1998

We're Honored That You Applied Here

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Recommended Citation

The Systems Librarian

by Terry Ballard

'We're Honored That You Applied Here'

In librarians' employment searches, some things change, some never will

Five years ago, I wrote an article for *Wilson Library Bulletin* called "We'll Keep Your Résumé on File," concerning my initial round of job hunting after library school, which led to my first job as an academic systems librarian. Anybody who read that article knows that by interviewing me for a job, they are opening themselves up to cheap shots in a future article. In spite of this, there were plenty of people who interviewed me when I was on the job market again in early 1997.

Round One: The Early Interviews

The first thing I did was call a headhunter who had phoned me a few months earlier. I had explained to her at the time that I wasn't ready to move on yet, but said I'd save her number. "So why are you calling me back?" she wanted to know. "I changed my mind," I said.

The next week after a pre-interview, the headhunter sent me to a prestigious law firm in midtown Manhattan. The interview went extremely well. The library had just bought a new online catalog, but hadn't really utilized it yet. That is my specialty, so I knew I would be invited back for the final interview. I was, but it turned into a disaster when they were more concerned with my facial hair than my potential for managing their online system.

A second early interview was in uptown Manhattan—far uptown. After a 45-minute subway ride, I had to walk through a badly depressed neighborhood to get to a large special library that needed an INNOPAC specialist. I had been excited about this interview until I actually got it. I raced into the building 5 minutes before I was due and explained to my potential boss that I am very fussy about punctuality. "Good," she said. "Around here we send people home without pay if they are 5 minutes late."

The rest of the day, the warning lights started going off. The director was resigning. The library was constantly at odds with the parent organization, which had almost thrown them all out and hired a rival agency to run the library. At the end of the day, I knew that I'd just had a learning experience. My confidence was starting to slip just a bit.

Round Two: The Job Room

Then it was time for ALA Midwinter. I had registered in advance, so there was a handful of slips from prospective employers. My confidence was back up again, the interviews went well, and two of these pre-interviews led to full interviews. One was a misfire, and one led to a job offer that I couldn't accept. Both places mentioned that they knew of me from my articles, and let me know that they had seen my Web page.

Another library director left me a note at Midwinter to call her when I got back to New York. This led to an interview at another special library in Manhattan. The director was enthused as she showed me around the small facility, and she said something that would become the motto

for this experience: "We're honored that you applied here." This phrase, or the similar "We've used your research in our work here," became the sure sign that I would not be getting an offer. This position was for a librarian/Webmaster, and the director wanted to know what experience I had with the advanced Web programming such as Java and CGI. Apparently, she found somebody with those skills.

Round Three: The Choice

In late spring, 3 months into the job hunt, things started happening. It turned into a horse race between two colleges. Both of them made a fuss about my Web

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page, and there were offers from both during the same week. The money was the same, so I based the decision on the corporate culture. One had a library director who was in trouble with his faculty. The one I chose had faculty members who told me that they were thrilled with their director. In other words, I chose the place with the fewest warning lights, and it has worked out very well.

What I Learned

My experiences illuminated a number of factors that may be different today than even just a few years ago:

- If you are going to be applying for a library automation position, keep in mind that the numbers will be kind to you. I'm told that there is a relatively short supply of automation librarians.
- In this age of free Web pages, it is a very good idea to have a personal Web page. It graphically demonstrates your computer skills—and prospective employers will look.
- Any advanced programming skills such as Java, CGI scripting, and Novell management will be very important in the job hunt. The last I heard, all of these skills were being taught in most library schools.
- The Internet is becoming more of a factor in job hunting. I heard about the job that I accepted through the INNOPAC listserv. On the other hand, I registered with a number of the free résumé services on the Web and got no response at all.

In my 1992 article, I concluded that everybody with an M.L.S. gets an appropriate job. That is still my conclusion. The jobs I didn't get in this campaign were jobs that wouldn't have worked out.

Epilogue

Within weeks of starting my new job, I was placed on a search committee for a new librarian. This was my first experience at seeing job hunting from the other side, and it showed me the process from a new perspective. After the final decision was made, I got to help send out dozens of those letters that we all know so well—ending with a phrase like "best of luck with your career."

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WLN

plays, help screens, searches, and indexes are all customizable. When mounting a library catalog on the Web with WebLN PAC, the library or consortium only needs to provide Web browser software and Internet access. WLN's staff will maintain and operate the WebLN PAC for the library or consortium, thereby reducing capital outlay, library staff time, and operating costs.

Pricing for WebLN is on a subscription basis with simultaneous log-ons as the primary component. The price of each simultaneous log-on goes down as more are added. Searching is unlimited. Up to 25 downloads are included with each simultaneous log-on each month. According to the company, WebLN can cost less than many MARC record CD-ROM products. For WebLN PAC, in addition to simultaneous log-ons and unlimited searching, the size of the database (number of biblio-

graphic records) will be an additional cost element.

Paul McCarthy, president and CEO of WLN, said of these new products: "This is yet another step for WLN in implementing new products and services that meet the needs of libraries. We are delighted to be able to provide WLN's sophisticated bibliographic system through the World Wide Web. Libraries are major contributors to fulfilling the information needs of people through the World Wide Web. We at WLN are thrilled to be able to contribute to the satisfaction of this need. This is yet another step forward for us and libraries."

Authority Processing Services

In another release, WLN has announced a contract with the Research Libraries of The New York Public Library (NYPL) to perform authority processing services for the online bibliographic database of approximately 6 million bibliographic records. When the initial 6 million records are finished, WLN will process new

records daily, placing them under authority control before they enter the NYPL online database.

The NYPL Research Libraries add approximately 140,000 new bibliographic records each year. The records from their major retrospective conversion of the library's holdings before 1972 will also be included in the 6 million record total.

The services provided by WLN include normalizing name, subject, uniform title, and series headings to conform to the latest Library of Congress (LC) practice; as well as correcting tagging and spelling errors, returning corrected errors in MARC format, and providing matching Library of Congress name and subject authority records. Where headings do not match with LC headings, WLN's professional cataloging staff will manually review records, correcting the headings to conform to LC form if appropriate. In addition, WLN will provide notification of changes and updates to authority records held by NYPL

and provide NYPL with a copy of the updated authority records.

The Research Libraries' four centers have combined collections of 38.8 million items, including 11.8 million books, and annually serve nearly 1.1 million people. CATNYP is the online catalog of the New York Public Library representing The Research Libraries holdings cataloged from 1972 to the present. Materials from the Center for the Humanities; the Science, Industry, and Business Library; the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts; and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture are included. CATNYP contains information on books, periodicals, manuscripts, maps, microfilms, music scores, sound recordings, visual materials, and multimedia materials in the library's vast noncirculating collections.

Source: WLN, Lacey, WA, 800/DIAL-WLN, 360/923-4000; Fax: 360/923-4009; http://www.wln.com.