Quickies for the 21st Century Librarian

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Abstract
The paper focused on skills of the librarian in the twenty first century; how librarians can be hired quickly in the technology-driven era. The role of the librarians as changing from traditional roles to new roles, adopting the new technologies was addressed. The challenges facing librarians of today in adopting the new technology skills were also dealt with and recommendations to help tackle these challenges were made.

Introduction
In education, librarians have always played key roles. The librarian has always served as an information organizer in the traditional library environment. The librarian builds the library collections, gives library orientation to new library users, and acquires relevant information resources for the user. A librarian’s role has in fact, traditionally been more of the builder of library collections and maintainer of library collections. These collections could come in different formats; print and non-print media, audiovisual and electronic materials.

Today in the digital age, librarians can no longer be simply information providers or the ‘keepers of knowledge’. The changes in technology using electronically stored and retrieved information has changed the way patrons and students are able to access, retrieve and use information. Nofsinger (2003) stated that ‘striving to meet the rapidly changing needs of society and higher education, librarians must continue to redefine their roles and emphasize new functions and services’.

Traditionally, a librarian is known as a person located in the library building carrying out the tasks like acquiring, organizing, preserving the printed documents besides helping the readers in locating the information needed by them. In the last decades of the twentieth century this picture has rapidly changed under the influence of advances in computer and communication fields. The paper collections have given place to networked, computer resident, user searchable collections like bibliographic databases, Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) obliterating the need for the user to visit the library building (Rao and Babu, 2001). The 21st century skills for librarians are skills librarians need to acquire in order to fit into the demands of the 21st century technological developments. Therefore, librarians need to be trained, and or, acquire skills which will enable them offer better services in the 21st century.
Training of the librarian for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century must be mainly in the mode of a digital librarian as the library of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century has been appropriately described as a digital library. In a bid to be relevant in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century where there exists a lot of competition among workers, a librarian should be able to take up the great challenge of imbibing some roles. These are quick roles, as the term ‘quickie’ describes. Quickie is a term used for short, fast actions. The Online Macmillan Dictionary Thesaurus defines quickie as something that you do or make quickly. In terms of measure, \textit{quickies} are actions that are intended to achieve or deal with something (www.macmillandictionary.com). Hence, it is expected that librarians should take quick actions in imbibing the following roles in order to be relevant in the 21\textsuperscript{st} century where new things are evolving.

\textbf{Roles of the Librarian in the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century}

There are some responsibilities expected of the librarian of today which have been highlighted by some authors.

Zhou (2005) describes the responsibilities of a digital librarian:

- Select, acquire, preserve, organize and manage digital collection;
- Design the technical architecture of digital library;
- Plan, implement, and support digital services such as information navigation, consultation and transmit services;
- Establish friendly user interface over network;
- Set up relative standards and policies for the digital library;
- Design, maintain and transmit add-valued information products;
- Protect digital intellectual property in network environment; and
- Insure information security.

As an addition to the skills for the 21\textsuperscript{st} century librarian, some issues were captured from LIPs Common Concerns Blog post of Thursday, August 10, 2006. The title of the post read “Skills for the 21\textsuperscript{st} Century Librarian-A must Read for LIPs (extracted from another blog: http://meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/index/php/2006/07/17/skills-for-the-the-21st-century-librarian/).

Some Basic Tech Competencies listed include:

- Ability to embrace change
- Comfort in the online medium
- Ability to troubleshoot new technologies
- Ability to keep up with new ideas in technology and librarianship (enthusiasm for learning):

1. \textbf{Ability to embrace change}: It is often said that the only permanent thing in life is change. Changes keep occurring in the way we offer services to our patrons. There is need therefore, to embrace these changes in order to improve our mode of services to our patrons. Change should be looked upon as an exciting thing—a positive thing. We should always endeavour to keep up with the pace. Change should not be feared, but embraced.

2. \textbf{Comfort in the Online Medium}: These days, there are a lot of online resources waiting to be accessed, and in a situation where library patrons are unable to assess these resources, the help of librarians are sought. Librarians need to help patrons locate materials online, do online library registration, set up e-mails and teach basic Internet
skills. The reference librarian should also be able to answer reference questions online, and send Instant messages to patrons that need such information.

3. **Ability to Troubleshoot New Technologies:**
The patrons are seen as customers in the library. A good customer service therefore, should include troubleshooting. Assuming in a digital library, a patron faces systems breakdown, the librarian should be in a position to sort the problem out.

4. **Ability to easily learn new technologies:** It is crystal clear that many librarians are afraid of learning new technologies. They are so much addicted to the traditional way of doing things. This should be fought by developing the hunger to always learn new technologies, bearing in mind that it will improve our service to our customers (library patrons).

