

Information Overload

Registrant Resources Edition

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Welcome:

Welcome to the June edition of the Registrant Resources Edition of Information Overload. This month we ask the question – is now the best time to move?

We would like to thank you in advance for forwarding on this edition to interested friends and colleagues. If you would like to read any of the back issues of this edition or the main edition of Information Overload you can find these on our web site - <http://www.iea.com.au>.

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In this issue we will look at:

- Now is the time to move (if you are going to):
- A Buyers Market:
- Personal and Professional Development:
- Are you short on experience?
- Job Opportunities:
- A Thought to ponder.

Now's the time to move (if you are going to):

With the jobless rate sitting at around 4% it could be argued that the only people who are not working are those who either don't want to, or feel they don't have the skills and abilities needed to do the jobs that are on offer.

However, if you look at most of the selection criteria you will notice that what we term "soft skills" are relevant to most industries and can translate across the many different types of professions.

What do we mean by the term "soft skills"?

We'll consider:

- Ability to work in a team environment;
- Ability to work on your own and prioritise own tasks;
- Ability to complete specified tasks in a timely manner;
- Good customer service skills;
- Good interpersonal skills;

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- Good eye for detail;
- Understanding and knowledge of Occupational Health and Safety

Of course there will always be job specific skills and abilities required, as well as knowledge of specific pieces of software. But in general terms, if you have the skills and abilities listed above, you could (in theory) be anything you wanted to be, and work wherever you wanted to work with some additional course of study or on the job training.

A little later on we will be going through some of the ways to enhance your job applications, but for the meantime, we need to know - why is now the best time to move?

A Buyers Market:

Quite simply there are more jobs than there are people available in the library and information sector. Actually this situation is not limited to the library and information sector. For example, the hospitality industry is struggling to keep personnel – long hours, grumpy customers, late nights, relatively low pay. Compare that to the jobs (and money) available in the building and construction industry and the mining sector and you can see why.

But what has that got to do with the library and information sector?

Well – everything actually.

With the growth across the entire job sector, company expansions, a need for more specialised personnel and the end of the financial year (yes we do see a peak at this time of year especially in a bid to use project funds). Add that to the fact that the baby boomers are getting ready to hang up their pens, a shortage of educational options (including a lack of educators), and more organisations trying to upgrade their processes, software and systems than there are people able and willing to undertake the work, you can begin to see why there is a shortage.

If you've been there and done that, then chances are going to be good that the bit of paper (or lack thereof) will not count for very much at the moment. People need other people with the right kinds of experience. If you can back that up with the latest theoretical knowledge all the better, it means you can save the new organisation a lot of money in false starts and project overruns if you know some of the short cuts. The problem is not where the next job is going to come from; rather which job are you going to take first?

Within the contract arena, we are not immune to the shortage of personnel either. Over this last year we have seen more jobs than we have people. And those people who are working on fixed-term contract through IEA being kept very busy. The difference with contract positions and traditional positions (i.e., you are employed by the organisation directly rather than through IEA) is that clients usually don't have the time to train. They need a person who can step into the breach and "hit the ground running". Which is why we understand that not everyone can cope with the life of a contract employee. Of course we do compensate you well, but even so.

So – lets assume that you are planning on moving onwards and can see the dollar signs flashing before your eyes. We need to discuss other things first.

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Personal and Professional Development:

If you've done the same job since leaving school it could be argued that you don't have 20 years experience, just one year's worth of experience repeated 20 times. In order to move onwards and sideways as well as onwards and upwards you have to be committed to your own personal development. You have to be willing to give up some of your own time, after all you are planning on being well compensated for it, so a little more long term planning is important.

Career progression is important. In order to demonstrate that you are the best person for the job, especially one that would normally be out of your range, then there are some things that are important to consider:

- Are your skills up to date? Whilst some employers may be willing to train on the very job specific stuff, it is up to us to ensure that we are au fait with the latest and greatest software thingumajigg's. Remember what we said about having the right kind of theoretical knowledge to back up the hands on job experience? Well this is essential. Can you imagine going for a job with a software company today if your only experience was with a BBC Micro? Unlikely I know, but most people assume that once you get your degree and your first professional job you don't need to consider any further course of study. Well that is of course up to you. But if you want to be considered a suitable candidate for the next round of jobs that are on offer, you need to ensure that you do know the latest trends and have demonstrated experience and on the job training and/or study to prove it.
- Reading – Yet another essential component of a professional's arsenal. You can count your professional reading as part of your Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points. But don't just limit your reading to your direct knowledge base. As an information professional we should consider business management, HR management, software, computing, security, storage, methods, processes and practices as well as our "normal" material. Given that a lot of Australian based operations are owned by international organisations it is essential to have a global business perspective. How do their laws impact on the way we do our business? And vice versa?

Are you short on experience?

What do you do when you are faced with answering selection criteria and you feel that you are lacking suitable experience in a certain area?

Answer: Think laterally.

Except for perhaps a few very job specific questions in an application, you will be able to use your knowledge and experience from other areas of your life to answer the questions, which we will cover later on in this edition of the newsletter.

Short on experience? How to answer job specific questions

Obviously these will be dependent on your particular industry. But in the library and records management industry, the questions are usually related to particular types of software, knowledge of certain standards and eligibility for an organisation associated with the profession.

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Associations - starting with the last point first. In most cases, you do not have to be a member of the organisation at the time of your application, you just have to say that you would be willing to become one should you be successful in your application.

Police clearances – please bear in mind, these are only valid for the moment that you receive it, after all you may decide to hijack a car to get home from the police station. Again, it is worth mentioning that whilst you may not have a current police clearance, you can say that you have applied for one, and/or be willing to apply for one should you be successful in your application.

