



# Archival Media Preservation

## Skills Librarians Need

By Anita Williams

The librarian of today has come a long way from the bun-wearing matron with thick glasses and sensible shoes who spent a large part of day checking out books, assessing fines and admonishing those who were less than perfectly quiet. Librarians come in all shapes and sizes, all ages and genders. There are those who come into the profession straight from college and library school as well as many who discover that librarianship is the next logical step after spending part of a career lifetime working in other areas. Books remain a major part of a library's function, but technology has risen in the ranks and has become so pervasive, no librarian worth his or her salt can enter or exist in the profession without at least cursory knowledge of major innovations in technology and a keen interest in what lies ahead.

Of major importance to librarians, particularly those entering the profession and/or those who weren't "born digital" is to know how to keep up with technology and how to make good, informed decisions about implementation and use. These "big picture" topics are described by Meredith Farkas in her 2006 blog post *Skills for the 21st Century Librarian*. Farkas worries that library schools may not be adequately preparing students for the continuing education required in this technological age. Because change comes hard and fast, Farkas advises that library schools teach students how to "develop skills for learning new technologies" in addition to a strategy for troubleshooting them.

Following is a working list of skills and competencies librarians need to have, but just like the myriad technological innovations available for use in the field, this list is by no means comprehensive or static. Many thanks to Farkas and also Roy Tennant, whose *What's in my Librarian Toolbox?* weblog includes some very helpful information regarding specific technologies it would behoove a librarian to have in his or her bag of tricks:

*Call a spade a spade or if it's not a spade, don't be afraid to call it a dud*

Before a new technology is co-opted for use in the library, records office or repository, it is important to know if it has 'legs', i.e. Will it actually be useful for the needs of the institution or is it and will it be useful 10 minutes hence?

### *Know those you serve and how and when to serve them*

Library patrons are changing every day and are no longer limited to students and book borrowers. Some require technology guidance, reference service or knowing the location of the rest rooms. Others just want to be left alone. So that patrons are given optimum service, it is important to know the patron base and carefully evaluate its needs.

### *Take your space in cyberspace*

Librarians need to be comfortable in an online environment. Knowing one's way around search engines, social networks and the blogosphere is key to providing the service expected by patrons, particularly those of the tech savvy set.

### *Go to the head of the class*

In order to implement new ideas into the institution, it is important to have a plan. But since no one is an island, the plan can't be realized without the contributions of other staff members. Librarians need the ability to visualize, research, gather the troops, strategize, review, finish and follow up on ideas designed to improve library service.

### *Don't sweat the small stuff*

The ability to prioritize is crucial. Those tasks which help an organization reach its goals are at the top of the list. The rest may be expendable and are secondary at best.

### *Read, write, speak and share*

In order to stay in the game, librarians need to read and assess the information contained in professional literature, texts and weblogs. Writing is also essential, and can range from carefully-crafted peer-reviewed academic articles to posted comments on the blogs of others. Membership in professional organizations and attendance at forums and conventions provide plenty of opportunities to network, present and keep abreast of innovations, improvements and ideas.

### *Techno tools of the trade*

Tools with which librarians should have at least moderate familiarity include scripting languages, XHTML, CSS plus text indexing and database software.

### *Learn fast, keep up and smile*

It is not enough to just keep up the pace, librarians must also demonstrate an enthusiasm for the constant change in this technological age.

Finally, there's a mental component that should also be included in a librarian's cache of skills. It is important to use every experience and personal connection to discover new ways to disseminate information. Librarians as information professionals need to develop a proficiency for filing away for future use even the tiniest bit of information that may come in handy as they endeavor to provide service to humanity, the greater good and last but not least, the patrons for without them, there is no us.

Sources:

Farkas, Meredith

*Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Librarian*

<http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/2006/07/17/skills-for-the-21st-century-librarian/>

Tennant, Roy

*What's in my Librarian Toolbox?*

<http://techessence.info/node/111>