



The Hiring Tide Turns For Corporate Librarians

By Perri Capell

Corporate librarians are seeing demand for their services increase from last year's rock-bottom levels.

As 2003 has progressed, recruiters say they've been filling more openings for mid- to upper-level corporate librarians than in 2002, when headcounts in corporate information centers were being reduced. Some of the hiring is for librarians to work in such industries as biotechnology that weren't badly hurt by the recession. Other librarians are being recruited to replace staff members who were laid off to cut costs during the downturn.

"We've seen a pretty intense increase in the past few months," says Carol Berger, public-relations consultant for C Berger Group Inc., a search firm in Carol Stream, Ill. "People want to hire candidates quickly, sort of like a few years ago, and that's always refreshing."

Recruiters say the hiring spurt also is due to the increased need for professionals who can help locate and organize competitive information. "Smart organizations realize that a librarian or information specialist is critical to the business-development process, which is where most senior executives are spending their time right now," says Samantha Whitney-Ulane, director of research and a managing director of Whitney Group, a New York-based search firm.

"There's definitely a change in the climate for the employment of corporate librarians," says Janice R. Lachance, executive director of the Special Libraries Association (SLA) in Washington, D.C., which includes professionals who work in corporate, legal, newspaper, medical, music, science and other libraries. "Librarians are now being recognized as crucial players within their organizations."

The average number of full-time employees working in libraries or so-called "corporate information centers" climbed slightly in 2003 to 9.18 from 8.77 in 2002, reports Outsell Inc., a research and advisory firm in Burlingame, Calif. The 2003 level is considerably below the 13.09 full-timers reported in 2001, and translates to one full-time information professional for every 208 users of the center and its services. Outsell is predicting another small gain in staff levels to 9.26 in 2004.

"The big reductions-in-force affecting corporate information centers have died down somewhat now that these functions are, for the most part, operating with a bare-bones minimum in staff," says Roger Strouse, director and lead analyst for Outsell.

He cautions that one reason why headcounts may be down from 2001 is that information professionals may now be working within the units they serve rather than being based in corporate information centers. "Some have lost their libraries, but they haven't lost their jobs," adds Judy Field, a library-science senior lecturer at Wayne State University in Detroit and former president of the SLA.

Specific Requirements

Recruiters say that hiring for library professionals is most active among pharmaceutical, law and medical organizations. "Pharmaceutical, legal and medical are hiring people selectively," says Sarah Warner, co-founder and director of staffing services for Wontawk, a New York search firm. These employers' job requirements are very specific since they seek only professionals who can immediately tackle projects without training, she says.

One of her searches is for a major pharmaceutical firm that opened a research center in Boston and needs an information scientist to do pharmaceutical research. The company prefers candidates with a master's degree in library science and another degree in a life science, plus proficiency using the Dialog, DataStar and STN databases. Other requirements include good communication skills, a commitment to customer service and the ability to work with global and regional teams. The job will pay between \$50,000 and \$70,000 annually, depending on the new hire's experience, says Ms. Warner.

Search-Firm Opportunities

The executive-search industry itself serves as a barometer of sorts for librarian hiring. Recruiters rely on librarians to conduct research on potential clients and executive candidates. With business at some firms down by more than half, many corporate librarians in this field were laid off in cost-saving moves during the recession. As the economy improves and more executive searches are initiated, some firms are starting to rehire information professionals.

After six years of supporting the global health-care practice at Heidrick & Struggles International Inc., a Chicago search firm, Jeanine Amilowski, 34, saw her job as an information specialist eliminated in a round of layoffs in August 2002. Unable to find a full-time position she wanted, Ms. Amilowski started working as a research contractor to search firms, eventually gaining six clients.

"A lot of companies were letting go of information professionals, but they really needed the help," says Ms. Amilowski. "That's why it was a good opportunity to do contract work."

One of her clients was the Chicago office of Whitney Group, which had downsized its information staff to one from five. It offered Ms. Amilowski a full-time position as research manager in May, which she accepted. She's earning about the same as her past salary, which she says is higher than the national average of \$61,522 for special librarians, as reported in the SLA's 2003 annual pay survey.

What's in a Name?

Many openings for corporate librarian no longer have the word "librarian" in their titles, which can make job hunting somewhat confusing. For instance, of 14 job openings listed on the SLA site in October, only half included the word "librarian" in their titles.

"Companies will call the same job or skill set different things, so you might look for jobs [on the Internet] under librarian and find very few postings," says Rachel Singer Gordon, Webmaster of LISjobs.com, a career site for library professionals. "But if you look under knowledge manager, information specialist or taxonomist, you would find more."

The wide variation in titles has caused some controversy among librarians. Members of the SLA considered renaming the group Information Professionals International but voted down the proposal at their convention this year.

Regardless of the name issue, Ms. Field notes that the profession is changing and librarians who want to remain employed must align themselves with their employer's mission and find ways to improve the bottom line. She predicts that even as corporate libraries start disappearing, more specialists with library skills but with varying job titles will be hired.

"Will we see huge new corporate libraries? No," says Ms. Field, "but there will be hiring of new specialists with titles like marketing analyst, who are adaptable, willing to work in a collaborative mode and speak the language of users, not librarians."

Most corporate positions require candidates with master's degrees in library science and an undergraduate degree in the industry or specialty, says Linda McKell, president of Advanced Information Management Inc., a Mountainview, Calif., search firm which primarily fills positions in California. A legal librarian might have a history, political-science or law degree, while a medical researcher might need hospital experience or a science or medical degree.

Her firm recently helped fill a position for a library director for a California pharmaceutical company, whose former director had retired. The new hire came from another drug company, had management experience and could create new strategic directions for library services, says Ms. McKell.

Currently, the Texas Medical Center Library at the Houston Academy of Medicine is seeking a librarian with management experience and the ability to manage a library of computers to be its new associate director of information technology, says John Strzynski, business development manager for the C Berger Group. Candidates must have a master's degree in library science and "be technically capable and also have senior management experience," he says.

The Emotional Quotient

Companies also have become more particular about finding candidates who will be good fits and have compatible "emotional intelligence," says Ms. Warner. Having this intrinsic quality apparently helped Ms. Amilowski land her job at Whitney Group.

"She is very driven, focused, poised and a professional, which is critical in our organization because of the interface with partners and senior people," says Ms. Whitney-Ulane. "And she's excellent at project management and a lovely person to work with."

Ms. Berger notes that most librarians nowadays need skills to maintain or create Web pages. Among areas where her firm has been active is helping government contractors hire information professionals to work on a project basis. As the librarian job market has improved, however, many contract librarians have accepted full-time jobs recently and aren't available for project work.

Pay in the profession remained flat in 2003, and discussion about bonuses, which were prevalent a few years ago, is nonexistent, says Ms. Warner. While the \$61,522 average salary for all librarians in 2003 is slightly higher than 2002's average, average salaries for directors and managers have declined to \$67,000 in 2003 from \$68,694 in 2002, SLA surveys indicate. In California, library managers and directors earn between \$80,000 and \$130,000 annually, Ms. McKell says.

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