SKILLS FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS WORKING IN BORDERLESS LIBRARY

Nirmal Ranjan Mazumdar

Abstract

Borderless library is a technologically empowered web-based library, which provides services to its user throughout computer networks. As the changes occurred in library environment, the library and information science professionals should be acquaintance with different skills. This paper tries to reflect some skills required for the library and information professionals working at IT environment and highlights on different programmes to enhance these skills among the professionals.

Keywords : Borderless Libraries, Cyber Slackers, Skill Enhancement Programmes

1. Introduction

The vast increasing rates as well as maximum need for the speedy access of latest information in the present day-to-day context, the libraries are now becoming an inseparable and integral part of an information-based society. Because of the increasing awareness among the users, availability of new resources and advanced application of information communication technology, the library is changing its traditional concept rapidly. Library and information centers are now becoming a global information hub, available and accessible to the users, where the users have the most opportunity to retrieve and access their required information covering all disciplines all over the world with a single mouse click on the computer monitor. The users can enter in and can access this type of library 24 hours round the year sitting at the most remote places too. Thus library is going to be wall less or borderless library.

2. Borderless Library

Availability of e- resources and using of new electronic storage mediums like CD ROM, DVD and Floppy Disc etc. are replacing books and journals in paper form day by day. Most of the reference books like encyclopedias, dictionaries directories, handbooks etc. are available in electronic form both in on line as well as online version. Similarly, abstracting and indexing services like Chemical Abstract, MEDLINE etc. are now available in electronic form. This aggressive contribution of science and technology has brought tremendous changes in the concept of traditional library as well as on its services. Libraries are first computerizes and then they are automated. After that, library collections are digitized and gradually the libraries become digital libraries. Now the digital libraries are turning towards virtual libraries as well as borderless libraries.

Borderless library is a web-based library where all documents and information sources are available in digital form and can be searched from any where at any time. This type of library has no physical wall and border; they just exist in web *dunia* where users can enter into the library just with their own user ID and password. As a result of the ongoing research and development on the application of science and technology, the library once which was the repository of books and manuscripts only for the ruler & scholar class of the society are now turned to the people's information center. Borderless library is now becoming the center for infotainment for the mass people with its diversified collection available in text, audio, video, image and multimedia form. Briefly, a borderless library is a digital library, which is accessible and available to the user community through web more or less in virtual reality environment. This library, simply looks like a web page containing a series of hyperlink with different web resource, facilitates the users with online searching and accessing of different full text, bibliographic and numeric information. But the Internet itself is not the borderless library; it is an important part of the library. Internet provides only connection to different web-based information databases; on the other hand, the borderless library must have its own collection of information resources along with the connection to different web resources.

3. Library Professional in Electronic Library Environment

The rapid development of information technology and communication system has brought a revolutionary change in the organization and management of information. In present electronic information age, where information is treated as an economic resource, a marketable commodity and as a social wealth, the librarians are to play an active and important role in the process of information communication system. The libraries are facing new challenges, new competitors, new demands, new expectations and a variety of information services from users. They are now to be more acquainted with the skill of handling new technologies related to collection, processing and dissemination of information. For working in the borderless digital library environment, besides gaining the professional knowledge in library and information science (LIS), the library professionals should have the knowledge of information technology and its application in library operations and services, both in theoretical as well as practical level. With the changing role and responsibility of the librarians their professional identity is also changed, they are now known as Information Officer, Information Broker, Cybernarian etc.

In the borderless library, a library professional is desired to be that of a continuous learner, an alert user and an expert consultant.
As the technological revolution has given raise to some innovation and innovative ideas including artificial intelligence, bar code technology, speech synthesis, neural network, digital signature,

etc. the library professional must become a continuous learner. He must be keep him up to date with the latest technological changes in general and its application in library operation in particular.

In a digital web environment, the librarian gets the opportunity to search different web sites, e-journals etc as well as to share ideas among the same professionals' groups using e- mails, audio/ video conferences etc. Moreover, he must be an alert user of newly developed hardware as well as software required for a web-based library.