5. **Ability to keep up with new ideas in technology and librarianship (enthusiasm for learning).**
The above points dealt with the technology aspects of the roles of the librarian in the 21st century. The 21st century librarian should not anyway, only be concerned about how to harness the relevant technologies to suit the patrons’ needs, but think of how best to really satisfy the users’ quest; at the end of the day both parties are fulfilled.

Traits for the 21st century librarian by Kwok (2007) as listed below were generated from two book discussions done by Michael Stephens’ MLIS class:

- **Not afraid of change and technology:** One who remains in the past when the world is undergoing constant change will be relevant and useless. The 21st century librarian should embrace current changes in the profession and technological breakthroughs in order to be properly equipped to be currently relevant and useful.

- **User-oriented focus:** This is where the librarian should aim at satisfying the users’ need. The 21st century librarian should be proactive and try to project forward in providing answers to users’ queries ahead of time.

- **Spot trends and market them:** Spotting trends has to do with discovering and noting developmental changes in library services and being able to bring them to the notice of the library users.

- **Plugged in and using new tools to communicate:** New tools when spotted, should be utilized to serve patrons. For instance, blogs and wikis are new tools that the librarian could discover and start using to communicate with the users and meeting their needs.

- **Be a maven/be a connector:** ‘Every reader his book’ is one of the rules of Ranganathan’s and it simply talks about matching a book with its relevant reader. Books are classified according to subjects in the library and the librarian should be able to what what material a user needs per time. The 21st Century should be able to refer users to websites that are relevant to the information they need.

- **Listen to users:** The 21st century librarian should position himself always to listen to users and be able to match their queries with relevant answers. It should not be understood that no question is a stupid one nor is there any irrelevant question. The library user knows what he/she wants and so, should be given attention.

- **Don’t judge interest:** Different users have different interest depending on their needs. Hence, the 21st century librarian should be open to diverse interests.
Hence, a user who is asking for the website for pornography should not be judged to be a bad individual. Such individual may be writing on the dangers of pornography to juveniles. Hence the user has need to view note down such sites in order to make a point.

- **Gather lots of input and diverse opinions**: the 21\textsuperscript{st} century librarian is meant to serve complex and diverse communities and personalities ranging from children to adults. These personalities are exposed to diverse kinds of information and information carriers. This makes it inevitable for the librarian to be ready to accommodate

- **Learn from Games-Leadership, teamwork, and strategies**: This simply talks about learning from collaboration.

- **Remove barriers-too many roles**: A 21\textsuperscript{st} century librarian should endeavor to be an expert at his/her job rather than doing a lot of work and knowing little of each.

- **Leave your comfort zone**: striving to learn new things; doing away with pleasure and

- Provide opportunities to flatten the world

- Communicate regularly with users: communicating with users regularly like informing them when there are new books is very necessary.

- **PLAY**: The 21\textsuperscript{st} century librarian should be a player. This is all about being cheerful, jovial and playful with library users. This not only eases off tension on the side of the librarian, but also goes a long way to establish warm relationship between the librarian and the users. This could always draw people to the library to read.

- **Create networks for discussion**: This is where social networks are useful. Librarians can set up social networks where issues about librarianship for librarians and library services for patrons can be discussed. Example of such networks are www.infoscientists.ning.com; Academic Library Users – a facebook group; Tame the web- created by Michael Stephens.

- **Travel and learn**: Young (2003) wrote:

  candidates for a position in my library may have specialized in one area during library school, or in their first job at a large institution. That’s great, but I need people who can see where they could branch out; go to workshops, pre-conferences, and institutes. I don’t mind funding the learning; I just need people willing to learn (p.66).

In today’s librarianship, there are some evolving areas which help bring the discipline into limelight. Such areas as Knowledge Management, E-libraries, Information Systems, Networking, Web designing (Eke, 2009). Omekwu (2008) listed current developments in the professional horizon that impact on professional practice generally such as: Knowledge segmentation; Knowledge organization; and Knowledge authentication. Omekwu added that the librarian should be a web master, a software specialist, a process manager, systems manager, digital archivist, information retrieval system designer.
Building a 21st Century Librarian

In order to keep up with the pace in Librarianship, especially in this digital era, the librarian should be able to learn some techniques that will enable him/her to fit into the world of technology. Therefore, the librarian should be:

