



Sue Henczel argues that Information Professionals need to wise up to the business environment to succeed.

Think big, add value

On a global scale, corporate libraries are being downsized and closed at a staggering rate, and we must ask ourselves why this is happening at a time when information is seen as the most valuable asset that an organization can have. It seems that, while information has value for an organization, from the perspective of many a CEO or managing director a library does not.

While corporate librarians have become 'Information Managers' or 'Chief Knowledge Officers', many are still heavily focused on resourcing and managing a physical collection, yet the information that adds value and contributes to an organization's success is rarely acquired from books. If we are to take our rightful place as information experts in the business environment, we must let go of our traditional roles and services and investigate the real workings of our organization – the business that it is in, what people do, how they work and what information they need to do their jobs better.

The competencies that we have as librarians are clearly and easily transferable to the business environment. They can be used to position an information service strategically; to develop products and services that add value to the work of our clients; to package and promote the products and services in a way that is attractive to existing and potential clients; to persuade clients that our services are better than those offered by any of our competitors; and to perform in such a way that we consistently exceed the expectations of our clients. The benefit of becoming 'organizationally aligned' and 'client focused' is that we have the opportunity to become an integral part of the organization. We must help our clients to have faith in our ability to deliver, and trust us to give them correct, authoritative and context-relevant information.

At a recent workshop offered by Dialog in Melbourne Australia, 22 corporate librarians

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came together to examine their competencies in light of the business environments in which they operate. By recognizing the relationships between their existing competencies and the business competencies required, they were able to identify their own strengths and weaknesses and develop a personal action plan to improve their levels of competency. It also gave them insight into new ways of applying their skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes to becoming more client-focused.

For some it was a welcome confirmation that abandoning the traditional tasks was OK, while for others it was a realization of the vast and exciting range of opportunities that exist for them beyond the perceived boundaries of their physical or even virtual 'libraries'. The unanimous response to the workshop was one of gratitude for the opportunity to take time out and reflect on the value of the tasks corporate librarians do each day and to acknowledge their responsibility to make the appropriate changes for the good of their organization and themselves.

I will leave you with some final thoughts from the workshop:

- Think 'organization' rather than 'library' – see the big picture.
- Be busy, but be busy doing things that make a difference and add value.
- Market yourself and not the library.
- If there's no perceived value in the eyes of the client, there's no added value for the organization.
- Get out of the library and become an active member of the organization – seek strategic partnerships within the organization and outside.
- Get rid of the visible collection – even if only temporarily – so you are not just seen as the keeper of books.
- Ask existing and potential clients what they need – and listen to what they say.
- Never underestimate your skills – accept thanks graciously and actively solicit testimonials and referrals.