

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

browser market in the coming years.

What are the main features of Firefox?

Until other browsers, it is an open source product; that is to say that programmers can get access to the source code and produce mainly additional utilities to increase its functionality. These are being added to all the time, so unlike Internet Explorer which has not changed at all for several years, Firefox is continually able to adapt and increase in flexibility.

The main difference between Firefox and Internet Explorer (as far as users are concerned) is that it is a tabbed browser. That is to say, users can have multiple windows or tabs open at the same time in a single version of the browser window, until Internet Explorer which has to be opened a second time if a user wants to be able to move quickly from window to window. In Firefox users can simply click on an open tab and bring that to the front, making the whole process of moving from page to page very much easier.

Firefox also has improved security; it keeps your computer safe from malicious spyware and popups. Users are also prompted before Firefox downloads any programs so you only download those that you mean to. It also has a very effective way of deleting items that users have already downloaded, so the hard disk doesn't get clogged up un-necessarily.

An effective search bar is also integral to the product. Several hundred search engines are supported, as well as dictionaries, access to eBay and so on. Users simply have to type their search into the appropriate box and the search engine of their choice is searched and results are delivered directly onto a tabbed page.

Firefox includes a very effective bookmark management system that makes the whole process of adding, moving and editing bookmarks quick and simple.

Firefox is only a small download, taking seconds to download and install on a fast connection. It will also import all of the settings from Internet Explorer, so users will not lose existing bookmarks or passwords. Users can still continue to run Internet Explorer side by side with Firefox, so it isn't necessary to stop using one in order to start using another.

Various extensions add to the power of the browser; most search engines have now produced search toolbars that work with the product. Other useful extensions allow you to cut and paste not only the text, but also the title of the page and the URL with one click, rather than the clumsy approach taken by

Internet Explorer. Another extension allows users to 'nuke' elements from a page, which can be useful when printing a page with a lot of adverts; they can all be removed prior to printing. Yet another allows users to click and highlight words on a page, drag them to another part of the screen and drop them, and a search is automatically run for the highlighted text in the users search engine of choice.

More information on Firefox can be obtained from their website at <http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/> Extensions can be viewed and downloaded from <https://update.mozilla.org/extensions/?application=firefox> and a more detailed explanation of the browser and a comparison with Internet Explorer is at <http://www.philb.com/firefox.htm>

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The challenge of creating a Virtual Information Centre

Background

The UK Trade & Investment Information Centre, based in Victoria, London, has existed for over forty years as a free self service reference library where exporters can carry out research into overseas markets. Our parent body, UK Trade & Investment, is a government organisation which supports and promotes the work of UK exporters and promotes Britain as a location for inward investment.

Our users can compile contact lists of companies in foreign markets – identify agents, distributors or possible partners. They can also research market, sector and background information using a wide range of reports and statistical tools. At present, we have a comprehensive hybrid collection of over 20 electronic databases, plus 15,000 printed directories and statistics information.

From April 2005, we are moving to an electronic only environment. The centre will still be open to visitors. From around April 2006 we plan to have launched our "Virtual Information Centre" – e-resources only, available by registering on the existing UKTI website.

Why are we changing?

In common with many public access libraries, we have suffered a decline in visitor numbers in recent years. We also need to make sure our services are consistent with those already provided by UK Trade