

Chapter 1

Media libraries in the 21st century

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The purpose of this book is to explore the main issues facing information workers employed by media organizations, that is, broadcasters and publishers of newspapers, magazines and websites. Each chapter examines an issue that librarians, archivists, cataloguers, researchers and other information professionals are likely to face in their working life, with chapters written by practitioners who have faced these problems themselves. The aim is to spread knowledge acquired through practical experience to help solve and prevent problems as they arise. 'Media librarian' in this book does not refer to those looking after multimedia collections in public or academic libraries, although some of the issues discussed may be useful to them. In addition, although controversial among practitioners, the author uses the term 'media librarians' to refer to all who carry out information work for media organizations (although their actual job title may be 'Researcher', 'Media Manager' or 'Information Manager', for example) for historical reasons, for convenience and because she has never considered libraries to be exclusively collections of books.

Media librarians have a low profile in the information profession and among their employers. Academic, legal and public librarians are often intrigued to discover that some of their peers work for the same people who provide their television programmes and daily newspaper. Journalists write articles perpetuating the idea that libraries are dusty book collections run by stern ladies with date stamps, unaware that the people who provided their newspaper database or background research are part of this profession.

Yet media companies, producing vast quantities of content in an increasing variety of formats, need people both to help them fill up column inches, pages or hours, and to organize this content afterwards so that it can be found again. The profession offering the best skills to meet that need is librarianship and information services. Librarians are the specialists in connecting people who work in media companies with the items they need to do their jobs and putting it where they can find it again. Although unlikely to be called librarians or, in the 21st century, to be working in a room called 'the library', information professionals continue to carry out this task for media organizations throughout the world.

A short history

The media librarian's role has changed significantly since the days of newspaper 'morgues' - cuttings collections filed by subject and personality by clerical staff, where reluctant trainee journalists often had to spend a few months before being allowed to write their first stories. In the 1980s they were among the earliest adopters of online databases, in those days dial-up connections to news databases such as FT Profile. It was during these years that the sector sought to professionalize itself and, for the first time, the news library employee became as likely to have graduated from library school as to have arrived in the company as a 16-year-old clerk.

In the late 1990s online databases began to be accessible through the world wide web. Being able to search via the company intranet was a time-saving boon to librarians, but the databases were now also available to journalists and programme-makers directly. Because end-users now had direct access to information sources previously only searched by librarians, the latter lost their role as gatekeepers and intermediaries between their users and their research resources. Although new roles associated with online research appeared, such as training, subscription management and web content management, many librarians found it a struggle to keep those roles within the library. It was harder still to justify the existence of mediated researchers and prove that they had special skills not held by their customers who, after all, tended to be journalists who prided themselves on their research skills.

The results of these changes varied from organization to organization. In some cases, managing and controlling subscriptions, catalogues and research intranets raised the library's profile, made them seem relevant to younger journalists and even resulted in an increase in enquiry numbers

(various examples are given in Schopflin and Nelsson, 2007). In others, the fact that journalists and programme-makers could access research tools without using the library convinced many managers and budget-owners that specialist staff were no longer needed. The same issues began to affect those managing audiovisual collections. Once programmes began to be created on servers in the newsroom and accessible online, it appeared to senior management that specialist film researchers were unnecessary and even programme metadata could be added by the programme-makers themselves. In some organizations the role of the archive was reduced to managing the retrieval of pre-digital legacy formats.

Despite the best efforts of many library managers to convince their paymasters of the value of skilled professional staff, a depressing number of units closed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Those that survived did so through a mixture of communication, diversification and, especially, promotion. Classic methods, such as posters and leaflets, becoming part of the company induction and holding 'brown bag lunches' proved useful to many. For others training journalists and programme-makers in the use of online databases provided a showcase for library skills. As one veteran media librarian noted, 'journalists are prepared to wade through pages of drivel rather than ask for help' (Dunn, 2005). Demonstrating search methods and how to evaluate and choose research sources was one means of showing users that they were not as accomplished in online searching as they thought. Moreover, such sessions became a means of publicizing collections which were not available to the end-user, such as newspaper cuttings archives or periodical collections. One media librarian noted an increase in enquiry numbers after databases were rolled out to end-users as they used induction sessions to promote the range of their services and holdings, of which many journalists were unaware (Schopflin and Nelsson, 2007).

