

# DRINKING FROM A FIRE HOSE:

HOW TO COPE WITH THE  
ONSLAUGHT OF ELECTRONIC  
RESOURCES

# Public Services Professionals

*Meeting expectations is a treadmill turned on high speed – publishers and librarians have to run hard just to keep up. Free and easy and powerful, the challenge to keep current is always a step ahead.*

(Tenopir, 2006)

# Definitions

- Resource – high-level term to include databases, websites, membership directories, documents, postings to listservs
- Fonds – *all the records, in all formats, created by a person, family or organization that have been preserved in an archival institution* (Archives Society of Alberta)
- Users – could be clients, customers, patrons, students, faculty

# Changing Landscape of Services

Re-shapen by

- Advances in technology
- User expectations
- Variety of sources
- Reference overload

# Changing Landscape of Services

*The exponential growth of digital resources that can be accessed from personal computers has implications, both for archives that provide primary sources for consultation and for users who rely on sources for their research and benefit by the services an archives provides.*

(W. Duff, B. Craig, J. Cherry, 2004)

# Changing Expectations

- Faster more complete access
- Better client services
- Electronic/digital access to catalogues and all resources

# Reference Staff Responsibilities

- Understanding of the institution's holdings and additional resources
- Be technologically savvy to assist in redirecting or pointing to other sources
- Verify sources as credible

# Literature Review

- Few articles about how to keep up with resources
- Articles on how best to manage and provide information to users so the user is not overwhelmed
- Role of reference services
- Using new technologies



# Reference Services in Transition

*In the digital realm the reference librarian's responsibility is to provide transparent, seamless access to the library's resources without overpowering the user with too many options.*

(Reichardt, 2006)

# Reference Overload

- Too many resources available
- Anxiety over which resources to choose

*if the user is not made aware of all these resources, then we have not done our job. . .*

(Reichardt, 2006)

# Archives' Path to Information Management

- Descriptive standards
- Electronic catalogue
  - Retroactively converting to electronic catalogues and converting descriptions to the national descriptive standard
  - Alberta and B.C. electronic catalogues
  - CAIN (Canadian Archival Information Network)
  - Finding aids

# Finding Aids

*Finding aids and archival descriptions provide context for records, situating them in relationship to other sources whose custody may be dispersed among several institutions. ...The Internet and electronic connections between distant parts of Canada promises to broaden access to archival descriptions, to sources, and to archivists too. Broader access generally increases the need for knowledgeable archivists to mediate sources and users.*

(W. Duff, B. Craig, J. Cherry, 2004)

# Finding Aids

- Hard copy finding aids
- Electronic
  - Indexes
  - Subject/thematic guides
  - Ahead in developing standards for digitally born records

# Archival Reference

- Archivists must provide orientations to archival research
- Reference functions may have to be reoriented from simply providing information or a document delivery to more of a knowledge creation process.

# Library Databases

- Academic institutions
- Reliance on technical services departments
- Collections departments co-ordinate the process
- Access
- Fee vs. free

# Library Databases

- Multitude of ever-changing database vendors, content, and interfaces
- User groups and locations
- Federated/meta search options



# Consortia – General

- Seem complicated
- Which resources are available through which consortium?
- The University of Calgary is a member of:
  - CNSLP (Canadian National Site Licensing Project), now CRKN (Canadian Research Knowledge Network)
  - COPPUL (Council of Prairie & Pacific University Libraries) – includes Consortia Canada
  - APMC (Association of Canadian Medical Colleges)

# Consortia – TAL

The Alberta Library has 3 types of consortia:

- Subscriptions Alberta – Alberta Universal Core Databases available to members
- Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library (LHCADL) – LHCADL Resource List
- Online Reference Centre (ORC) – Students, parents and teachers have access to the password to Learn Alberta

# Promoting Resources

- To users, colleagues and professional community
- Need to promote functionality in databases
- Database Upgrades
  - Content (current and historical)
  - Interface

# Current Awareness Services

- Designed to help tame information overload
- Used by sophisticated users
- Separate registration

# Types of Current Awareness Services

- Table of Contents
- Search Alerts
- Saved Searches
- Electronic Clipping Services

# Professionals Keeping Current

- Listservs
  - Jerome-L
  - Arcan-L
  - Professional associations
- Colleagues and professional community
  - Webpages
  - Blogs
- Internet resources
- Word of mouth

# Professionals Keeping Current

- Professional literature
  - Bulletins and newsletters
  - Workshops and conferences
- Professional association memberships
- Currency services
  - *Current Cites*
  - *Informed Librarian*

# Professionals Keeping Current

- Product solicitations
- Vendor training sessions
- Current awareness services
- Consortia updates
- Database of databases



# Balancing Act

- Needs of users
- Using technology to provide access
- Access widest range of information
- Adapt as reference services change

*Technological changes are occurring at a dizzying pace in the world of information . . . . Common-sense strategies . . . and appropriate technologies when operating in tandem will hopefully allow us to stay informed without being overwhelmed.*

*(Sullivan, 2004)*

# Selected Articles

Wendy Duff, Barbara Craig, and Joan Cherry. “Finding and Using Archival Resources: A Cross-Canada Survey of Historians Studying Canadian History, *in Archivaria*, No 58, Fall, 2004, p. 51.

Randy Reichardt, “Digital Musings: Digital Reference Overload: Thoughts on How To Deal, *Internet Reference Services Quarterly*, Vol. 11(2), 2006, p. 105.

Patrick Sullivan, “Information Overload: Keeping Current Without Being Overwhelmed” in *Science & Technology Libraries*, Vol. 25(1/2) 2004, p. 123.

Carol Tenopir, “Online Databases: Keeping Up with Expectations” in *Library Journal*, October 1, 2006, p. 26.

Elizabeth Yakel, “Thinking inside and outside the Boxes: Archival References Services at the Turn of the Century, *Archivaria*, No. 49, Spring, 2000. p. 141.

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# How Do You Cope?

## Group Discussion