

Profile: Lorraine Estelle



Lorraine Estelle, CEO of JISC Collections, is a well-known figure in the information industry. Her job brings her into contact with librarians, publishers and other vendors and she is a popular speaker on international conference platforms.

Lorraine was born in London and indeed has spent her whole life living in London. Her current home is about one mile away from where she was born – quite an unusual feat in these days of geographical mobility! Her mother was a stay-at-home mum and her father was a transport manager. Lorraine's early engagement with the education system was not a great success. She went to a "dreadful school" – Shelburn School for Girls in Holloway – where the only thing she claims to have learnt was how to smoke cigarettes. She stayed there until the age of 16 and wanted to go to college to do her A-levels, but her mother had other ideas and so Lorraine went off into the world of work.

Despite her bad experience at school, Lorraine loved books and decided to find work in the publishing industry. Her first job was with Jayne's Yearbooks, making tea and delivering parcels. She then moved to Architectural Press and worked as a book designer. For the next 20 years Lorraine stayed in publishing doing both production work and commissioning, working for a range of publishers including Hamish Hamilton, John Murray and Sinclair-Stevenson. Her final publishing job was with a company called Two-can. She found this an innovative and exciting environment as

they were working at the cutting edge of using technology for educational publishing, albeit on CD-ROM. Two-can published the first electronic subscription magazine for children – the *Young Telegraph*.

Looking back at this period of her career, Lorraine says that what strikes her now is how long it took to publish a book and how labour intensive it all was. It was very much a 'gentleman's publishing world' with long tea and coffee breaks ... and even longer lunches. Books took at least a year to be published and standards were not high. But as we know, the world was about to change – and the advent of electronic publishing was about to raise the bar. The first e-publishing initiative which brought massive change to the industry was desk-top publishing in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Lorraine recalls that this was a very interesting time to be in publishing and there was initially a good deal of resistance, with publishers genuinely concerned that now "anyone can do publishing".

The next major shift occurred around 1992/94 with the move from CD-ROM to online publishing. Whereas desk-top publishing changed the means of production, online availability changed the nature of distribution.

After leaving Two-can, Lorraine toyed for a short time with corporate life. She worked for a while for a company called Hewitts, producing online communication manuals for end-users and call centres. Although she says she "learned a lot

about creating easily navigable reference resources and other online environments” she hated the job and was very miserable. Despite the good pay she felt completely unsatisfied. In retrospect, she puts this down to the fact that in publishing, people believe in their products, they believe in the educational or literary value of the work they do. In the corporate world, this was not so. Unsurprisingly, she and the corporate world soon parted company.

Looking around for a new job, Lorraine decided that she didn’t want to return to work in a traditional publishing environment. What really interested her was electronic publishing and the power of the Internet. When she saw the job of JISC Collection Team Manager advertised, she says she knew it was her dream job – and it was. She started working for JISC in 2002, taking over from Alicia Wise (now Chief Executive of the Publishers Licensing Society) who in turn had taken over from Lorcan Dempsey (now VP and Chief Strategist at OCLC). Quite a pedigree!

Since joining JISC, Lorraine has seen many changes. When she started there were only a handful of database and e-journal deals and the original NESLI set-up was in transition. She grasped this opportunity to make changes and really engage with publishers and librarians to get better deals for the community. Her aim was to negotiate more strategically and take the long-term view on negotiations, business models and the structure of the deals. Her first big project was to work on the setting up of NESLi2 and devise a national consortium with an opt-in model. She also recognized that the JISC Data Centres were an under-utilized resource and could become powerful hosting centres for certain types of JISC-negotiated content. Whilst working on these initial projects it also became clear to her that, because of the complex JISC structure of nested committees, it was difficult to get across the concept to JISC colleagues of the power of electronic information resources to support research and teaching. A case in point was *Early English Books Online* (EEBO). This collection of early English language books and manuscripts held a wealth of unique and valuable resources – yet it was difficult to communicate this effectively both within the JISC as well as to the education community at large. To overcome this issue she arranged a conference to promote EEBO, entitled ‘Waking up in the British Library’ which, she felt, succeeded in getting the message across.

The next milestone at JISC was the formation of JISC Collections as a company in 2006. There were a number of reasons for doing this. The main reason was financial as JISC actually had no legal status with regard to financial transactions, but there were also administrative advantages – and it certainly helped to make the organization much more efficient and agile. The company has been a huge success and since being set up has doubled in size and taken on a wide range of additional activities, such as negotiations for the Scottish libraries, Becta, MLA and schools. The company has also undertaken a number of projects such as the National E-Book Observatory Project, Project CASPUR and investigations into business models for book and journals which have helped to underpin JISC Collections’ activities. Lorraine believes that e-books will take off significantly over the coming years and she cites her experience with the e-books for further education project. Within two hours of putting up the consultation document on the website, they had 30 responses. Her other prediction is that while the current economic crisis is providing real challenges to libraries and publishers, she also believes that it is real opportunity to open discussion on the sustainability of the industry.

With all this frenetic activity at work it is surprising that Lorraine finds time for her social life. But she does! She lives with her daughter



Lorraine does not do things by halves

Sophie, who is 16, and her partner Laurie (who was once her boss when she worked at Hamish Hamilton and who, she says, has been amazingly supportive in the difficult times). They are about to be joined by a new puppy – a golden retriever – which at the time of the interview was still to be named. Lorraine loves travelling and has done lots of it for both work and pleasure. She says her

favourite place is Mexico and she has wonderful memories of travelling the country by bus, rucksack on back, with daughter Sophie. Another little-known fact about Lorraine is that she qualified in 2008 as a City of London guide and is now studying contemporary architecture so that she can use this in her tours. And because we promised to mention this – her favourite colour is purple.