Besides, the library professional must be an expert consultant too. Because of the ever-changing information technology environment, the library professional should catch up and stay with contemporary state of art of information technology. Selection of a new aspect of technology and its application to the library operation involves a huge expenditure. So he must consult with other professionals for getting and giving better suggestions before selecting a particular technological system for the library. Moreover, in the borderless library, the librarian is to offer continuous consultancy services to its users throughout the web.

4. Skill for the Library Professional

Skill is an ability or proficiency in execution or performance, which is required for a person to plan and execute an action designed to achieve some goals or accomplish a particular task. A skilled person has the ability to perform any task successfully. He can face the challenges occurs in a particular profession because of the social, economic, education and technological changes. Thus in order to cope up with the ever-changing library and information science profession, the library professional must be a skilled professional. As the borderless library is fully a web-based digital library, so the library professional should be more acquainted with technological skill and so this skill should be enhanced among the working professionals.

4.1. Technological Skills

Technological skills mean those skills which are required to handle information technology and its other related fields such as computer operation, telecommunication medias, creation of online database, designing of websites, searching information from internet etc. As the borderless libraries are nothing but the advanced application of information technology on the library, so the library professional should have to familiar with the skills to handle IT and its application in the library environment in the relevant context.

Technological skills needed for a library professional can be discussed as follows:

4.1.1. Computer and Information Technological Tools using Skill

The librarian in the cyber world must have the skill of using computer and other information technological tools properly. Because quality of the library services is dependant on the quality of the librarian's performance. Skill of computer operation, application of bar code technology, creation of database and its up dating, designing and updating of web pages etc are required for the web-based librarians.

4.1.2. Skill of using Internet and Computer Communication Networks

Skills of handling different computer communication networking architectures and systems i.e. LAN, MAN, and WAN as well as using of internet and other library related networks like INFLIBNET, CALIBNET, DELNET etc are required for a modern library professional working in IT environment to tackle the problems and challenges raised in building and maintaining a digital web-based library. Speedy resource sharing and dissemination of information is possible only with the proper computer networking skills. Moreover, the library and information professionals should have the knowledge of network protocols like TCP/IP, UDP, SMTP, HTTP, FTP etc.

4.1.3. Information Retrieval Skill

As the web-based libraries are the database of databases, the librarian should have the professional technological skills of comprehensive retrieval of right information from a particular database in a logical and analytical manner and to provide it to its users at the right time. The librarians should be in a position to help its diversified user community by providing retrospective searches, ready reference services, bibliographic services, selective dissemination of information services etc.

Besides these technological skills, the library professionals should have the some other basic skills. The following skills should be enhanced for the library professionals:

4.2. Traditional/Basic Skill

Traditional skill includes those basic skills, which are necessary for running and operating a general traditional library. Skill for classification and cataloging of documents, method of indexing and abstracting etc. are also required for the librarian working in the web environment. With these skills, the librarian can manage the information in proper way and provide them to the users in a right way.

4.3. Managerial Skill

As the librarians are the manager of a library and information centre, they should have some basic managerial skills for managing the different sections like Finance, Human Resource etc. They should have to apply some of these managerial skills in planning, decision-making, motivating etc. Time management skill is one of the important managerial skills required for a successful librarian.

Total Quality Management (TQM) of library and information center is mostly reliant on the managerial skill of the librarians.

4.4. Communication Skill: The library and information professionals act as the mediator between the information users/ seekers and the information resources or information providers. In the borderless digital library environment, librarianship is now rightly hauled as public relationship. Therefore proper communication skill is also important for the library and information professionals. They should be acquainted with the skill of technical communication writing, as they should have to deal with various groups of people through Fax, E-Mail, Bulletin Board, Web Sites, Blogs etc.

4.5. Preservation Skill: As like traditional library in digital library environment, also the librarian should have the preservation skill for the E-Resources. In the borderless E-Library though all the documents as are in the digital form, but they are not fully secured. Different computer virus can attack the digital library databases and affect them very badly. The hacker can also hack the borderless digital library with their dangerous intelligent skills. Therefore, the library professional should have the knowledge of cryptography, firewall, and different anti-virus software for prevention and preservation of E-Resources.

