

Postcard from SE1

Welcome to the first Elucidate for 2005, particularly relevant as we start the year rebranded as UKeiG – the UK electronic information Group. The December issue of Information World Review announced, somewhat ominously, that “UKOLUG is dead, Long Live UKeiG.” I can guarantee that all the best bits of old UKOLUG will survive under our new banner, and this New Year will see a new sense of direction and energy as we tackle the complex and demanding range of issues that face the electronic information community.

UKeiG will continue to be a respected and well-established professional body for all information professionals and users and developers of electronic information resources. Through our activities we will actively encourage communication and the exchange of knowledge; raise awareness of existing and new technologies that retrieve, manage and process electronic information. Our strength lies in our eclectic and established membership which extends across all key UK sectors: higher and further education, government, legal, business & commerce, science & technology, science & healthcare and the public sector.

Over 2005 you will see a significant revision of UKeiG membership benefits. *eLucidate* content will focus on hot topics and information industry developments. We will commission more fact sheets in response to member demands. (Look out for [Phil Bradley](#)'s overview of the fast, safe and efficient web browser Firefox which Forbes magazine describes as: “Better than Internet Explorer by leaps and bounds.”)

Our 2005 annual meetings and training portfolio, an invaluable resource for all organisations committed to ongoing personal and professional development, has launched with relevant and practical content. It will continue to provide affordable and practical workshops and seminars for members and non-members held at venues across the UK. There will be special emphasis on issues of current interest with a practical hands-on approach. Topics will cover the following areas: legislation, e-resource management, training, managing and promoting e-information and resources and practical “know-how” sessions on specific types of information and subject-specific resources. Have a look at the programme on the website.

We will continue to be a major force for advocacy and liaison as an independent body representing and lobbying for the interests of members; co-operating with other national and international organizations. We are, in essence, a community of

practice with a formidable knowledge base that will continue to provide a strong voice in the information world. The pool of expertise at UkeiG's fingertips is extensive, and we can advise and direct you to industry experts.

We launched UKeiG at Online late last year, and were delighted to meet so many of you at Stand 203. We've had a presence at the event since 1977, and will continue to do so. This time we offered a master class on professional development, presented by committee member Shaida Dorabjee. It was received with interest and enthusiasm and is featured in this issue for those of you who couldn't make it to the event. I'd be delighted if you suggested ideas for future *eLucidate* content or submitted a paper for inclusion in future issues. For the moment, enjoy this issue, and all my best wishes for 2005.

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Analysing the Obvious - using a SWOT analysis to develop your role as an information professional

INTRODUCTION

Approaching the delivery of information services with a business sense is one area that does not always come naturally to the information professional (IP) and requires a change in behaviour. This article is based on the premise that many library and information services need to regard themselves as a business in their own right and re-brand and re-launch themselves in order to compete in the fast-moving, competitive and sometimes fickle world in which they now operate.

An objective analysis of your service is one of the first steps to take. It may be obvious to some but unfortunately it has been ignored by others, to the detriment of the service.

Analysing the service using a SWOT analysis is appropriate. By highlighting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, it is easier to map out and identify patterns that characterise the information service. In doing so, it becomes possible to concentrate on the important issues and also to focus on areas where changes are required. The

analysis can be done on the service as a whole, taking in to account the organisation's specific requirements. However, part of this analysis will include characteristics of the IPs themselves and this is summarised below for a generic IP, exemplifying common features and perhaps assumptions about the profession in the hopes that it will spur you into action as well as reaction.

STRENGTHS

Traditional skills

Taxonomies and metadata have now replaced classification and cataloguing. Handling enquiries is now research. Information architecture has become a discipline in its own right. These need to be repackaged and promoted.

The inquisitive IP

Being an IP is a passport to be inquisitive, and allows the IP to know all customers and potential customers and their needs.

Putting hidden skills to work

Hidden skills are often not fully exploited, for example, adapting, negotiating and project management.

WEAKNESSES

The name

A number of forces come into play to challenge the identity of the information service or the 'brand'.

- The old stereotyped negative image of a 'Library' is firmly carved into the psyche of our society, and indeed occasionally toe-curlingly reinforced. (At least there is brand awareness there and the word 'librarian' is universally understood.)
- Information Professional or Information Specialist or whatever - a misunderstood term that it just serves to cause confusion.
- The information service itself may or may not be associated with the library. More room for confusion.
- Other functions or individuals may also take on the role of providing 'information'.

A huge challenge, but the importance of adopting an identity and a brand cannot be over-emphasised and having one that reflects the culture of the organisation is vital.

