

Pat Hawthorne and Nicole A. Cooke

Trendspotting and microtrends in academic libraries

Working in the new society

What happens when something matters to 1 percent of the population? That is all it takes “to create a movement that can change the world,” states Mark Penn, author of *Microtrends: The Small Forces Behind Tomorrow's Big Changes*.¹

Penn, the well-known pollster who identified soccer moms as a critical voting constituency in Bill Clinton's 1996 presidential campaign, identifies “a microtrend as an intense identify group, that is growing, which has needs and wants unmet by the current crop of companies, marketers, policymakers, and others who would influence society's behavior.”²

Like Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock* and John Naisbitt's *Megatrends*, *Microtrends* is a fascinating and informative study of the counterintuitive trends of our times. Freedom of choice and individualism are at all time highs, Penn notes, and we've moved from the Ford economy (where thousands of workers turn out the same car millions of times) to the Starbucks economy (where thousands of individuals order customized coffee products with or without caffeine, fat, or sugar).

Academic librarians are already seeing the effects of this new society play out in how, when, and where we deliver library services. But what are the implications for the type of workforce and workplaces we want to create now and in the future?

Five work-related microtrends

Penn discusses five work related microtrends—working retired, extreme commuters, stay-

at-home workers, wordy women, and ardent amazons. He outlines the overarching trend, discusses the context, provides statistics, and comments on the individual, societal, and commercial implications. Here's a brief summary of Penn's five work-life microtrends:

- **Working retired.** Few of us actually retire at 65, due in part to rising health care costs and limited retirement income. Penn notes this is reflective of our changing attitude toward work (we actually like or love it) and of the increasingly nontraditional view of retirement. With more baby boomers working past 65, the implications for the nation are immense. The workforce will be larger. Younger workers will have to wait longer to move into leadership roles, and may, consequently, leave organizations and start their own companies.

- **Extreme commuters.** Many individuals travel at least 90 minutes each way to work every day. According to Penn, the number of such commuters hit 3.4 million in 2000, double the number that existed in 1990. Reasons for the rise include rapidly increasing home prices, quality of life issues, and logistical reasons for dual-earner couples. These 3 million commuters (the 1

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percent needed for a microtrend) are concerned about gas prices, are at greater risk of road rage, and may suffer health effects. This group has also created markets for a variety of industries —fast food meals that fit into cup holders, satellite navigation systems with real-time traffic options, and a market for audio books and language tapes.

- **Stay-at-home workers.** The opposite of extreme commuters, these 4.2 million individuals work from home 100 percent of the time. A 23 percent increase from 1990, these workers do not include the approximately 20 million employees who sometimes work from home. Such workers are possible because of laptops, high-speed Internet access, Blackberrys, cell phones, and other technologies available at reasonable prices. Fifty-three percent of stay-at-home workers are women, and 58 percent run their own businesses. The majority is white, college-educated, and work in management and professional jobs; 76 percent report high job satisfaction. Their average work week is 44.6 hours compared to the 42.2 hours of full-time on-site workers.

- **Wordy women.** The numbers of women in word-based professions such as journalism, law, marketing, and communications are increasing. As women become the majority of word workers, men may leave these professions. Conversely, women are not increasing their numbers in sciences or business fields. This trend reflects the growing number of professional jobs open to women, and increasing the competition for library jobs.

More with Mark Penn

Want to learn more about Mark Penn and his new book? A brief book talk and Q&A with Penn can be found on the C-SPAN Web site and streamed as video at www.booktv.org/program.aspx?ProgramId=9053&SectionName=&PlayMedia=Yes.
—Ameet Dosbi, *University of North Carolina-Wilmington*

- **Ardent amazons.** Women are choosing jobs that demand serious physical strength, such as sport and sport-related fields, first responders in firefighting and law enforcement, military, and construction.

What's your opinion?

How do these microtrends affect libraries? We know that many libraries are already seeing the impact of the working retired as librarians are not retiring as predicted rates. Will this help us staff our libraries in the next decade? Will more extreme commutes affect recruitment? Will more library workers seek to work from home some or all of the time, and how will this impact library service? As women have more career options, how will this impact recruitment to the profession?

We want to know your thoughts on these microtrends! Visit the “Working with and retaining new librarians” section of the ACRL Recruitment and Retention wiki, and share your thoughts about such trends on your career and your library, as well as on the profession and academic libraries in general.³

If you are interested in topics such as these and their impact on the academic library work place, join us for the ACRL President's Program at the 2008 ALA Annual Conference in Anaheim on Monday, June 30, to hear Dan Ariely speak on his newly published book, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces that Shape Our Decisions*. Ariely will be joined by a panel of four academic librarians from around the country and a variety of types of institutions.

Notes

1. Mark J. Penn, with E. Kinney Zalesne, *Microtrends: The small forces behind tomorrow's big changes* (New York: Twelve, 2007), xiv
2. Ibid., xx.
3. The ACRL Recruitment and Retention wiki can be found at wikis.ala.org/acrl/index.php/Working_with_and_Retaining_New_Librarians ¶¶