Like most workplace libraries, media libraries were also subject to changes affecting their parent organizations. The media industry was particularly hard-pressed in the 1990s and early 2000s by globalization, deregulation, the challenges of maintaining advertising income in a time of proliferation of new media, conglomeration and cuts to the public sector. In the early 2000s, commercial media organizations perceived themselves to be in crisis following 'the worst advertising recession in 30 years' (Cassey, 2002). Public sector organizations (for example the British Broadcasting Corporation, BBC) faced different pressures, finding it difficult

to justify public funding as their audience fragmented, both to increasing numbers of other television channels, and to new activities presented to consumers, for example by video recorder and internet.

Global newspaper circulation was in long-term decline (Greenslade, 2003) and publications feared competition from the world wide web. One journalist remarked that 'as the amount of information available online explodes, papers will inevitably face a losing fight to hold on to readers' (Greenslade, 2003). Conglomeration, particularly among regional newspapers and commercial broadcasting, gave large media companies the opportunity to merge and downsize departments and make many staff redundant. In the face of this insecurity, the library and information unit was the most vulnerable part of the organization, particularly where the perception was held that new technology meant library skills were no longer needed.

The late 2000s are without doubt an interesting time for media librarians. But despite the challenges the profession faces in convincing broadcasters and publishers that their skills are vital to the authority, depth and quality of their output, repeated predictions of the death of the media library have been exaggerated. Media channels proliferate interactive and portable formats, needing well researched content and to be made accessible in the future. Although financial managers will always attempt to cut the cake of human capital in new ways in the hope that they can save on headcount, research and archiving remain necessary. Many are realizing that perhaps the most efficient and cheapest way to accomplish it is to pay information professionals to carry it out. Those library and information units that survive and flourish are those which have spread this message to the people who matter within their organizations.

Characteristics of media libraries

Information work in the media industry is centred around two main areas. First, librarians help provide content for what is published or broadcast by their parent company. This might be fact-checking, in-depth information research, providing research sources online, finding archive pictures or clearing stills for use. Second, they help to process, maintain and organize what is produced by the organization, so that this material can be found again and possibly commercially exploited. All media organizations require these tasks to be carried out. What varies is how much is given to

information-related departments, how much to journalists and programmers, how much to administrative staff and how much is outsourced.

The working environment

Media libraries and information units bear little resemblance to the traditional idea of the library. Like many corporate libraries, they have been under pressure to give up precious office space and it is rare to see a media library today with many paper-based holdings. Those concentrating mainly on research are likely to have some reference books either not available online or more economically purchased in hard copy. Magazine and broadcasting libraries often stock periodicals not available through commercial databases or which may be used for reference or rostruming (that is filming for television broadcast). However, the vast majority of media libraries look like every other office in the building. Even those professionals managing the tape archives belonging to broadcasting organizations are under pressure to store non-essential items off site and are normally based in basements and other unglamorous areas of their company's offices.

As with other corporate research units, media libraries primarily carrying out enquiry work are noisy, busy places. Even where the bulk of enquiry work is done by e-mail, or the main tasks are cataloguing, it is rare to encounter a 'library hush' in a media organization. Most media librarians are accustomed to working to very tight deadlines, often matters of minutes where some information or archive may be needed for immediate transmission. This can lead their users to have unrealistic expectations when they use specialist libraries primarily catering to the research and academic communities. Because of publication or transmission requirements, media libraries are often staffed at odd times of day. Today only a few news research units are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, but even those that offer users a reduced number of hours of research backup will be open at weekends and evenings if this is useful for their deadlines. Information units archiving, cataloguing or indexing content for newsrooms may also run seven-day operations so that published or broadcast material can be reused or sold on as soon as possible.

