

## Editorial: Why Is *ITAL* Important?

Dan Marmion

*Editor's Note: What follows is a reprint of Dan Marmion's editorial from ITAL 20, no. 2 (2001), <http://www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/divs/lita/ital/2002editorial.cfm>. After reading, we ask you to consider: Why does ITAL matter to you? Post your thoughts on ITALica (<http://ital-ica.blogspot.com/>).*

Some time ago I received an e-mail from a library school student, who asked me “Why is [*ITAL*] important in the library profession?” I answered the question in this way:

*ITAL* is important to the library profession for at least four reasons. First, while it is no longer the only publication that addresses the use of technology in the library profession, it is the oldest (dating back to 1968, when it was founded as the Journal of Library Automation) and, we like to think, most distinguished. Second, not only do we publish on a myriad of topics that are pertinent to technology in libraries, we publish at least three kinds of articles on those subjects: pure scholarly articles that give the results of empirical research done on topics of importance to the profession, communications from practitioners in the field that present real-world experiences from which other librarians can profit, and tutorials on specific subjects that teach our readers how to do useful things that will help them in their everyday jobs. The book and software reviews that are in most issues are added bonuses. Third, it is the “official” publication of LITA, the only professional organization devoted to the use of information technology in the library profession. Fourth, it is a scholarly, peer-reviewed journal, and as such is an important avenue for many academic librarians whose career advancement depends in part on their ability to publish in this type of journal. In a sentence, then, *ITAL* is important to the library profession because it contributes to the growth of the profession and its professionals.

After sending my response, I thought it would be interesting to see what some other people with close associations to the journal would add. Thus I posed the same question to the editorial board and to the person who preceded me as editor. Here are some of their comments:

One of the many things that was not traditionally taught in library school was a systematic approach to problem solving—for somebody who needs to acquire this skill and doesn't have a mentor handy, *ITAL* is a wonderful resource. Over and over again, *ITAL* describes how a problem was identified and defined,

explains the techniques used to investigate it, and details the conclusions that might fairly be drawn from the results of the investigation. Few other journals so effectively model this approach. Regardless of the specific subject of the article, the opportunity to see practical problem solving techniques demonstrated is always valuable. (Joan Frye Williams)

The one thing I would add to your points, and it ties into a couple of them, is that by some definitions a “profession” is one that does have a major publication. As such, it is not only the “official” publication of LITA but an identity focus for those professionals in this particular area of librarianship. In fact, ideally, I would like to think that's more of a reason why *ITAL* is important than just the fact that it's a perk of LITA membership. (Jim Kopp)

Real world experiences from which other librarians would profit—to use your own words. That is my primary reason for reading it, although I take note of tutorials as well. And the occasional book review here may catch my eye as it is likely more detailed than what might appear in LJ or Booklist, and [I would] be more likely to purchase it for either my office or for the general collection. (Donna Cranmer)

*ITAL* begins as the oldest and best-established journal for refereed scholarly work in library automation and information technology, a role that by itself is important to libraries and the library profession. *ITAL* goes beyond that role to add high-quality work that does not fit in the refereed-paper mold, helping librarians to work more effectively. As the official publication of America's largest professional association for library and information technology, *ITAL* assures a broad audience for important work—and, thanks to its cost-recovery subscription pricing, *ITAL* makes that work available to nonmembers at prices far below the norm for scholarly publishing. (Walt Crawford)

The journal serves as an historical record/documentation and joins its place with many other items that together record the history of mankind. A professional/scholarly journal has a presumed life that lasts indefinitely. (Ken Bierman)

In a sentence, *ITAL* is important to the profession because “Communication is the key to our success.”

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Dan Marmion was editor of *ITAL*, 1999–2004. This editorial was first published in the June 2002 issue of *ITAL*.

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*ITAL* is a formal, traditional, and standardized way of sharing ideas within a specific segment of the library community. Librarianship is an institutional profession. As an institution it is an organic organization requiring communication between its members. An advantage of written communication, especially paper-based written communication, is its ability to transcend space and time. A written document can communicate an idea long after the author has died and half way around the world. Yes, electronic communication can do the same thing, but electronic communication is much more fragile than ideas committed

to paper. *ITAL* provides one means of fostering this communication in a format that is easily usable and recognizable. It is not the only communications format, but it fills a particular niche. (Eric Lease Morgan)

So there you have the thoughts of the editor and a few other folks as to why this journal is important.

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Why does *ITAL* matter to *you*? Post your thoughts on ITALica (<http://ital-ica.blogspot.com/>).