

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a sales manager in Africa



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Pictured above: Katy giving a presentation at a recent workshop for INASP member libraries held at Gweru Polytechnic Institute, Zimbabwe

“South Africa? Wow, how exotic!”

I’ve received this comment, or a variation on it, several times. But the truth of the matter is that Johannesburg is a big, modernized city like many of the ones you live in. True, the weather is near-perfect: as we approach winter, day-time temperatures will usually be between 18–23°C and, night-time, 9–14°C. Just as in many other big cities, we have our share of crime, traffic and other urban problems. And, like many of you, my day begins with e-mail.

I’m currently based in the Johannesburg regional office of EBSCO Information Services, but my company’s headquarters are in Birmingham, Alabama, in the US. This office here also works closely with our European counterparts. And in addition to work contacts, all my family and most of my friends are in the US. So, each morning

begins with a review of the e-mails that have come in from across the pond (and from north to south) during the night. I also spend a few minutes deleting junk e-mails. Because I have had some trouble with our spam filter and not receiving e-mails that should have come through, I have had to turn the filter off and, as a consequence, I receive a pretty large number of junk e-mails, too.

On this particular morning, I’m anxiously trying to get in touch with the catering services at University of the Western Cape (UWC) in Cape Town. IFLA’s Serials and Other Continuing Resources Standing Committee (SOCRS), of which I’m a member, is holding a satellite conference in Cape Town prior to its annual conference in Durban (19–23 August 2007), and I’m helping with local arrangements. I exchange a few e-mails with someone in the library at UWC, then make a phone

call to catering services. That lady sends me a fax, which I then scan and send via e-mail to the chief organizer in the US. Whew! One more detail attended to.

After taking a tea break, I move on to the next project. This is also related to the upcoming IFLA conference. One of the publishers that we work with plans to host a luncheon in Durban, and we have offered to help put together an invitation list. This takes a good chunk of time.

Next comes a meeting with my new sales representative. We hired her in January, away from one of the local university libraries. Though she has not previously had detailed experience in serials acquisitions, her experience in libraries is still very valuable to us. She understands the needs of library end-users and, therefore, the needs of our library customers. On this day, we are discussing the customers to whom she has been assigned, and working on a plan for her introductory visits to them. Over time, she will become familiar with each one, knowing who the primary contacts are for which services we provide, and who she should contact when we have new services to review or if she has questions pertaining to their accounts. I want her to form her own opinions about each person at the various libraries, but today I'm giving her a brief bit of background on each one. It's a little bit difficult to hand over accounts with whom I have been building relationships, but giving these to her will allow me a little more time for training, administrative and planning duties.

A minor crisis arises when the power suddenly goes off. I said earlier that this is a modernized city, but we do still have 'Africa moments'! This particular power outage lasts for about an hour. I have a corner office with two walls of windows; plenty of light by which to catch up on some professional reading. My choices today are *South African Journal of Libraries and Information Science* and *American Libraries*.

During a hurried lunch of tuna fish and an apple at my desk, I work through some more of the e-mails that have come in during the day. A customer who has a trial to a publisher package is being prompted for a username and password, but they should be IP-authenticated. The project manager of a local consortium needs pricing for EBSCO's A-to-Z service. A customer service representative needs some information about

EBSCO's claims interface with Innovative's Millennium system. A prospect wants to change the date of an upcoming meeting. Our Corporate Communications office in Birmingham has sent a lead for someone who is interested in our Electronic Journals Service. And so on.

Now I need another meeting with the new sales representative. She needs to figure out why some of the claims being placed by one of her 'new' customers are being rejected by our online subscription management system. So, we review the ins and outs of claiming online, and decide that she really needs to sit down with the customer and see exactly what is being done during the claiming process.

The phone interrupts us, and it is a call I need to take. After getting a credit card statement, I have learned that a hotel in Zimbabwe, which I visited two weeks ago, has apparently charged me not at the bank's exchange rate, but at the black market rate. A room that I had thought would cost R1,000 has cost R15,000. Not acceptable! I have a difficult conversation with the hotel accountant, and by the end of the call, nothing is resolved. I'll have to phone my bank, but it will wait until Monday. Now, it's late afternoon on a Friday. I end my day as it began – running through e-mails, deleting the junk, filing ones that have been dealt with, and leaving the rest for Monday. Now it's time to go home and feed my American cats who are quite enjoying their own African experience!



Katy (right) on a visit to a corporate customer (a chemical and fuel producer in South Africa) with colleagues, Salomé Potgieter and Jean Smith, after being shown round the plant