- familiar with e-learning: Librarians should be involved in e-learning practices; collaborate with faculty members and teach use of library using e-learning platform;
- adept at MS Office (Microsoft Office)
- A blogger – start from building a personal blog; visit www.blogger.com to start up one.
- An Information Architect - a library portal builder and specifiers;
- an embracer of new technologies
- able to consider new ways of promoting reading
- a digital citizen rather than an analogue citizen
- a member of librarians’ online forums- for collaboration and brainstorming
- a Cybrarian- an expert in locating information on the Internet.
- A website builder and publisher-aids in marketing of library services.
- An Online Cataloguer – use of OCLC for instance and Library of Congress for instance
- A Web Services Librarian

According to Eke (2009),

A web services librarian is that librarian that possesses the skills of web designing, development, maintenance, staffing, and web content management. With the advent of web services librarianship, there is therefore, no more need for the library to hire external hands for the issues that concern the building of the library’s website. The web services librarian becomes the web master and takes up the responsibility of developing and maintaining the library website. Recently, there has been need for such librarians (web services) in different higher institutions. Since the world is becoming a global village, there is call for Information Scientists, Web masters, ICT gurus, Systems analysts, programmers, Hardware and Software engineers, etc. (p.6).

- A Problem solver: Librarians are sometimes confronted with challenges of solving problems for users. Therefore, it becomes necessary that they imbibe the spirit of problem-solving As cited in http://www.imls.gov/pdf/21stCenturySkills.pdf:

  In a September 9, 2008 speech, Obama noted: “Without a workforce trained in math, science and technology, and the other skills of the 21st century, our companies will innovate less, our economy will grow less, and our nation will be less competitive. If we want to out-compete the world tomorrow, we must out-educate the world today.” More recently, in remarks on March 10, 2009, Obama offered these words: “I’m calling on our nation’s governors and state education chiefs to develop standards and assessments that don’t simply measure whether students can fill in a bubble on a test, but whether they possess 21st century skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and entrepreneurship and creativity (p.6).”

In addition to the afore stated features of a 21st century librarian, ‘ability to market oneself’ is a trait that cannot be left out. A librarian that wants to be hired in the 21st century should be able to exhibit some traits which Nofsinger (2003) listed in his article ‘hiring academic reference librarians in the century’ as: optimism and enthusiasm; flexibility and creativity; courage; ability to communicate; ability to market library resources and services; ability to be a team
player; confidence and sense of humor; and finally, technological competence. Nofsinger remarked that ‘forward-looking, dynamic academic libraries will be seeking these essential characteristics when hiring new reference librarians. Lovato-Gassman (2003), wrote about ‘librarians in the 21st century’ and he made serious remarks about the perception of the 21st century librarian thus:

What is expected of librarians in the 21st century? It depends on whom you ask. The general public, when informed that professional librarians require a master’s degree, usually respond with “I didn’t know that you needed and advanced degree to shelve and check out books”. However, human resources executives and presidents/CEOs of medium to large corporations are looking for “information specialist/librarians” who not only have advanced degrees, but significant and varied experience in information management (p.46)

Threats/Challenges
Considering the present age (digital) we are in, there are bound to be some challenges to the adoption of new technologies to enhance library services. In the area of reference services, a librarian that is not yet familiar with computer technology may not be able to attend to the clients appropriately. For instance in online chatting, it requires an expert in online technology to be able to attend to online users effectively and timely.

In library online public access catalog (OPAC), there is need for a librarian to assist the clients to punch the right keywords into the computer so as to enable them get the right books they need. Many librarians have the fear of learning new technologies. This can be overcome, but it poses a threat to many librarians.

Recommendation
Based on the challenges discussed above, it is therefore recommended that librarians of the now be trained in the area of information technology as there is shift from traditional library services to modern library services. The whole world is becoming digital, and so the library should not be left behind. There should be intensive update on knowledge acquired by every librarian per second; every librarian should move with the world in information technology. Every library user is expectant of improved library services, especially in this digital era.

Distance learning is becoming rampant. Synchronous and asynchronous learning is the language of every educator in this present world. Therefore librarians in a bid to serve the public should move with the tide. Libraries are beginning to aid in e-learning, providing access to distant library users.

It is recommended in this study that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) be integrated in LIS curriculum so that upcoming librarians will get used to technology issues and Library services and do away with fear of information technology. There should be training and workshops organized for practicing librarians from time to time so that they will be able to learn new stuff in the profession.

There should also be face-to-face interactions between clients and librarians so that they will spell out how they would like to be served in a better way. This will enable librarians conquer fear of the unknown. They will now know the areas where they need to aid the library user better. As a summary, a librarian of the 21st century should be able to add new styles to whatever
service he/she offers in order to be hirable. The librarians should consider new ways to promote any service. There is need therefore, for regular update on existing knowledge. The librarian should update his/her knowledge often in every aspect of practice. The librarian should be an explorer; expanding notion of searching, and be able to retool and learn.

References


http://www.macmillandictionary.com