Most media library jobs are within the commercial sector. Whereas the legal business information communities have academic and professional libraries in addition to corporate information units within individual organizations, there is no public sector equivalent for media libraries (as

currently defined). This means there is no centre of excellence operating as a knowledge- or skills-base outside the commercial sector. Admittedly, the UK's one public-sector employer of media librarians, the BBC, employs the largest number of people carrying out information work in the sector (as might be expected for a multi-channel, multimedia 24-hour broadcaster). However, its stated aims are to broadcast and produce radio and television programmes and web and interactive content to public sector standards. This does not mean that professional work is required to be of the highest standard across the board. Indeed, information services are seen as an overhead, diverting money from the core activity of broadcasting.

Media library users

Corporate libraries take their character from their parent organization and users of information services differ considerably depending on whether they practise law, industrial research, property management, high finance, charitable activities or any number of commercial or public services. The largest group of users of media library services are journalists and broadcasters and, although clearly there are huge variations from organization to organization, those who are attracted to such jobs can be characterized as being creative rather than analytical or introspective. The task of assembling research materials tends to be carried out by those at a more junior level, by staff who are often young, inexperienced and still learning to cope with pressure from superiors. Media librarians need to accustom themselves to brusque treatment and an inexperienced approach to knowledge-seeking from their customers. However, the creative community also includes people with huge amounts of subject or technical knowledge and it is often they who are the most appreciative of what information professionals are capable of (even if they do not quite understand it). The author has written more on the users of media libraries in the Association of UK Media Librarians (AUKML) newsletter *Deadline* (Schopflin, 2005).

Types of media library

Newspaper and magazine libraries

Most of the larger newspaper groups had a library at one point although many have been closed or downsized. The remaining libraries vary from large units supporting prestigious daily or weekly titles (in the UK, examples

are held at the *Guardian* or News International) to individuals working solo for small local papers, many part of large media groups (regional newspapers in the USA and the UK are controlled by a very small number of companies). Their work is generally divided into four areas: information research, archiving newspaper content for in-house use or sale to news aggregation services, managing stills collections (whether sourcing and licensing commercial stills or managing an archive possibly including items whose copyright is owned by the newspaper) and managing subscriptions for the newsroom to use. Other responsibilities include compiling in-house specialist information sources, current awareness monitoring and training end-users on the use of subscription or in-house databases. Few units carry out the traditional task of classifying hard copy newspaper articles, as the vast majority of newspaper articles are retrievable from newspaper text databases. However, most have retained their cuttings archives for historical research and commercial exploitation.

Magazine libraries' activities cover much the same areas as newspapers: information research, archiving, subscription management and looking after stills collections. However, magazine content requires either more in-depth analysis (for current affairs magazines) or more lifestyle content (for consumer magazines). They may also require visually stimulating material such as graphics and stills, whose research or syndication may be carried out by library staff. Customer relationships in magazine-publishing organizations are likely to differ from those in newspapers as, rather than supporting teams producing primarily in-house content for a small number of daily or weekly titles, magazine libraries often provide services for hundreds of titles a month, each with different deadlines, covering a huge range of topics and in many cases operating more as commissioners than writers. Perhaps because of this, some magazine groups have never had information or research units. These organizations rely on a mixture of end-user databases and outsourcing to carry out their research and archiving tasks.

Television libraries

Television organizations tend to have separate areas for information research and archives if, indeed, both areas are carried out by information professionals. Information research units are run much like units of newspaper publishers although they may be open for longer hours and offer a more diverse range of services. The main difference will be the requirement to

source newspaper and magazine articles for rostruming (filming), a small but important part of any television information researcher's job. Also significant is that in many cases the content produced by the organization may not be news, but lifestyle programmes, documentaries, music or even drama, all of which require slightly different sets of research priorities.

