Whatever Happens in Vegas, Tell It! - Attending the 2014 ALA Annual Conference

By Joel Sanders

As a current graduate student preparing to enter the professional arena, the ever changing landscape of the library world requires me to continually update and expand my knowledge so that my skills do not become outdated. One way I believe that librarians and support staff can continue learning, is by attending professional library conferences. Last year, I had the opportunity to do just that. I attended the 2014 American Library Association Annual Conference and Exhibition in Las Vegas.

To travel such a distance, I asked myself “Joel, what’s in it for you?” And I replied, “Whatever Happens in Vegas, Tell It!” So here we go.

For me, traveling a longer distance made the conference more of a special occasion for me; breaking away from daily routine to focus on the events while putting work (aka: the Job) aside.

In order to get the most memorable experience out of these events, I decided to search the conference program for a diverse set of presentations involving new and emerging technologies. I focused my selection on particular topics that I felt would be useful to me in my current position.

For example, I looked for topics that I already had some knowledge of. Having experience as an Association of Research Libraries Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce (IRDW) Diversity Scholar, I selected the ALA Diversity and Outreach Fair as a support mechanism to assist me in forming a strong peer network. Having peers to share ideas with and turn to for help, socializing with new and former colleagues was truly an important part of the conference experience for me. To this day, the relationships have become extremely valuable. My second selection was the Copyright Discussion Group. I felt this session would help reinforce and expand the knowledge of copyright related issues.

My final selections were topics that I knew hardly anything about, yet felt I needed to be introduced to. The Information Commons Discussion Group and 3D Printers and Library Policies presentations exposed me to aspects of the academic library industry I knew existed but was very unfamiliar with. Knowing that I would soon be facing these two distinct topics within my current position, participation in the discussions would be most rewarding. I really enjoyed listening to the success stories and lessons learned.

What I got from the experience was that the conference:
• Helps keep you informed of and able to identify the industry's current needs
• Keeps up to date with changes in the industry through discussion and exercises
• Allows you to learn from others ideas and experiences
• Able to gain specific technical knowledge

What I learned from this experience was to:
• Get out there, meet new people, ask questions, share experiences and network/make connections with others in the profession.
• Take good notes (visual, mental and written) - pay close attention and get more out of each presentation by focusing on the session and writing down notes really help me. I use the old fashioned pen and paper so I could "Tell it" like it was for me.

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