The image

How IPs perceive themselves is important. They tend not to see themselves as leaders or initiators, so the potential for growth within the organisation is limited.

Image is also about how others perceive you.

Appropriate wardrobe and grooming, body language, tone of voice, content, as well as ability, success and competence all have to be congruent in order to make the right impact.

Confidence

The areas where information expertise can be most effective will be taken over by other, more energetic but perhaps less appropriate functions unless the IP is confident enough to step in at the right time.

The competitors

When running a business, taking one's eye off the ball when it comes to competitors, both internal and external, is often the downfall of a once-successful business. The same requirements apply to an information service.

Me? Sell?

Marketing, selling and promoting the information service which matches the way the organisation operates is no longer a mere option, but an essential part of the role. IPs often find it difficult to adopt an extrovert marketing role in promoting and selling themselves or their products.

Risk

Rapidly-changing market demands and the fickle nature of the customer means that products and services have to adapt and change at the same pace. In the profession there is a tendency to play it safe. Instead they should embrace challenges. For example, when the going gets tough, service functions or cost centres are the first to go. Being active and visible at this time, rather than retreating into the background is a risk that is probably worth taking.

Soft skills

There are many other soft skills that information managers have not developed sufficiently. These include leadership skills as well as management and influencing skills, managing culture change fostering sharing communities.

OPPORTUNITIES

A receptive audience

By far the biggest opportunity is the explosion of the availability of information combined with the realisation that the information has to be structured and managed efficiently. Strike whilst the iron is hot.

E-everything

Being able to identify and ascertain the quality and consistency of the data and also to facilitate access to e-content are surely now key roles for the IP.

Information disorder

Information disorder is seen in all parts of an organisation, and in well-established systems, paper-based as well as electronic. Core skills of organising and classifying content should be in demand.

Our information cousins

Knowledge management, records management, information systems, document management, content management, information architecture are all information-related activities. There is substantial overlap of competencies and skills and opportunities to collaborate or indeed lead are enormous.

New roles

Adopting the role of a consultant or an advisor in legal matters relating to information or being a facilitator or trainer for e-learning initiatives are just a few examples.

Evidence-based everything

As in normal business practice, collecting information, monitoring performance and benchmarking information activities should be done at every opportunity to support the business case.

THREATS

Unfortunately many of the opportunities already described can also be regarded as threats, depending on how the issue is approached (or ignored). The key attributes required to counteract the threats are the ability to recognise them – early, explore ways in which the threat can be turned into an opportunity, develop strategies for addressing the issues and to target new services effectively. Being proactive is more than a mere option.

The IT 'solution'

Given a problem that involves the managing of large amounts of information, the first port of call is often the IT department, thus focusing on the 'T' to provide the solution. That IT experts may not be the best group to address the 'information' part of the problem is now irrelevant. They have already filled the niche, and with time will refine their products and open up new opportunities, leaving the IP way behind or, at best, still providing the traditional support service.

Unless information staff play a major role at the start of such projects, what is essentially an information-based issue results in the information being supplemental to the IT-centric project rather than the focus of the project.

Knowledge management

Knowledge management (KM), however it is currently regarded, should have woken up the

complacent IP. KM has permeated its way into many businesses at lightning speed, often without the help of the library and information service.

Again, this is a discipline based on information management surely, so who are these usurpers to the information throne? KM professionals come from a variety of backgrounds with new ideas, energy and experience. IPs seem to have been taken by surprise and have not highlighted the considerable overlap and identified the opportunities for themselves (or indeed the threat).

DIY Information

The patron saint of information searching, Saint Google, has entered our home and work and gives the illusion that all is well at the input of a single search term. If IPs don't inform, persuade, promote and market themselves and their skills, they will be overlooked as providers of expertise and training in finding information.

Outsourcing

The call centre culture is affecting many businesses, including information services. Whilst outsourcing has been taken up with varying enthusiasm, if it increases, the IP should be ready to identify this potential threat and to change its strategies accordingly.

CONCLUSION

The strengths and opportunities identified indicate that there is, of course, a future for the information professional, and that it will be an exciting future. However, the prerequisite is the need to address the weakness and threats - the most challenging part of the journey to success.

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Firefox

What is Firefox?

Firefox is an internet browser, just as Microsoft Internet Explorer is a browser. That is to say, it's a piece of software that allows you move from web page to webpage, displaying the data on those pages. It's recently come to prominence with the release of version 1, which was downloaded over 5 million times in the first week, and it is expected to get an increasingly large percentage share of the