Any organization that produces broadcast content needs to keep and access it in some way so that content can be reused and resold. Every production or broadcasting company has someone looking after their footage (also known as 'media assets') for broadcast and reuse, even if this is an unpaid runner or intern. Formats covered might include film, videotape, server files or website plugins. The costs of storage and access mean that few television organizations keep all of the programmes they have made but most keep some. In the UK, broadcasters are required to keep all output for three months for legal reasons, something which is often carried out by library technical staff. Television and radio archives require technical work, storage, cataloguing and copyright licensing. They also need to find material for reuse or commercial exploitation. However, these tasks are increasingly carried out, to greater or lesser professional standards, by journalists or specialist researchers in the newsroom, the latter of whom may or may not identify themselves as information professionals.

Most large media organizations now own a variety of content platforms including newspapers, magazines, web services and broadcasting companies. However, they are often run as entirely separate companies (as with News International newspapers and British Sky Broadcasting, both owned by NewsCorp, or the various parts of the AOL-TimeWarner conglomerate). In other cases information services originally provided for newspapers or magazines changed when, for example, web services or book publishing were added to the company's portfolio. Another trend is that new departments appear, but their staff are unaware of the library, or not able to use it under existing service level agreements. It is rare, however, for an organization to redesign an information service completely in order to meet the needs of an expanded multimedia organization.

Media librarianship as a profession

Media librarianship and the information profession

In some ways, media librarians are among the least connected of all sectors to the wider information profession. Many who carry out research or

information-related activities do not identify themselves as information professionals at all. There are a variety of reasons for this. First, the traditional career trajectory of those in media libraries was to work as clerks cutting and filing articles (or reshelving tapes), then move on to classifying newspapers and answering enquiries, without spending an obligatory year studying librarianship. Although this has changed in some organizations, it is not uncommon for there to be no qualification requirement in media library job advertisements. This not only demotivates media librarians from becoming involved with the wider profession, but also helps to establish a culture whereby both staff and managers feel that wider professional skills and knowledge are irrelevant. Clearly this varies from unit to unit. Many media library managers are members of professional associations and are committed to allowing their staff to grow as skilled professionals rather than simply as staff. However, media library staff often struggle to be released for daytime training events or given the chance to attend external courses.

Furthermore, because of the perceived glamour of the sector and the shortage of jobs in the media industry, some see information work as an entrance route to the core creative activities of the organization rather than greater professional advancement. These people perceive librarians as subordinate to production staff or journalists (even if the latter are no better paid or graded). Ironically, the route from the library to the newsroom or production office has become more open in recent years. Now that journalists and programme-makers are expected to carry out some or all of their research themselves, and in many cases to provide their output with metadata or rudimentary cataloguing, organizational and research skills are more valued in end-user departments. However, the jobs themselves are designated as journalistic or production positions rather than information roles.

Career prospects

At the time of writing there is no doubt that the pool of jobs in media information units is shrinking. As previously stated, media organizations have used financial pressures and new technologies as opportunities to reduce headcount. However, whereas in the early 2000s entire units were being closed for good, it is now more likely that individual posts may be lost and these can sometimes subsequently be claimed back. Moreover there are now roles in other parts of the organization, notably among researchers,

information architects and professionals working with metadata, who carry out roles requiring information skills. Whether the incumbents practise the roles to professional standards, or identify themselves (secretly or openly) as information professionals, is another matter.

A new entrant to the profession is less likely than otherwise to be joining something called a library or resembling the traditional idea of one. There remain a few large 24-hour or seven-day news research or cataloguing units, but the large teams of researchers who constituted the bulk of media librarians in the 1980s and 1990s are the exception rather than the rule in the 21st century. More often, teams of two or three professionals work in offices which may even be collocated with those of their customers. There are very few clerical positions available in any library and those that exist tend to be limited to stock retrieval in audiovisual collections and newspaper data archiving. In both cases there are increasingly fewer positions as demand is expected to shrink either through outsourcing or automation, or because of end-user online access to media assets. This means that most people start their media library careers carrying out professional jobs.

