

Information Outlook
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Interconnectedness: Your Global SLA

by Stephen Abram, SLA President 2008

It's been a big month. As I write this column, (it is my last as president of SLA although my regular InfoTech columns will continue), we are living in truly tumultuous times! Today, as I write this, is September 30th, 2008 but that's likely to feel like the distant past to you in this November issue of *Information Outlook*. It appears that we are undergoing an intensification of the social, economic, demographic, electoral and technological change that has been predicted for a number of years. Indeed it was a centerpiece of both my and Janice Lachance remarks as we opened the 2008 association year in Louisville. On Sept. 29 the \$700 billion bail out failed to pass Congress. Is that over yet? How many banks, brokers, loan companies, etc. made it through so far? Did the U.S. financial difficulties spread worldwide with the same intensity? Also, the U.S. election was becoming quite interesting and appeared to be a toss-up at this point. How does that appear now? Did the demographic change from increased numbers of younger, African-American and Latino voters cause the election to play out differently? How about the Canadian and New Zealand elections? Did you hear about them at all? From the perspective of this columnist/observer I can't even hazard a guess about what the world looks like a few weeks hence, but I'll be interested to see how this real-life soap plays out.

Why am I thinking about this? Well, I've had the opportunity over the past 8 weeks to see the global situation from a number of perspectives. First, a group of your fellow SLA members attended the IFLA conference in Quebec City in August. It's an amazing gift to hear and see the perspectives about global libraries in such an intense setting - the beauty of the oldest walled city in North America on the 400th anniversary of that world heritage site contrasted with the fascinating techno-wizardry of the information profession meeting there.

From there I headed to the Netherlands and visited six cities and some of the most amazingly innovative libraries I've ever seen. Some were focused on making a difference in economically depressed zones while others were whiz-bang sparkly and crowded. As I left Amsterdam for my flight through Singapore CNN started rumbling about the economy and the health of the money, mortgage and stock markets.

I arrived in Australia to give the endnote at the biennial ALIA conference and participate in the first joint SLA/ALIA three city tour. Again, all eyes were on the U.S. and global markets as it was becoming clear that something big was

happening. By now I had seen CNN International, BBC and Sky News Australia versions from the perspectives of Europe, Singapore, and Australia and the early damages being done to the global economy and their own national institutions. It even came up during my interviews in three different cities on ABC (Australia) Radio. By the time I got to Tasmania the topic of conversation with the Premier was the emerging information and knowledge based economy and economic difficulties that were likely to occur as it matured. I guess it's too lighthearted to think of this economy as adolescent but that's how its personality feels – alternately delightful and difficult.

On to SLA New Zealand when the market meltdown increased such that by the time I arrived in New York and Long Island (losing a whole day crossing the International Dateline), I was meeting with some shell-shocked fellow members at the center of the action. Then again, many of the folks I talked to were from global institutions.

Why am I telling you this? Well, I was blessed to view this economic crisis from so many viewpoints over just a few weeks. I got one telling insight from this and that is that we are all CONNECTED. It's more than proverbial butterfly wings beating in Beijing. It's more than dominoes or economic models or government policy. We are just all so intimately connected on so many levels. We cannot let our face to the outside world be falsely and narrowly informed merely by national boundaries, by language, by culture, or by any other simplistic categorization. *We are all in this together.*

What is the lesson I see in this for SLA? SLA is global. We must strive to be even more global and to be your connection to the world and the world's connection to you, wherever you reside in the world. Information in and of itself rarely knows or respects artificial boundaries. We don't need to either. As we participate in this transition to this global information and knowledge-based world, we can rest assured that there will be more bumps. There will be shocks and successes. There will be mergers, acquisitions and failures. Even the simplest issues of our profession, such as copyright, are made necessarily more complex as SLA addresses this global context. We are by definition one of the most globally connected professions and we need to ensure our tent is informed by the fullest diversity of our profession.

Before my presidential year ends, I will visit fellow SLA members in Sweden, New Mexico, Michigan, Alabama, Maryland, and Western Canada, and, with other SLA folk, I'll keynote a large new regional SLA Conference in New Delhi, India for the SLA Asian Chapter, one of our fastest growing chapters. This is stupendous. Our SLA network grows, our connectedness grows, and the value of an SLA membership in a world of change grows too.

Grow with us. Continue to invest in the global SLA community for networking, professional development and advocacy. We all win when we value connections.

Stephen