



PRESIDENT'S ANNUAL REPORT 2010

When I stood here last September to deliver my third annual report as President, I outlined a long list of achievements for the previous 12 months. I confidently predicted then that in the coming year, the pace would be less frenetic. Looking back now, I'm not so sure that management activities did slow down to any significant degree. It has been another busy, but satisfying, year of change.

Getting the bad news out of the way first, there has been some slowing in membership applications. Total numbers now stand at 1314, a decrease of 246 from this time last year. On another comparison, we have recruited 360 new members in the first eight months of this year compared with 551 in the previous corresponding period of 2009.

I attribute the slowdown to two factors. Firstly, the level of publicity last year was particularly high, and that helped to raise our profile. The second factor is the long-term trend wherein the people entering our target age group of 50 plus are increasingly likely to have gained exposure to computers through their jobs or home environment, so are less likely to need our services. That is a more gradual effect, but nevertheless we need to change with the times. More on that shortly.

While computers are becoming more sophisticated in their capabilities, they are also becoming more 'user-friendly.' However there is still a large group of older people who approach computers with fear and trepidation. Our Patron, Val French, convened a meeting to try and work out how we can build our numbers, and how best we can overcome people's initial fears and encourage them to join BSOL. We decided to adopt the slogan 'Computers Can Be Fun,' and this is now the theme for future promotions. We commissioned an eye-catching new brochure which promotes the three ideas of Entertainment, Confidence With The Basics and Facing The Future. We will emphasise the leisure aspects of computer use, and the wide range of applications accessible even to novice users.

This year, for the first time, we employed a paid consultant to handle our publicity and advertising. This recognises that we have been unsuccessful in recruiting to our committee anyone with the necessary skills and interest to reliably take on the publicity portfolio. A paid consultant is not cheap, but considering our modest budget, the results were reasonable. In the coming year, we plan to continue with our consultant, but on a more restricted basis to assist us with specific promotions.

The introduction of a \$20 joining fee and the absence of a need for significant capital expenditure have strengthened our financial position. Our Treasurer will report on this in greater detail shortly. This year, for the first time, we have

operated with a budget. Given the size of our operation, I believed it was essential to introduce a formal budgeting process and to monitor financial performance continuously against agreed budget figures.

The editorship of the newsletter was reorganised, mainly to cover the periodic absences of our Peter Nicholls, our Newsletter Editor. Peter has now assembled a subcommittee of four who are sharing the editor's role. The arrangement is working well, and we will continue to have a different editor by rotation each month. In addition, there is now a special page created by Garry Royle for the Apple Mac enthusiasts.

Speaking of enthusiasts, BSOL now has three special interest groups, all of which are going well. To broaden its appeal and better reflect its range of activities, the Technical Support Club, convened by Michel le Riche, has recently been renamed the Mentor Support Group. In addition we have a Video Group and a Digital Photography Group.

Our training sessions continue to attract strong support, and we ran a large number of such sessions, mainly in the first half of the year. Brenda Williams organised a series of hands-on lessons, particularly on the newer operating systems Vista and then Windows 7. Meanwhile, Michel organised lectures on a variety of diverse topics, from the transport Go-Card to database design to the use of Picasa for improving digital photos. We have a well-equipped training facility, and it is vital we maintain momentum with plenty of interesting training sessions. They are a good revenue generator, an important means of encouraging learners to renew their memberships and a way of giving something back to our mentors in exchange for their continuing support.

A survey among our mentors has highlighted strong support for us to provide them with additional training, possibly through conferences or training courses. We were very pleased therefore when we were given a generous grant from Brisbane City Council to run two full day conferences. The first of these will be held on 25 February next year, and the other next June. Planning is well under way.

During the year we ran three of our introductory sessions for new mentors. To make the sessions as accessible as possible, one was held on the northside at Chermside Library and another was held in the city on a Saturday morning so that those mentors who work full time had the opportunity to attend. Ideally, every new mentor should attend one of these briefing sessions before being assigned a learner. I look forward to the time when we can make that a firm policy, as it would benefit both our mentors and their learners.

We held one social event during the year, a lunch on 14 April in New Farm Park. It was most enjoyable, though we were slightly disappointed by the relatively small number of members who attended. My thanks go to Marilyn Hooper and Peter and Ann Nicholls who make the organisation of significant events such as this appear so easy.

Currently under development is a Management Information System based on Microsoft Access. Eventually it will supersede the current membership database and the wiki reports used by our hub coordinators. The new system will manage

the membership records, routine correspondence and reports. Mike Walker, a BSOL mentor and retired systems analyst is developing the system from scratch, a complex task which has already taken several hundred hours. Rozie Lange is coordinating the system implementation, a major task in itself.

As I mentioned earlier, we need to plan for the future. As society becomes more exposed to computing devices of various sorts, the need for our current style of basic computer training will diminish. I often say, slightly facetiously, that our prime objective is to get all over-50s to be computer-literate and thus make ourselves redundant. While this won't happen soon, there is little doubt that the types of services we provide will have to reflect these strong trends. Already, many of our former learners are upgrading their computers to newer operating systems or applications and are asking for additional lessons. In a change of policy, we now offer these 'graduate' learners a small number of additional lessons covering the new software.

Looking further ahead, a sub-committee has been convened by John Noad and is looking at how BSOL adapts to new technology and to society's future needs. They have produced a comprehensive draft report which will be presented to the forthcoming Mentors' Conference. The final report will become our blueprint for the future.

This is my fourth and final annual report as President of Brisbane Seniors OnLine, but it certainly doesn't signal the end of my involvement with BSOL. Looking back, it has been a satisfying period during which we have achieved a great deal. Those achievements were possible only through the enthusiastic support of so many people - far too many to list by name. Among those though whom I must mention for their enthusiastic assistance over all or most of those four years are our Secretary, Pat Noad and our Vice-President and Training Coordinator Michel le Riche. I am most grateful too to our hub coordinators, our office volunteers and my fellow Management Committee members. Finally, I acknowledge those people without whom there wouldn't be a BSOL, all our mentors who provide the training. BSOL is a unique organisation which provides a valuable service to the community. I am confident that it will continue to thrive vigorously.

Brian Korner
September 2010

Hub	Learners	Mentors	Total*
Apple Mac	57	22	79
Bayside	69	26	95
Central	100	68	168
East	111	25	136
Inner North	85	26	111
Inner West	77	45	122
North	101	23	124
North Central	89	17	106
North East	91	31	122
South	117	40	157
West	50	24	74
Totals	947	347	1294

** The totals do not include life members, office volunteers and other supporters*