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Learning to adapt to change vital in all lines of work

By Melinda Rollinson
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When Natalie Hillar began her journalism studies in the late '90s, she adopted what she considered to be a rounded approach.

Believing this would set her up for a successful career, Hillar studied print and broadcast journalism and undertook work experience at newspapers, magazine publishers and broadcasters. However, none of this adequately prepared her for the realities of her chosen career 20 years later.

Hillar's first media role in 2000 involved writing feature articles for print magazines and short stories for an online news feed.

"Writing radio news stories was the closest I got to training for the snappy copy required for the web and eventually social media," she says.



Natalie Hillar had to work out how to adapt her skills to a changing world.

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Between 2002 and 2016, Hillar witnessed enormous change while working in advertising for large publishing companies in an industry that was heavily impacted by the social media boom and digital advances.

"In the end, I felt lost," she recalls. "It was all a struggle and I couldn't figure out what was best for my clients."

Realising a new approach was required, Hillar forced herself to take a step back to review her skills and work out how to adapt them to a changing world.

"I needed to listen to what people wanted rather than pushing what to me felt like an outdated agenda," she says.

Hillar started a consultancy business focused on influencer marketing and quickly discovered that the skills she had developed in the magazine world were transferable.

"I co-ordinated many campaigns for my clients gaining them fantastic exposure and opportunities to build relationships with high-profile influencers," she says.

Hillar believes that even with evolving technology, strong writing, presenting and listening skills will continue to be vital for media professionals.

But resilience is equally important.

"I didn't realise how much the world would change, but I think learning to adapt to change is a useful skill in all lines of work," she says.

Adjusting to change has been a slow process for the traditionally conservative and paper-heavy legal sector.

For Victorian barrister, Jing Zhu, digital advances have had a predominantly practical impact on her worklife.

Zhu recalls the challenges of lugging around large volumes of folders in the early days of her career.

"Now I see more and more organisations going paperless, including encouragement by the courts for e-trials and solicitors who prefer to brief counsel via e-briefs," says Zhu.

"I think these changes have been a long time coming but, as with many things in the law, change took some time to filter through to daily practice."

To date, for Zhu, the most useful development has been the advent of e-briefs. The volume of paperwork involved in hard copy briefs often means that working from anywhere other than the office is not practical. Having a brief in electronic form and the ability to access documents remotely gives Zhu greater flexibility.

While Zhu's legal studies didn't include preparation for the technological side of practicing law, she has always been interested in using technology to make everyday tasks easier.

"I generally take my iPad with me everywhere and have my calendar, legislation, time and date calculation apps and other apps ready to go," she says.

Zhu views the changes as positive and is looking forward to running e-trials in the future. "I have tried to attend as many seminars about e-trials and e-briefs as possible to keep myself up-to-date and learn from others, as well as find out what the courts expect from us," she says.

But this period of change from the old way to the new comes with challenges. "With courts, some judges prefer e-trials and others hard copy," says Zhu.

"I suppose while everything's transitioning you have to be prepared and ready to use whatever medium is thrown up."

Jack Hylands, general manager strategy and new product at RMIT Online, believes the Australian workforce is not keeping pace with digital and technological advances.

"There are growing and increasingly acute skills shortages across a variety of digital and technology fields," says Hylands.

"Our skills deficit is not yet at US or UK levels but our future opportunities as an economy are fundamentally underpinned by digital and tech skills, and currently too few of our students are focused on developing these capabilities."

Hylands believes that responsibility for adapting to these changes sits with individuals, businesses and governments.

"For individuals, it is fundamental that they adopt a lifelong learning approach to managing their career," says Hylands.

"No longer can we expect that the education we receive up to the age of 21 will stand us in sufficiently good stead to support us through our careers."

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