5. Skill Enhancement of Library Professional:

With the above-mentioned skills, a librarian in a web-based library can make a library function in a proper way. Therefore, proper emphasis should be given on the enhancement of the required skills of the library and information professionals. For the skill development among the human resources, the training can be directed in two levels.

5.1 Basic Level: In this level, importance is given in developing necessary professional skills require for a library professionals for giving services to each users by using different Information Technology tools.

5.2 Advanced Level: In Advanced level training, areas like designing and architecture of computer networks system, developing web pages and databases as well as developing application-programming packages, troubleshooting of IT related tools etc. are included.

The following steps can be adopted for the skill enhancement of library professional in a right track.

i.   Library science school should introduce skill-based curriculum providing more provision of specialization.

ii. Timely updating the syllabus and the facility of well-equipped computer laboratory to cope up with the frequently changed technological environment are highly necessary.

iii Short term courses for skill enhancement of library worker should be arranged b y d i f f e r e n t professional associations & universities.

iv Different seminars, workshops, conferences etc. should be organized by different professional organization and opportunity should be made for the professionals in participating in such seminars, workshops etc.

v The professionals should be highly encouraged in developing their professional skills by participating in advanced studies, research programmes etc.

vi Provision should be made for the library personnel to interact with the different professionals and experts who are working in such developed digitalborderless libraries.

5.1. Skill Enhancement at Online Environment

Online learning or e- training is or may become an attractive and fruitful way for the skill enhancement of the staff. In the web based library environment the library employees can learn/ enhance various skills themselves by taking advantages of online training staying at their working place. In the e-training or online training process, the contents of training and development programmes are placed on the internet and intranet as well as extranet and the library professionals can go through these contents for their necessary skill developments. In a web-based environment, the skilled manpower may become cyber slacker, who generally used to surf the net, write e-mail or indulge in other internet related activities during their duty hours which are not related to their jobs. The library personnel should not be a cyber- slacker and they should maintain their duties as well as self-development activities simultaneously.

5.2. Technologically Skilled Manpower in India: its Present Status

In the last few years IT and IT enabled service sector has moved up India to a knowledge hub of the entire world. Now 5.2% of the country's GDP comes from export of IT and its related services. It becomes a job opportunity field for the unemployed educated youth of India. Though India is in the burning problems of unemployment, but most of the IT sectors are facing a shortage of proper skilled manpower which can crippled its economic growth. Every year three Lakhs engineering graduates and approximately two million graduates pass out of Colleges. But unfortunately only 10-15% are suitable for getting job in the IT related field with their technological skills and others are to be retrained for that.

As India is a young generation country with 50% of its population age of 25 years and below, it can become a hub of skill professionals for the IT based sectors of its own as well as for other developed countries.

For upgrading and generating technologically skilled manpower, NIIT has taken initiative in India. It has planed to start some District Learning Centers (DLC), which will provide training to the youth of the small town and villages for making them skilled manpower. From August, 2007 NIIT has already started its first DLC at Chhindwara district in Madhya Pradesh which cover 200 students each year and they will be empowered with IT and communication skill as well.

5.3.Technological Skill Enhancement Programmes for the Library and Information Science Professionals in India and Assam: some examples

Besides the Department of Library & Information Science of different universities and Institutions, some other organizations have also been working for the skill enhancement of library professionals in India as well as in Assam.

INFLIBNET also regularly organizes SOUL Training Programme & ILMS Training Programme for the working library professional, for making them technologically skilled so that they can use the soul package in their respective libraries in a proper way and face no problems. PLANNER is another important activity of INFLIBNET to make the library professional of NE India conscious about the advance application of technology in the library automation and networking. This type of seminar can play a principal role in promoting skilled manpower in LIS sector. PLANNER 2007 is going to be held at Gauhati University on coming 7-8 December.

From last few years, Central Reference Library, Kolkata has been organizing an Apprenticeship programmes for the library and information science students. In this one-month duration training programme a group of LIS students, each batch generally containing five students representing from different India universities, are practically trained to work in a real library environment and to use software packages i.e. LIBSYS, GIST etc. This type of 'earn & learn' training is very beneficial both for the students and the Library & Information Science profession itself.

