

## Shaping Priorities for the Future of Library System

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In the Summer of 2005, Illinois Library Systems Directors decided to survey librarians of all types and service levels to better understand the issues that impact their working lives. A survey was designed and administered on the late summer/early fall to 1775 Illinois librarians.

### *Technology and the Future of Libraries*

Generally, awareness of technology was high. Excluding podcasting and RSS, all librarians that responded to the survey reported an awareness of technologies such as blogging, chat email, web conferencing, online interactive tutorials, instant messaging, intranets, and text messaging from cell phones and PDA's.

Though awareness was high, application of these technologies was not widely reported. Only emailing was in wide use amongst the majority of respondents (89%). Use of intranets followed at 40% of the respondents using the technology. However, many librarians agreed that online interactive tutorials had the most potential value for their library.

Free internet search engines, such as Google, were seen as the strongest competitor (56% of respondents) as providers of information resources and services. Other information providers such as video stores, internet search engines that charge for document retrieval (such as Google Scholar and Northern Lights), online DVD rental (Netflix.com), and coffee shops were not seen as competitors while traditional bookstores, online bookstores and online discount bookstores were seen as minor competitors.

### *Social Change and the Future of Libraries*

In addition to technology issues, the survey also gathered responses about the changing social climate that librarians must work in and adapt to. Variables examined included demographic, government/political, and economic trends.

In the demographic category, the librarians who responded to the survey reported that they would make minor adjustments for the graying of America, rural-urban population shifts, increasing ethnic/language diversity, increasing home schooling, increasing affluence for the top 20% of households and increasing poverty for the bottom 20% of households. However, 60% reported that they would make no adjustments for the increasing rate of incarceration.

In the government/political trends, a majority of respondents see opposition to tax increases as an area of significant adjustment. Educational standards/No Child Left Behind, intellectual property conflicts, privacy/intellectual freedom policies/Patriot Act, and security concerns in public places all warranted minor adjustments. The respondents were fairly evenly split on how they would adapt to the increasing use of biometrics. 28% reported a significant adjustment, 22% reported a minor adjustment, 29% reported no adjustment, and 21% reported that they did not know.

### *Library Systems and the Future of Libraries*

The final area that respondents were surveyed about was the role Library Systems and the services that they provide.

Of the consulting services currently offered by Library Systems, respondents reported that they had used the following services: training, collection development, long-range/strategic planning, public relations/marketing, technical/automation, cataloging, youth services, public libraries, and library administration. 29% reported that legal consulting and 34% reported that building consulting were not applicable to their library. 38% reported that they were unsure of how diversity consulting could be used in their libraries.

The services currently offered by Library Systems are valued highly by the majority of respondents. The services most highly valued were continuing professional education (76%), opportunities for local/personal networking (59%), and technical support (59%). Job search services (32%) and advocacy (40%) were also highly valued.

Also valued highly was the technology services offered by Library Systems. These services include integrated library systems/LLSAP, library automation consulting, basic technology training, and shared online catalogs.

The cooperative programs most highly valued by respondents were interlibrary loan/resource sharing (89%) and delivery (82%). 43% did not think an insurance program was applicable to their library.

In all categories surveyed, no more than 3% of the respondents wanted to see Library Systems do less of what they currently provide.

### *Overall*

One of the most significant findings from this survey was that respondents reported a desire to make adjustments in their service for the changing ethnic make-up of their patrons (Question 11), but they were unsure of the role that Library System consultants would play in this (Question 16).