Standards – this includes occupational health and safety, and those standards that are associated with your industry. For example ISO15489: Records Management. With regards to knowledge of the OH&S legislation, all organisations should adhere to this legislation regardless of the industry they are in. Some industries will have stricter requirements than others including the mining industry and health care workers for example. If you are currently working it is a good idea to re-check your letter of appointment, this should include all terms and conditions of employment including OH&S requirements. If you have been given an employee handbook, there should be a section on the subject, and there may be documents you can read that are available via the corporate intranet, or shared drives. If you cannot find one, then it is worth speaking to a member of the HR department, to see if they have a copy. Whilst reading about something is a good start, you may also want to mention in your response, whether you have undergone any formal induction training at your current or previous places of work, and how you incorporate good occupational health and safety practices in your day-to-day activities, for example proper lifting techniques.

Software – This is an example where an organisation may require you to have previous experience with a certain piece of software. The reason can be as simple as that they do not have the time or the people to train you in its use, or as complicated as – you will be the systems manager, and not having the intimate knowledge of the software would mean that you would not be able to do the job that you had applied for. Therefore, depending on the role that you are about to apply for will determine whether or not you will be able “wing” it with regards to your answer. With some library management software, it may be possible to outline the software knowledge that you do have, noting that most library software packages do have some similarities and you are willing to learn.

Qualifications – Do not say that you have a certain qualification when you don't. If you are studying then say so. However, if you have worked within an industry for a considerable length of time, and you do not have any formal qualifications, you may be able to cover this question based on the experience that you have, and any courses that you have been on.

Some final points:

Do not re-use old answers – Why re-use work that did not give you the results that you wanted? If you are basing your new application on a previous application, without considering the fact that the last application did not get you the job. Then why are you wasting your time doing the same thing? Chances are you will get the same result. By all means re-read previous applications, this will tell you where you went wrong. But do not rely on your old applications as the basis for the new one.

Job titles – do not “upskill” your job titles to try and make your work history sound more exciting than it was. For example, an “underground extraction engineer” is a “miner”, a

“vision enhancer” could be an optometrist or a window cleaner. The reason being, your references will be checked, so it will be very clear very quickly what your job title and your roles were within a particular organisation.

Do not leave questions blank - Please understand that the short list for the interview stage of the application process will be drawn from those people who have answered all the essential criteria, and most if not all of the desirable questions as well. Whilst leaving a question blank may seem to be sensible, after all you really don't have any experience with a, b or c criteria. To a prospective employer it may just seem that you are careless, and have demonstrated that you do not have “good attention to detail”. You should also bear in mind that a prospective employer looks at your application as evidence of:

Good written communication skills: One of the best ways to determine the answer to this question is a simple one. A prospective employer looks at your application, and therefore the interviewees will have demonstrated their “good written communication skills” with their answers to the selection criteria, the quality of their writing of the covering letter and the quality of writing skills and experience as shown by what is in their CV and the way the whole application package has been presented.

Who do you work for? - If you have worked for or are currently working for an employment agency, it is essential that you say so on your CV. Your employment agency is your employer for the duration of the contract. Not stating this could make you look like you are a “job hopper” never satisfied with the job you have and are always looking for something new and exciting. Make sure you state that you worked for the host employer, but always, always, always write underneath that this was a contract position and name the employment agency. For example:

May 2004 – April 2005

Librarian

XYZ Organisation

Contract position through abc employers.

Do not refer back to other documents or parts of your application or your CV – Please bear in mind that the prospective employer will have already read your CV and covering letter, so please do not repeat the same information, “as I mentioned in my CV when I worked at such and such an organisation I...” .

Nor should you refer them to a particular section. Always give a different example to the ones you have used before. You can tighten your writing and prove to the prospective employer that you have good experience and you can articulate your responses well and in such a way that the prospective employer will insist that you go for an interview.

Check your application before sending. Have you re-read the instructions for filling in your application form and the submission guidelines? You may have missed the point that said, please send us 3 copies of your entire application, copy 1 on blue paper, copy 2 has to be on yellow paper and copy three has to be on black paper with white writing. OK this is a little frivolous – but there are some organisations who insist on electronic copies of all applications, some insist that all applications have to be submitted via their web site, or hand delivered, and please supply 3 copies, unbound.

Check for spelling and grammatical errors – and fix them. If you cannot proof read your own document (and not everyone can) then get someone you trust to do it for you.

Make sure all your documents use the same font and font size. Do not use fancy script – use something simple and easy to read - for example Arial, Verdana or Times New Roman.

Unless stated otherwise, print out your application on white paper using black text. This makes it easy to reproduce. Most interviews use a panel configuration and your application will need to be photocopied (Unless you've sent in the required number of copies that is). Coloured paper may make your application stand out for the wrong reason.

Do not include anything other than what you have been asked for within your application as you may not get them back. Therefore do not send original copies of certificates, and do not send anything they have not asked for.

As always we hope you have found the information contained in this newsletter of interest and use to you. Remember if you haven't considered that now is the time to move, then believe me when I say – you will rarely get a better opportunity to do so.

Kind Regards
Lorraine

Job Opportunities

The weekly job opportunities bulletin are now added to our website, and an email sent to all direct subscribers. Visit our home page at <http://www.iea.com.au> to find the latest edition.

To see back issues, please visit:

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A Thought to Ponder

*“The world is full of willing people, some willing to work,
the rest willing to let them”*
Robert Frost (1874 - 1963)

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