Because teams are smaller, there are fewer opportunities for promotion by the traditional route of managing staff. However, the purchasing and implementation of new technology gives rise to a significant number of project-related jobs (although in many cases the information unit's contributions will be given by existing staff in addition to their ordinary jobs). As previously mentioned, many information professionals now also move sideways to jobs on the production or journalistic side of the organization, something which was previously very rare. In production areas, there may be more upward mobility and the jobs are often better paid and of higher status (without requiring a greater degree of skill). There is, however, anecdotal evidence that information staff may have more job security and better working hours than those working in newsrooms and production offices.

Salaries

Compared with many workplace libraries, the salary differential between media librarians and their users is less marked than, for example, in the legal and business sector. However, media librarians are in general paid less than information professionals working in legal or financial services companies or even for government departments. Although organizations'

pay policies vary, an entry level salary is likely to be similar to that of an academic library. Unlike academic libraries, the absence of specialist posts means earning potential is not as high. However, a media librarian is likely to earn more than their equivalents in art, museum and learned society libraries and, in many cases, than those in public libraries.

Training

Because of the lack of professional recognition within media organizations, chartership and, in some organizations, even library qualifications are unnecessary. However, a library and information studies course is likely to give potential employees the best preparation for professional work in media libraries. In the UK there is only one course, at City University, which has a specific option in media librarianship. However, most recognized information courses will offer compulsory or optional modules that are useful.

A good grounding in research techniques, online and field searching and different information sources is essential for any information or archive research position. It is also important to demonstrate an ability to judge the authoritativeness of a particular source. Those working with audiovisual material often need cataloguing skills (although the principles are more important than any particular cataloguing system) and it will be particularly useful if the course covers the cataloguing of non-traditional materials. A film archiving course may be as appropriate as a librarianship degree for these positions. Trends change quickly in the information world. At the time of writing, any course that offers introductions to web design, information architecture or media asset management would make a candidate highly employable by media libraries. But it is worth remembering that any proprietary software used at university is likely to be very different by the time a student is employed to carry out this kind of work. Media librarians also need to have a good knowledge of current affairs and, increasingly, the world of showbiz and celebrities. In fact, an interest in these areas is a prerequisite for working in the sector and candidates are likely to be tested on this in job interviews.

Once in the workplace, media librarians often have few opportunities for training, as budgets are frequently tight and there are few opportunities to be released to attend courses. However, media librarians need to be aware of changes both in the profession and in the needs of the organization and wider industry, to constantly refresh and build on their skills to adapt to

the future needs of their employers (and those of future employers). Current skills and knowledge in demand include training end-users, writing for the web, following developments in media asset management, knowledge of copyright, and managing and negotiating contracts. Where in-house training is unavailable, professional associations and publications can fill the gap.

Professional associations

The largest organization devoted to media librarianship is the News Division (www.ibiblio.org/slanews) of the US-based (but internationally focussed) SLA (Special Libraries Association), which represents librarians in the workplace sector (not working for public or academic libraries). SLA is a large and influential organization, which holds a highly regarded conference in the USA and carries out many other networking and information-sharing activities. Its News Division is considered to be among the more lively sections and without a doubt represents the world's largest body of media librarians (albeit with a slant towards hard news rather than the looser definition of media librarians). For those unable to pay SLA subscriptions, it is free to join the busy and informative News Division e-mail discussion list, NewsLib (<http://parklibrary.jomc.unc.edu/newsliblyris.html>), and they also have a blog (<http://newslib.blogspot.com>). In the UK, AUKML (the Association of UK Media Librarians, of which the current author is ex-chair; www.aukml.org.uk) is a small, independent voluntary professional association with no corporate membership, but a range of professional activities available free to members. Like the News Division, AUKML publishes a newsletter and runs an e-mail discussion group.

