

## **Make librarians part of the newsroom team**

**By Andrea Nemetz**

There's a library at the newspaper where I work as a reporter, a daily with a circulation of about 120,000 serving not only the city of Halifax, but the province of Nova Scotia.

Many of the reporters haven't visited the library since 1998, the year in which our stories began to be archived online. Now, if we're looking for the facts of a court case, background data on an entertainment or sports personality, or the history of a particularly troublesome municipal development issue, we can enter a name, a phrase or the reporter's byline into the archives' search box on our desktop computer and the relevant information is available at our fingertips nearly instantaneously. The decline in use of the library's extensive hard copy filing system actually began before the Web archiving started. Between 1992 and 1997 news stories were archived on CD-ROM and were available (and still are) at a special (though now rarely used) terminal within the newsroom.

I occasionally get sent by the editors to the quiet confines of the library – separated physically from the bright, bustling newsroom by a long, dark hall – most often to look for hard copies of photographs of local and national celebrities archived alphabetically in vertical files. I remember searching for photographs of Queen Elizabeth II for a retrospective on the 50<sup>th</sup> year of her reign, pictures of Cape Breton fiddler Ashley MacIsaac as a boy at the beginning of his career, as well as shots of entertainers who had performed in plays, films or jazz festivals in days gone by. Even this is happening less often as more and more of our interview subjects have access to digital cameras and computers and can send us current or historical photographs electronically.

Newspaper librarians need to remind reporters that they are not obsolete, that they cannot be replaced by the Internet and that they are a valuable resource, not just for locating past stories or photos, but for finding information for current projects, information reporters might not retrieve themselves or even think to look for.

Before I entered the Masters of Library and Information Science program at Dalhousie University, I believed, like many other people (not just reporters) that anything I needed could be found on the Web. Sure, Google might retrieve 25,000 hits on a given subject and many of those might bear no relevance to the topic I was actually researching, but I was convinced, with perseverance, I could find what I was looking for.

Wrong.

While researching a presentation for my Resources For Business Intelligence course, I came across an April 2002 paper entitled "Free, Fee-Based and Value-Added Information Services," prepared for Factiva with contributions from Mary Ellen Bates and edited by Donna Andersen, which says "of surveyed knowledge workers, 62 per cent believe anything is available on the Web (Outsell, Super I-AIM study). But new research shows more than two-thirds of publications used most often by knowledge workers either do not have Web sites or do not make their material available on the Web for free."<sup>1</sup>

While our reporters don't have access to any outside databases, a librarian could make the case to the company to purchase an aggregator like Factiva, LexisNexis or Dialog Profound to provide reporters with information they can't find for free on the Web. The librarian could also take a key role in educating reporters on the use of this type of product and situations in which it might be helpful. A librarian could point reporters to a fee-based government source like E-Stat (from Statistics Canada) and guide them through research which could be used in a variety of stories from crime to lifestyles features. The information could also be used for internal marketing purposes, such as

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<sup>1</sup> Andersen, Donna, editor. Bates, Mary Ellen, contributor (April 2002). Free, Fee-Based and Value-Added Information Services. The Factiva 2002 White Paper Series. p. 1

discovering the number of Nova Scotians who have access to the Web (and who might read our product online), how frequently these citizens turn to the Web and for what purpose. Computer Assisted Reporting (CAR) workshops are offered at most journalism conferences. A librarian could deliver such presentations in house.

Most reporters, I suspect, will continue to want to do their own research as it is their name on the story and they will be held accountable for the reliability of any information they include. Reporters aren't alone in this desire to perform their own research. In the 2002 Factiva report, researchers conclude "68 per cent of knowledge workers prefer to look for the information they need themselves."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the key is to make librarians part of the newsroom both physically and as an integral resource to daily operations.

Angela Edmunds and Anne Morris, writing in an article entitled "The problem of information overload in business organisations" in a 2000 issue of *International Journal of Information Management* discuss Helen Butcher's suggestion that in the business world an information worker could be part of each team in an organization rather than part of a separate intelligence unit. Butcher, according to Edmunds and Morris, found that "managers often prefer to rely on verbal information and may also be wary of using information services if they believe this will just add to their information overload but if such a person were part of their team, there would be fewer barriers, and in addition, the information specialist would have a greater knowledge of the team's information needs."<sup>3</sup>

We reporters are already relying greatly on our colleagues for information. Questions of spelling, grammar, geography and history are frequently bandied around the newsroom as reporters seek information from their fellow writers and editors. By adding a trusted librarian/information professional to our immediate midst, the organization can gain a wealth of knowledge from a skilled resource person to put out a better product, more efficiently to the benefit of the readers and the newspaper itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Andersen, Donna, editor. Bates, Mary Ellen, contributor (April 2002). Free, Fee-Based and Value-Added Information Services. The Factiva 2002 White Paper Series. p. 5

<sup>3</sup> Edmunds, Angela. Morris Anne (2000). The problem of information overload in business organizations: a review of the literature by Angela Edmunds and Anne Morris. International Journal of Information Management 20 p. 26