

# Information Management

## Martin White

*A new column from Martin*

After countless columns on intranets for *eLucidate* I've persuaded the Editor to let me loose on the subject of information management.

Who first coined the term 'information management' is not clear. In 1984 a paper by Peter Vickers "Promoting the concept of information management within organisations" was published in the *Journal of Information Science* (Vol.9, pp 123-127). Peter was a member of the Research Department of Aslib at the time. He defined 'information management' as "the coordination of an organisation's information handling skills, its information technology and its information sources and stores, both internal and external". However the term failed to be widely used, and by the early 1990s there was a great deal more interest in the development of knowledge management as a discipline and as a profession.

It was Professor Don Marchand, Professor of Information Strategy at IMD, Lausanne (<http://www.donaldmarchand.com/>) who positioned information management as one of three areas of

business competence, the other two being information technology and information systems. In Marchand's view information management relates directly to the content, quality and use of information necessary for running the firm, such as operational controls, customer services and financial reporting. He wrote two superb books on the subject, *Competing with Information* and *Making the Invisible Visible*, both published by John Wiley and Sons.

Another stimulating book on information management is *Information First*, by Roger Evernden and Elaine Evernden, published by Elsevier in 2003. The authors make a very good attempt to link together information management and knowledge management, and the opening chapter sets out a set of objectives for any organisation seeking to maximise its investment in information. Far too many organisations still do not see the need to treat information as an asset. In that respect I was pleased to see that in the Government's new ICT Strategy, published in March, that there is at least

a statement to the effect that information is an asset.

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/content/government-ict-strategy>

One of the actions in the Strategy is, within the next 6-12 months:

“To recognise information as an organisational asset and to deliver improved access to clean and consistent information, the Government will develop an Information Strategy while maintaining necessary protection for sensitive information”

Of course I should not forget the report from the Government in 2008 entitled *Information Matters: building government's capability in managing knowledge and information*.

<http://gkimn.nationalarchives.gov.uk/gov-strategy.htm>

I have to say that this not was the best of reports from HM Government. In my view the issues cover a much wider area than the public sector, but I will come back to the ‘Information Matters’ agenda in my next column, as I am trying to find out the relationship between this report and the new ICT and Information Management Strategies of the Cabinet Office.

It is certainly not easy to define just what ‘information management’ means to an organisation. Last year I developed an ‘information charter’ which I challenge organisations to commit to on behalf of their employees.

<http://www.intranetfocus.com/about/information-charter>

Individually none of the eight commitments are especially challenging or difficult to implement, but committing to all of them is beyond most organisations.

For organisations implementing, or planning to implement, SharePoint in the near future, having an information management strategy is absolutely essential. There is an absolute need to take a strategic view of corporate information management requirements, ranging from records management to forms processing, so that SharePoint applications could be effectively integrated with legacy systems or even replace these systems. After all it is obvious that no organisation would be able to make effective use of an HR application if there were no HR policies or a finance system if there were no accounting policies. Yet time and time again I come across organisations that have acquired SharePoint on the basis that it will meet all corporate information requirements without any work having been carried out to determine just what those requirements are, and no assessment of the extent to which SharePoint will be able to meet those requirements.

However I will try not to let this column become a SharePoint column, and as I have mentioned above in the next issue of *eLucidate* I will come back to *Information Matters*.