Indian Association for Special Libraries & Information Centers (IASLIC) is also working for improving the technical efficiency of the library and information professionals.

NISCAIR organizes different IT related short-term courses for enhancing skills among the professionals whole the year.

NISSAT encourages and supports variety of skill development programmes for the library and information professionals on CDS/ISIS, WINISIS, TQM, Internet and web design etc.

DESIDOC and NASSDOC, two national documentation centers also arrange different short-term training programmes for the professionals to acquaint them with the latest advancement in information & communication technology and its application to the library & information centers.

In the month of November in 2006, NIRD organized a six-day workshop on the topic 'Information resource management using IT' for the library professional at NIRD, NE Regional Centre in Guwahati and practically trained them how to use the GREENSTONE and KOHA software packages in the library housekeeping operations. They supplied these software packages free of cost to the participants to motivate them towards using this technology in their libraries.

From 21 November 2007 Media Trust of Assam in collaboration with National Library of India and RRRLF, Kolkata will organize a four-day national workshop-cum-training programme on preservation and digital conservation methods of the printed documents and manuscripts for the library professionals and the archivists.

These types of practical-oriented skill enhancement programmes are very necessary and prolific for the library staffs, which can introduce them with advanced technology and refresh and retrained them with various technological skills.

6. Conclusion

However, a borderless library is becoming available to the users community at their doorstep but this beneficial technological application in a library institution will be fully successful only when there is a close co- ordination between the IT and the human resource. Because it is mandatory for any institution that before implementation of any information technology it should be ensured that, the employees possess the required skills and competence. In the digital borderless library environment, the LIS professionals have to face different kinds of tuff challenges; so there is the maximum need of the skill enhancement programmes for the library staff. Besides academic institutions, other organisations may also help in enhancing the skills of the library professionals. Along with the potential working skills, the library professionals should also have the positive attitude to work for the benefit of institutions for achieving its goals. As the National Knowledge Commission (NKC), under the chairmanship of San Pitroda has stated that for establishing a knowledge dependable society, importance should be given in greater participation and more access to knowledge across all sector of the society. The borderless library with a group of skilled manpower can become a global information hub and can help in fulfilling the objectives of the NKC in reality.

References

[1] DAS, H.N. "Knowledge economy for India". *Assam Tribune.* Vol.69(279), 2007(13 Oct).pp6.
[2] DHAWAN, S.M. "Role of libraries in the emerging electronic information era". In: *Library and*

information studies in cyber age; essays in honour of Prof. JL Sardana. Edited by S.M. Dhawan. Delhi: Author Press, 2004, pp. 500-510.

[3] GUPTA, Sangita. "Role of virtual institutions and libraries in distance education". *ILA Bulletin.* Vol.38 (3), 2002, pp. 74-80.

[4] JYOTHI, P and VENKATESH, D.N. "Human resource management". New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2007.

[5] PAWAR, Rajendra S. "Educate the masses". *Times of India.* [Guwahati edition] .Vol.8 (4), 2007 (9 Oct),   pp.5.

[6] RAJYALAKSHMI, D. "Information professionals' knowledge and skills, for information management". *ILA Bulletin.* Vol. 40(3), 2004, pp. 5-12.

[7] RAMAMURTHY, C.R. "Globalisation and library information networking". Delhi: Author Press, 2004.

[8] RAWATANI, M.R. and YUSUF, Mohammad . "Professional manpower needs for libraries with special reference to skills". *ILA Bulletin.* Vol.38 (3), 2002, pp.81-83.

[9] SEETHARAMAN, S and VENKATESWARA, Prasad B. "Human resource management". Chennai : Scitech Publication, 2007.

[10] SINGH, Rajesh and SINGH, Rajesh Kumar. "Competencies and skills for university library and information professionals in 21st century". *Herald of Library Science.* Vol. 42(3-4), 2003, pp. 185-191.

ABOUT AUTHOR

Mr. Nirmal Ranjan Mazumdar has completed the MLISc Degree from DLISc, Gauhati University. He is now working as Assistant Librarian at GIMT, Guwahati. His two papers have already been published in national seminar proceedings**.** He is a trainee of CRL, Kolkata.
E-mail:nrmazumdar@yahoo.com