

Vol. 7, Issue 4, January 2018

ISSN 2249-894X

REVIEW OF RESEARCH

An International Multidisciplinary Peer Reviewed & Refereed Journal

Impact Factor: 5.2331

UGC Approved Journal No. 48514

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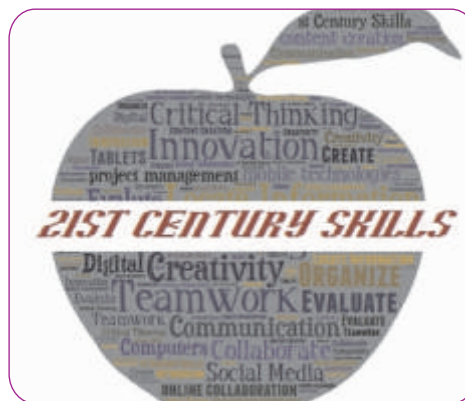
TECHNOLOGY SKILLS IN LIBRARIES OF THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT: -

The experience of working as Library Assistant in the University setup has confirmed for me what I have thought for some time. Being a service provider is many things. It encompasses a wide range of areas that I have gone through: technical skill, interpersonal ability,



subject area knowledge. More than that, however, being in the Library profession represents adoption of a distinct philosophical position. It is, as the Book of Common prayer says so well, "an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace." This Library professionals grace stated in brief, values knowledge over ignorance,

order over chaos, and helpfulness over rudeness. This isn't to say that every Library Professional is conscious of this or acts accordingly, but, as the following essay show, these ideal do exist and people do care----which the readers will, perhaps, find either reassuring or inspiring according to their lights.

KEYWORDS: Technology Skills , information services ,library websites.

INTRODUCTION :

Computer technologies are becoming a part of many library jobs and as we progress into the 21st century, the role of technology in information services will expand. What technology will become standard or adopted by a particular institution or library is anybody's guess, but what is certain is that developing good computer skills is essential for the librarian of the future.

Just a few short years ago the internet blossomed and many libraries began developing Web pages to organize and publicize internal and external links to information. While some libraries developed simple pages listing hours and location, others have developed complex pages using a wide variety of languages. North Carolina State University libraries offer customize Web layouts called "My Library". California State University, Fullerton library offers online video tours of its library.

These are just a few examples of what is currently happening with library websites. A review of recent job postings listed a veritable alphabet soup of required and preferred computer skills. Just a short time ago PERL was the hot new Web programming language. Now ASP and PHP are showing themselves as the language of the day. Looking at job description for Web Savvy libraries could include a mix or match of any of the following skills: HTML, XML, SMIL, PERL, PHP, ASP, SQL, JSP, Java Script, Cold Fusion, Java, Dreamweaver, Flash and Visual Basic. This is in addition to non-Web technologies, including Microsoft word, Excel Access, PowerPoint and numerous desktop publishing programmes.

The lengthy list of skills can seem daunting and leave a job-seeking librarian wondering which technologies to spend the time learning and in how much depth. Many organizations have already adopted

specific software and languages that they support, and what is supported by one institution may or may not be supported by another. If you are already in an organization, you should determine what options you have before investing time learning a language or programe, but if you are in the market for new position, the question remains what to learn?

HTML is a good base level of skill. While more dynamic languages develop, HTML is, and will remain for some time, the standard. It be accepted everywhere for many ears to come as it is the language that opened the Internet to the individual. Learn HTML, beyond what WYSIWYG editors like Microsoft FrontPage and Netscape Computer offer. HTML is easy to learn and is required before you can build any Web programming skills into your repertoire. Soon, HTML will become at basic skill for many jobs, both in and out of libraries.

Beyond HTML, this is where some variation and personality can come into play. While you could learn a little bit about each language, a person looking for a technology position would be better off to invest the time in learning one or two languages and/or programs well. Developing depth of knowledge in one or two areas demonstrates the ability to learn something and learn it well. So learn a new skill, complete some projects to show off those skills especially if they are library- related, and use these projects to sell your skills. Show that you are adaptable, confident in your abilities and proud of your work.

Most positions, library and otherwise, list both required and preferred skills. Some institutions mean what they say when they say “required”. They refuse to review applicants who do not meet the “requirements,” and if no successful applicant is found, they must advertise again with a different list of requirements rather than review existing nonqualified applicants. Others are not as strict. If an appropriate applicant is not found, they will review applicants that do not meet the requirements. Since you can’t be sure what the hiring rules of an institution are, apply for the position you are interested in, tout any related skills and then buckle down and learn the required skills. Not only will you meet the job requirements and not have to worry about their application process, but you will also demonstrate your ability to learn, with the added bonus of being able to list that skill on other applications.

If a prospective Library professional has a good background in Web design/HTML, skills in other areas as well, and an expressed desire to learn whatever technology skills an institution already has in place, this candidate will more than likely make a favorable impression. This person is or could develop into a technology generalist, a person who can develop “ skill by building a knowledge by similar task.” This generalist will be able to develop new skills as they are needed by a library and will be essential to the continued technological growth of the library in its quest to provide information in the ever- changing technological expansion driven by the internet.

NOTES

1) Available online at <http://www.lib.ncsu.edu>.