



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“The Internet innovators of today are very aware there are parallels between the changes that are occurring today and those that occurred in the 17th century.”

-Library Link of the Day,
August 4, 2005 (tk421.net/librarylink)

Lately, one of my goals has been to reduce the number of the messages in my email inbox. There was a time when all the new messages were on one page, and the rest were organized into folders. Now I'm embarrassed to say just how many new messages there are. In fact, my inbox is not unlike my living room table, which can't seem to be emptied, no matter my intentions or even my hard work. It is like the bottomless soup pot in the folk story about the hospitable but poor country couple - it seems to replenish itself.

Some of the messages are related directly to my job: new services, questions about programs, agendas for meetings, arrangements for performers, discussions about procedures, technology alerts and much more. Then there are the three listservs I subscribe to: ALSC (Association for Library Service to Children), REFORMA (National Association to Promote Library and Information Servi-

ces to Latinos and the Spanish Speaking), and Library Link of the Day (provides a daily link to a library-related topic). However, people who subscribe to other lists forward messages to me in case I haven't already seen them. And I appreciate this, I do - it's just that, well, how much information is too much?

That question is the crux of my dilemma. I am driven by a "what if" attitude: what if I miss something important, what if it gives me insight into a subject, what if it is that last detail I need? I am gripped by this and even though I know this is information overload, even though I know the facts are out there, ready for me when I really need them, I struggle to resist the allure of even more details or comments on a subject.

To give you an idea of the challenge of this, here are three of the emails I have received in the last 24 hours. First, ALSC has forwarded a

message from the Library of Congress, saying: “An online survey has been developed to obtain input from the library community to assess the purpose, value and future of CIP [Cataloging in Publication].” According to the email, my input will help determine the future of this program, which is described on the website as “a bibliographic record prepared by the Library of Congress for a book that has not been published” (cip.loc.gov).

How can a librarian resist the urge to complete the survey? And how can I do the survey if I don’t first read up on this topic? And how can I read up on this topic if I’m busy doing my job? So, that email stays. Or does it? Maybe I should pass up this opportunity to voice my opinion on a subject I actually know little about.

Next, there is a brief message from REFORMA: “Excellent article just published in

‘La Raza’! Don’t miss it!” This is followed by a link (laraza.com). Fortunately, this Spanish language article is too much for my limited Spanish, so I can delete it without too much hesitation.

Finally, a forwarded August 3, 2006, article from *Washington Post* staff writer David Segal: “J.K. Rowling Conjures a Huge Crowd.” This certainly fits into the purview of my job, since Rowling is the author of the incredibly popular Harry Potter children’s books. So, I should read it, right? When I do, I’m glad, because I find out about the Haven foundation, started by Stephen King to support ailing and injured writers and artists. And what am I going to do with that information? Who knows.