

### Getting lost in VALA 2018

My first trip to Melbourne by myself! I feel like a big girl now. Notwithstanding the fact that I spent most of the first 48 hours in Melbourne hopelessly lost, yet valiantly pretending I knew where I was, I still managed to run [The Tan](#) (and yes I ran it clockwise - the hard way); visit the [Queen Victoria Night Markets](#); and buy some very gorgeous shoes.

Due to a very generous [scholarship sponsored by EBSCO](#) I also brought back to Queensland some new and challenging views on Libraries and met two wonderful co-scholars from Karratha, Western Australia and Mackay, Queensland.

My top takeaways from the Conference are (drum-roll):

Data is both a tool to enable and overwhelm us.

- We must make it our business to make our data discoverable and accessible; and use it to tell stories.
- Libraries need to let go a little. For instance, crowd sourcing can expand the reach and amount of digitised material. A great example is [Amplify](#) at State Library NSW where online users are enlisted to edit machine transcribed audio files.

What is Libraries point-of-difference in a digital world?

- We all know the advantages big data can have but it has its limitations. [It reinforces perceptions of how we think we are already](#) - not who we really are (think the echo chamber effect). We are complex beings. We are more than our search history. Libraries understand that - real people like our staff understand that.
- Libraries need to ask themselves, are we building technology *around* communities or building communities *with* technology? We shouldn't think of tech in terms of efficiency and productivity - but in terms in experience.

So what trends should we be preparing for?

- Digital citizenship is becoming a crucial skill as more government agencies deal online. Libraries can be a non-judgmental place for customers to acquire this skill.
- [Our online identity and privacy](#) is going to be a space Libraries can tackle head-on. How do we balance privacy and yet foster communities? There are an average of 98 data-points captured per person by Facebook. A large part of our identity - even our heartbeat - is in other people's hands (think FitBit).
- Libraries have the ability to foster *critical* digital literacy, which implies the ability to shape the world you inhabit and exert a measure of control over it.
- Lastly, although it's not new, open source is creating some very interesting opportunities in the Library space.

There were a couple of refreshing hypotheses expressed. For example, "[not everyone should code](#) - it de-professionalises the profession and makes it something everyone and anyone can do." Creativity in the *adaptation* of code will be just as important a skill. And of course, the gorgeous and sassy Angela Galvan in her keynote [The revolution will not be standardised](#) asserts "Libraries are not - and have never been - neutral." She further inspired us all with her quote, "Rather than ask, what if we do it and it's wrong? Ask what if we do it and it's amazing?"

Finally, my favourite quote from the conference (and there were so, so many it's hard to choose) is: "Disruption doesn't happen to Libraries. It happens to people. The strongest and smartest don't survive - the most adaptable do." ([Natalia Filbrich](#))

Thank you EBSCO and VALA, this has been an amazing experience and I can't wait to spread the word and put it into practice. Just hope I don't get lost in the process.