in maintaining on online OPAC, which is compatible with international standards.

2.1 E-journals

As we are aware journals are the carriers of primary research information. Hence they are very much cherished by the academic community. A huge chunk of the library budget is usually spent on subscription for periodicals. But, the evolution of e-journals again changed the scenario in academic libraries. The journals as well as their archives are made available by the publishers in digital format, bringing in the evolution of e-journals. The commercial seen of e-journals had more complexities by the evolution of various marketing models and intermediary agencies.

2.1.1 E-books

Publishers have started making available digital surrogates of books on internet in various formats. These e-books also created managerial problems in the library. Acquisition, classification, cataloguing and providing access to them in digital platform, creates serious managerial issues.

Since, one copy of the item can be accessed by numerous people; publishers increased the cost of items very much. Marketing models like perpetual access, bundled offers etc. are tricky situations which the managers of the library to face. Similarly, several bibliographic databases and information tools are now available. Data sources like indiastat.com are very essential in research and academic institutions.

3. Digitization practices

Many libraries had materials of academic and importance in analog format. They are susceptible to deterioration. The new technology helps us to convert these items to their digital surrogates which can be transformed over the networks. This process is called digitization and novel technologies of digitization are in the stages of evolution. It is not that easy to retrieve a digital document form a collection of such items unless proper metadata accompany them.

Integration of Web 2.0 tools and Social Networking Media for library marketing and instruction is a new trend in the western world. Our libraries are also following this trend. The multitude of e-resources subscribed and purchased makes it inevitable for libraries to have Content Management Systems (CMS). The open access movement is also having tremendous impact in the library scenario in our country. We have already established world class digital repositories for institutional publications.

The availability of enumerable resources in digital and analog formats could not be searched at a stretch some days back but the evolution of federated search engines and web discovery tools has made this very easy. The agencies which support us in such searches maintain our indices and help in easy retrieval.

All these changes warrant suitable training to be imparted to the users of a library. Users are to be made aware of the new technologies search mechanisms at the library. This necessitates in proper information literacy training to the users. We have discussed the changes that have happened in the institutions of libraries all over the world. These institutions are managed by library professionals who are having certain skills which they attained during their professional training. But the quick and tumultuous changes in libraries make it inevitable for the professionals to be updated with the latest developments and technologies. The software and other skills required for library professional is described in detail in the forthcoming paragraphs.

4. Skill Sets Required

We can classify the skill sets required for professional librarians into Managerial Skills, Technology Skills, and Creative Skills

4.1 Managerial Skills

The changes in library scenario warrant librarians to be equipped with managerial skills of different categories. He has to identify people who can manage technology well, who can deal with clientele of different categories with different demands. This point to the need for better human resources management for librarians. The market of library resources is not that easy to handle like that of books. The new resources like e-journals, e-books and databases forces librarians become more vigilant. The marketing models are so complex and it differs from publisher to publisher. He also should know the legal implications of the License Agreements we sign with publishers and distributors. The faculty and other clientele attached to academic institutions demand many resources for their use. But the librarian

should show his caliber in selecting the suitable items with respect to the financial availability. This poses also librarian to be a better financial manager.

The e-resources market in India is relatively new and there is huge hype about the cost of these items. Librarians are to be good negotiators for bringing down the rates quoted and in selecting better marketing models.

4.1.1 *Technology Skills*

The skills a librarian need under technology can be broadly classified into two namely skills related to hardware and software. Knowledge about the latest technology and its use is a must for librarians. As you are aware the technology related to hardware changes every day. Similarly, new and new software gets released every day. Libraries need not adopt whatever is available but select the suitable items for their library and make maximum use of it.

There are many standard open source integrated library management software. They are generic software, which are to be customized and used. Librarian should know the extent of customization required for their library.

Further, the open access movement forces institutions to upload their publications on online locus. These are called institutional repositories. Librarian should be able to collect, customize, upload these publications into their Institutional Repositories. Librarians will face a lot of resistance from publishers and authors. This has to be handled in a amicable manner. Any digital document in a collection is identified using the metadata attached to it. The metadata for items uploaded in an IR are to be provided by the librarian only. His sense of reasoning helps him to undertake this in a meticulous manner.

Most of the libraries are assigned with the task of checking plagiarism in India. The plagiarism checking identifies the similarity of content in a research paper with external sources. Librarian should know how to use plagiarism detection software, interpret the similarity report generated etc. He also has the duty of making people aware of the menace of plagiarism and how to avoid it. He also can train them in providing proper references and citations and to draft a research report according to an international style.

4.1.2 *Creative Skills*

A good library sustains on good marketing. Marketing a library requires creative skills from the librarian. Creativity is needed in designing posters, brochures and bulletins for the library. Modern libraries maintain blogs and websites for marketing their resources and services. It is very difficult to sustain identity in the digital world without web presents. The social networking media like Facebook and Twitter are now widely used by librarians to market their resources and services. It is unnecessary to assert that librarians need creative skills in such a scenario.

Content Management Systems are widely used by libraries to manage e-resources and to make web presence of libraries. WordPress, Joomla and Drupal are some of them. Here also librarians have to have a leading role. He can also support by

creating content for the parent institution. For that they should be capable of using utilities like Adobe Photoshop, Acrobat and Audacity. Sometimes librarians will be asked to edit even Video content.

5. Conclusion

The above discussion reveals the importance of a librarian to be multitalented and inspiring. Sky is the limit for its creativity and talent. "Outside pressures on librarianship in the 21st century place younger librarians in a unique role. Beyond technology, we need to challenge existing perceptions of libraries and librarians, and show our continued relevance to various groups". (Gordon, 2006) "Professional librarians have specialized expertise needed by every school, company, government, institution or agency. Because not every such organization has a librarian, each librarian not only know, but also communicate clearly, the value of a librarian to the organization. Furthermore, every librarian has an ethical professional responsibility to provide that value to the organization and to promote it to society at large." (Mcknight, 2010) Librarians of the modern era have to show all these skills by running and maintaining the traditional services to satisfy information requirements of his clientele.

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