

Interview with Yolande Nanayakkara

by Irene Travis

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

Yolande Nanayakkara has been selected as the first communications officer by ASIS&T, a role prompted by the Board's view that the organization needs to be more visible and to engage more effectively with international members. In an interview with ASIS&T *Bulletin* editor Irene Travis, Nanayakka noted that ASIS&T seeks to break down geographical barriers and enhance the free exchange of ideas and networking. She intends to focus on consistent branding throughout communications and marketing, emphasizing the connection between information science and other fields of study and industries, and expanding use of technology to promote interaction. Nanayakka looks forward to applying her personal creativity, academic background in organizational psychology and broad career experience in the management of nonprofits to help strengthen and build ASIS&T through innovative marketing and communications.

KEYWORDS

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EDITOR'S NOTE: Recently ASIS&T selected its first communications officer, Yolande Nanayakkara. Me, myself and I (not to mention our readers) want to know all about it, though in lieu of getting out our Quick Quotes Quill, we interviewed Yolande via that favorite muggle medium, email. Welcome aboard, Yolande!

ILT: Communications officer is a new position at ASIS&T. What is the job, officially? How does it relate to other positions? Why did ASIS&T decide to create it?

YN: ASIS&T 2016 president Nadia Caidi explained that the board felt the new communications officer position was necessary in order to expand the organization's visibility and also to increase engagement with our international members. Though my job description hasn't solidified and direction from the board is still pending, I believe a relevant part of the role is to develop a strategic communication plan that is systemic in its coordination and innovative in the use of available technologies to enhance outreach to existing and prospective members.

ASIS&T wants to break the geographical barrier to allow easy access in the exchange of ideas, resources and global networking. It is imperative to the organization that all members feel connected to ASIS&T, as they are the very heart of the organization. We are an international organization, and technology can provide the opportunity for all members to interact for the benefit of expanding their research, enhancing their applications and accelerating their professional careers.

In addition, this position will lead marketing efforts to ensure consistent branding, design collateral that entices prospective members and partnerships and illustrates how information science connects to multiple disciplines and industries.

The communications and marketing process is a collaborative effort. It ensures the smooth flow of communication internally as well as externally. It promulgates the efforts of the organization, be that staff, committees or the board. Therefore, I'm looking forward to working with everyone in showcasing ASIS&T's assets and value.

ILT: What inspired you to apply for the position?

YN: I love marketing and communication, the psychology behind the field, the creativity. I applied for this position because the idea of this position being newly created intrigued me. As with most positions however, you are applying blind, not knowing much about the organization. My calls with Dick and the board convinced me that this was the right position for me and to turn down some other offers I had received around the same time (when it rains it pours!).

ILT: What is your initial impression of ASIS&T now that you are on the ground?

YN: I truly enjoy working with everyone I've met, and Dick has created a pleasant office atmosphere that you don't always find in associations. My only regret is seeing Dick retire. I would have liked to have worked and learned from him.

ILT: Tell us a bit about yourself – your professional background and other things it might be interesting for us to know.

YN: I have spent my whole career working within nonprofits, with the majority of the time within associations. I started in membership, where I comprehended the importance of marketing and communication skills to excel in reaching and connecting with members. Once I started down this road, I realized how much I love the field and that I had a natural ability. I love the creative aspect of marketing, and I started writing poetry in third grade, so I've always been a writer. I have directed numerous departments within association management at some point in my career – membership, marketing and communications, education, conference and event planning, community outreach, fundraising and grant writing, as well as some public policy. I was the executive director for a community nonprofit and a consultant where I honed my skills in board management, finances and HR. In addition, the concentration of my major was in organizational psychology.

When I'm not working, I can be found volunteering on committees and leading projects for the Taproot Foundation. I am currently writing a novel loosely based on my grandmother, and I love sailing and kayaking.

ILT: What is your vision for ASIS&T communications, and what are your immediate priorities?

YN: I believe ASIS&T's potential is great. It's exciting to be a part of this new chapter. My hope is to see ASIS&T grow and strengthen as it reflects a changing field through communications that connect with stakeholders and marketing that illustrates its value. ■