

SLA Is Looking Ahead To Future Of the Profession

Approaching centennial provides an opportunity to celebrate yesterday--and plan for tomorrow.

BY JANICE R. LACHANCE, SLA CEO

In 2009, SLA will celebrate its centennial. This is an extraordinary accomplishment for any organization, and it deserves to be recognized and honored in a special way. To prepare for the yearlong celebration, a Centennial Commission has been created and is already planning events and activities to commemorate this significant milestone. It will, no doubt, be a memorable year.

As we reflect on the past and acknowledge the contributions of those whose efforts and dedication to SLA and to the profession have delivered us to this moment in the association's history, it also seems natural and right for us to focus a significant amount of our critical thinking and creative talents on assessing what lies ahead for SLA. It is this alchemy--this mixture of appreciation for successes of the past and curiosity and passion for the future--that makes anniversaries and celebrations very special and extremely important.

As SLA prepares to enter its second century of service, it does so amidst sweeping technological change that is not only reshaping the information industry but also redefining the world in which we live. How will these changes affect librarians and information professionals generally, and what will these changes mean for your career, and for your professional association?

To help answer these questions, SLA has begun a far-reaching and thorough examination of the information profession and of the roles librarians, info pros, and your association will play in the future. We are working with a team of respected communications and research professionals led by the international consulting firm, Fleishman-Hillard, supported by futurist Andy Hines of Social Technologies and the information analytics firm, Outsell Inc. The project, which will rely heavily on primary and secondary research, will help librarians and info pros align their knowledge, experience, and skills with the evolving expectations of the organizations of tomorrow, while ensuring that SLA continues to provide you with the right tools and valuable services you must have to be successful.

Employing a four-step methodology, Fleishman-Hillard--which has extensive experience advising organizations such as AARP, the Association of Fundraising Executives and the U.S. Library of Congress on their branding, positioning, and marketing communications--will work with us to identify and understand SLA's core purpose, ethos and value. After refining our current position in the marketplace or identifying a new position that is relevant, differentiated, and deliverable based upon sound scientific research, we will be able to create a framework for discussing the association and the profession in a single, persuasive voice.

Broad Study

There is no pre-determined outcome for the project. It is a wide-ranging inquiry about the future of the profession, the results of which will provide the SLA with valuable insights concerning its strategic direction. The only outcome that matters is one that serves the best interests of members. For that reason, we will listen carefully to the results of the research that our consultants will deliver in the months ahead. And we will listen to you.

Throughout this process, which we plan to complete by the middle of next year, we will encourage your input and ask your opinions. We will keep you up to date on our progress through our numerous communications channels, including the SLA Web site, and we will seek your feedback along the way. The alignment project also will be a primary topic of discussion at the 2008 Leadership Summit in Louisville, Kentucky, this January.

This is unquestionably an ambitious effort, but one we know will be successful. It will give SLA and the librarians and information professionals it serves the advantage of a glimpse over the next rise. It will help us map the landscape of the future and better understand our place in it. And, it will set us on a course that ensures that the significant value of librarians and information professionals is effectively communicated, clearly understood, and never in doubt. SLA