President's Message:
LITA Now

Andrew K. Pace

At the time of this writing, my term as LITA president is half over; by the time of publication, I will be in the home stretch—a phrase that, to me, always connotes relief and satisfaction that is never truly realized. I hope that this time between ALA conferences is a time of reflection for the LITA board, committees, interest groups, and the membership at large. Various strategic planning sessions are, I hope, leading us down a path of renewal and regeneration of the division. Of course, the world around us will have its effect—in particular, a political and economic effect.

First, the politics. I was asked recently to give my opinion about where the new administration should focus its attention regarding library technology. I had very little time to think of a pithy answer to this question, so I answered with my gut that the United States needs to continue its investment in IT infrastructure so that we are on par with other industrialized nations while also lending its aid to countries that are lagging behind. Furthermore, I thought it an apt time to redress issues of data privacy and retention. The latter is often far from our minds in a world more connected, increasingly through wireless technology, and with a user base that, as one privacy expert put it, would happily trade a DNA sample for an Extra Value Meal. I will resist the urge to write at greater length a treatise on the Bill of Rights and its status in 2008.

I will hope, however, that LITA's Technology and Access and Legislation and Regulation committees will feel reinvigorated post–election and post–inauguration to look carefully at the issues of IT policy. Our penchant for new tools should always be guided and tempered by the implementation and support of policies that rationalize their use.

As for the economy, it is our new backdrop. One anecdotal view of this is the number of e-mails I've received from committee appointees apologizing that they will not be able to attend ALA conferences as planned because of the economic downturn and local cuts to library budgets. Libraries themselves are in a paradoxical situation—increasing demand for the free services that libraries offer while simultaneously facing massive budget cuts that support the very collections and programs people are demanding.

What can we do? Well, I would suggest that we look at library technology through a lens of efficiency and cost savings, not just from a perspective of what is cool or trendy. When it comes to running systems, we need to keep our focus on end-user satisfaction while considering total cost of ownership. And if I may be selfish for a moment, I hope that we will not abandon our professional networks and volunteer activities. While we all make sacrifices of time, money, and talent to support our profession, it is often tempting when economic times are hard to isolate ourselves from the professional networks that sustain us in times of plenty.

Politics and economics? Though I often enjoy being cynical, I also try to make lemonade from lemons whenever I can. I think there are opportunities for libraries to get their own economic bailout in supporting public works and emphasizing our role in contributing to the public good. We should turn our "woe-are-we" tendencies that decry budget cuts and low salaries into championed stories of "what libraries have done for you lately." And we should go back to the roots of IT, no matter how mythical or anachronistic, and think about what we can do technically to improve systemwide efficiencies.

I encourage the membership to stay involved and reengage, whether through direct participation in LITA activities or through a closer following of the activities in the ALA Office of Information Technology Policy (OITP, www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/oitp) and the ALA Washington Office itself. There is much to follow in the world that affects our profession, and so many are doing the heavy lifting for us. All we need to do sometimes is pay attention.

Make fun of me if you want for stealing a campaign phrase from Richard Nixon, but I kept coming back to it in my head. In short, Library Information Technology—now more than ever.

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