

Soft Skilled Library Professionals

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Abstract

The internet has changed the role of librarians and other library professionals from their traditional concept to a modern concept. In this changing atmosphere the role of library professionals became a challenging one and it requires multi disciplinary skills. Now the library professionals must have the ability to use electronic resources to access to the right information in the right time, in right way.

Key words: Soft Skills, Library Professionals, Information Retrieval Skills

Introduction

As we are living in an information based society the libraries are getting vital importance in our day to day life. The virtual library environment encompasses the concept of digital library but is more than a collection of digitized resources. The virtual library provides access to an integrated collection of print, electronic and multimedia resources delivered seamlessly and transparently to users regardless of their physical location. (Liz Burke, 2001)

With the introduction of electronic resources the libraries are becoming information centers where information is available and accessible to the users irrespective of their time and place. In this changing scenario the library professionals should be well equipped to deliver information at its best form. In other words information dissemination should be new in method, new in style and new in fervor. But many of our library professionals are non familiar to the modern technologies of digital libraries and they are unaware of the techniques necessary to the new forms of information resources and services.

According to Young (1998), the library professionals are not mere custodians of some print or non print information resources but they are 'knowledge navigators'. In this virtual library environment the library professionals need more competency than ever before. Library personals of all levels, from top to toe, have the equal responsibility to provide proper information in proper time in proper way. So they need adequate soft skills.

1. Information Technology Skills

Without having enough Information Technology skills the library personals cannot satisfy the information needs of modern society. They have to get thorough training in handling the new technologies related to collection, processing and dissemination of information. They should be taught of the different operating systems, Database Management Systems (DBMS), various software, data and file management process, word processing, DTP, generating reports etc. Retrieval of data from the DBMS needs expertise. Unless the library professionals have proper knowledge in handling DBMS the information seekers could not reach to the data he needed.

Software knowledge is also essential to the library personals because acquisition and dissemination process in the automated libraries are running on well disciplined softwares.

2. Skills required for applying Information Technology in Library Management

Since the library professionals are considered as expert information consultants, they must keep themselves updated with the latest technological developments in the library operations. Special skills are essential for query interpretation on the basis of information technology.

2.1 Internet Skills

Academic community and the public use internet to communicate with each other to exchange information for education, research, business, economics, and entertainments. Unless the library professionals have enough internet skills information seekers will be dissatisfied. The internet has provided library with a user base and an information resource pool that is potentially worldwide. Library professionals must understand how to position their institution to take advantage of this global networking system. Who is a successful library professional? The answer will be the one who can leverage the possibilities of the extensive reach of the internet to the mission of a library. The library professionals should have awareness of the network protocols like TCP/IP, UDP, SMTP, HTTP, FTP etc.

2.2 Web Skills

According to Schuyler (1999) today's library personals should have significant web skills for creating web pages. McMillian (1999) introduced a new manifesto for the library professionals for the future library: "We have new roles to fill. While the format of our resources may change, while access methods to information may change, while styles of services may change the vision of high quality, service oriented information centers still fits the library's mission. Our library user community will be served better if we incorporate these technologies into the digital library". Electronic publishing, electronic commerce, electronic marketing etc are the major tasks to be rendered by academic libraries in this electronic era. Here the library professionals without proper web skills will make the libraries irrelevant.

2.3 Knowledge of data files.

Document management and management of archives need special attention in this information age. Preservation and archiving of data in electronic format is not only the necessity of the present age but also the duty of this era. So the library professionals should have both administrative skills and knowledge of data files. Building and maintaining computer networks helps the document management process. So special skills are required to library professionals in networking of computers.

2.4 Information Retrieval Skills

Retrieving the right information from the database in a logical and analytical manner is a major task of the library professionals in this electronic environment. So they should have professional knowledge in the area of retrospective searches, ready reference services, bibliographical services and dissemination of information services. As far as library is considered as information center, the duties like collection and organization of data in electronic form, indexing techniques, searching techniques, updation techniques, online searches etc. need information retrieval skills..

2.5 Communication Skills

The term communication is becoming very important to the modern society. We know that the library professionals are performing as mediators between information seekers and information providers. Without proper communication skills exchange of information will not be effective. In this electronic era chatting and e-mailing are the major communication methods, and the library professionals must have sound knowledge and training in both these methods.

2.6 Preservation Skills

We have heard of information hacking. Data stored in different databases can be hacked and damaged by different hackers. So the library professionals should have training in preserving databases. Different computer viruses can harm the library databases and it may cause the damage of much vital information. So the library professionals should be well experienced in the field of cryptography, antivirus technology and fire wall technology.

Conclusion.

Using the Information Technology applications in libraries the soft skilled library professionals can make use of the library wealth at its fullness to the users. Today's library professionals have to face a number of challenges for bringing out library as the centre of education, banking and economics. So it is the first and the foremost duty of the library management to equip their professionals to achieve high quality soft skills required to make the library relevant.

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