As an alternative to specialized media librarian groups, or in countries where one does not exist, networking opportunities should be available through organizations representing the special or workplace sector of the information profession (the function performed by SLA in the USA). In the UK the main organization is the Commercial, Legal and Scientific Group (CLSG; www.cilip.org.uk/specialinterestgroups/bysubject/iclg), one of the largest groups of the UK lead industry body, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). CLSG organizes a range of events aimed broadly at those carrying out information work in a business or commercial environment and has the financial and institutional backing of a fully staffed chartered association. It is possible to join CLSG without joining CILIP.

Other relevant associations are cross-sectoral organizations representing stills and audiovisual collections and their researchers. In the UK, these are FOCAL (www.focalint.org), which represents footage libraries and film researchers (especially those working freelance) and has an international presence, the Picture Research Association (PRA; www.picture-research.org.uk) and BAPLA, the British Association for Libraries and Pictures Agencies (www.bapla.org.uk). In the USA, the lead body is the Association of Moving Image Archivists (www.amianet.org). There are also two important international organizations, the International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF; www.fiafnet.org) and the International Federation of Television Archives (FIAT; www.fiatifta.org). These organizations hold events attended by representatives of the world's major audiovisual collections in order to set policy and discuss new developments.

Less formal networking and information-sharing activities also take place in the media library world. There are a range of blogs aimed at keeping the profession up to date, with search resources (such as Gary Price's ResourceShelf, www.resourceshelf.com) or with general issues of interests like the NewsLib blog and the Gaol House Blog (<http://gaolhouseblog.blogspot.com>). The largest single area of social networking in the media library world is the NewsLib discussion list. On this busy list research questions, matters of policy, new technology, and sources and items of general interest to those working in the sector are discussed; although it is a US-based organization, membership is international.

Literature

There has been very little formal publication on the subject of media librarianship since Paula Hane's *Super Searchers in the News* (Hane, 2000) rounded up the essential online resources used by news researchers. The last general guide in English was respected US library academic Barbara Semonche's *News Media Libraries* in 1993 (Semonche, 1993). In 2006 the author collaborated on the media libraries chapter of the latest edition of the *Survey of British Library and Information Work* (Bowman, 2007). There has been more writing in professional journals, including not only association newsletters such as *Deadline* and *News Library News* but also articles in broader industry publications such as *Library + Information Update*, *Library Journal*, *American Libraries* and *Library and Information Science Research*. However, the greatest wealth of writing, and the most up-to-date survey of

the issues at the heart of the profession, are to be found in the archives of the News Lib e-mail discussion list.

Policy for media libraries

Workplace libraries are subject to the whims and stresses of their parent organization and industry sector. It can therefore be difficult for them to formulate a policy which can be carried across different units within the sector. Attempts have been made: former AUKML chair Helen Martin has written about the early days of the Association, circa 1986, when the group acted as a think tank composed of information managers who could return directly to their library and implement policy decided at a committee meeting (Martin, 2004). It is far harder to achieve this against a background of organizational change and strictures. Moreover, the notion of what a 'media library' is has changed beyond recognition since those days. There is evidence that the SLA News Division has more success at laying down policy at the annual SLA conference (www.ibiblio.org/slanews/conferences).

However, media librarians at all levels implement policy every working day. Questions like 'What resource should I buy?', 'Shall I let this user borrow this item?', 'Is it ethical for me to answer that question?' or 'How can I describe this footage?' set policy and precedent every day. That they do not do it in a vacuum is a tribute to the professional networks, formal and informal, which connect the profession. Similar to most in the profession, media librarians like to share experiences and offer advice to their peers. It is the aim of this book to condense and synthesize some of this invaluable knowledge so that today's media librarians are equipped to face the issues that affect them every day at work.

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