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ABOUT FREE PINT

FreePint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter twice a month: it is packed with tips on finding quality and reliable business information on the Internet.

Joining is free at <<http://www.freepint.com/>> and provides access to a substantial archive of articles, reviews, jobs & events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

Please circulate this newsletter which is best read when printed out. To receive a fully formatted version as an attachment or a brief notification when it's online, visit <<http://www.freepint.com/member>>.

EDITORIAL

As you may know, I've been developing a train of thought over the last few issues of FreePint. It all started with an observation that a lot of people in the FreePint community have been asking about the skills required to become a fully-fledged information professional. This misguided me into thinking that anyone wanting to develop their information-seeking skills wants to be part of the information industry. They don't.

Moving the thinking on, and making a rash generalisation, it appears that there are two levels of Internet researcher: those who focus on information and online research for a living; and those who don't.

There seems to be agreement that information professionals have two levels of responsibility. Firstly, a responsibility to themselves to make sure they don't simply use Google but keep themselves up to date with the alternatives (including databases which are not indexed by search engines). Secondly, in educating non-professional users of the Web about the range of sources available and making them aware that there are times when it's best to use a search intermediary who does have this knowledge.

All I want to ask of non-professional information searchers is that they are aware that there are professionals available to help and that we're frustrated too at how difficult it can be to find information online. For example, see the FreePint Bar thread on trying to construct a detailed search query in Google <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b23381>>. As much as everyone moaned about how difficult it was to learn the 'command line' interfaces to commercial online databases, at least you could construct a very detailed and precise search query.

Terry Kendrick expands some of these thoughts in today's tips article, with a timely look at the skills information professionals can bring to risk management. Since resources relating to the UK Freedom of Information Act are discussed in today's feature, don't forget to check out the forthcoming 'FreePint Freedom of Information Exchange' <<http://www.freepint.com/exchange/>>.

We've had loads of nominations for the 'CILIP/FreePint Online Community Award'. This is your chance to vote for any projects which you feel have made the most of technology to bring groups of people together online <<http://www.freepint.com/events/cilip-2003/>>.

Over the coming months we'll be proactively seeking your feedback about the many things we do here at FreePint. We hope you will get involved by telling us about the products and services you would like to receive as a member of the FreePint community. In the meantime, if you have any feedback about today's newsletter then please post it at the Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/go/b23542>>.

Cheers
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FREE PINT JOBS<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

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information-related
jobs in one place.

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-- post a vacancy for
GBP 195 (EUR 285,
US\$300).

Find out more today at
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

This week's selected listings are below. All new jobs are posted to the Bar and Bar Digest (circulation 10,000+). This week's is at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b23515> and last week's at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b23437>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Records Manager<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2437>

Exciting RM role at top bank, jointly managing the team & responsible for workflows & quality - great salary & benefits on offer.

Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Researcher/Librarian<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2431>

Bright Researcher required by friendly, niche North London Human Resources Consultancy.

Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Find out more today at
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

Free Site About Unstructured Information Management

Unstructured Information Management consists of the tools and methods necessary to Store, Access & Retrieve, Navigate, and Discover Knowledge in text-based information. Knowledge about this new area is rapidly becoming a vital skill for all researchers and information professionals <http://www.unstruct.org>.

FreePint Financials<http://www.freepint.com/icc>

Research UK companies and company directors using FreePint's comprehensive database. It's free to search and see basic details. In-depth reports are available to purchase.

FreePint Freedom of Information Exchange

22nd July 2003, London, UK

This seminar will provide an overview of the Freedom of Information Act. The session will cover: practical issues to consider when implementing FOI; discrepancies between the Data Protection and Freedom of Information regimes; the role of the publication scheme; records management issues; handling FOI requests; right of appeal, complaints procedures & compliance matters; copyright issues.

<http://www.freepint.com/exchange/fi220703.htm>

Free Trial of Cogenta's Research Director to FreePint Members Only

Director is a desktop research management environment giving a single point of access to your internal and external information sources, even including subscription databases and the Deep Web. Create your own 'intelligent agents' to do the research for you; run multiple search queries simultaneously; store and manage your research and more. This is far more than a meta-search tool. For your free trial, go to: http://www.cogenta.com/form/free_trial.htm

The CILIP/FreePint Online Community Award

Since group communication and support online have become so important, the Online Community Award is your chance to nominate any online community project from any sector that has brought people with common interests together in a virtual environment:

<http://www.freepint.com/events/cilip-2003/>

MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES from Phil Ruston

Phil Ruston works for the British Library Business Information Service. He manages the business reading room and is responsible for maintaining the pages at <http://www.bl.uk/bis>

Tell us about your favourite Web sites. Check out the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>, then email penny@freepint.com.

- ADVFN <http://www.advfn.com/> - My preferred choice for stock market quotes. If you can ignore the inevitable 'ramping', the bulletin boards can be a first for breaking company news.
- Motley Fool <http://www.fool.co.uk/> - The Fool doesn't take itself too seriously. Attend the Fool School to learn about investing and then consult the advice on how to get out of debt!
- Askalix <http://www.askalix.com/> - First port of call for checking company contact details. Produced in association with Dun & Bradstreet, Europe's largest online business directory usually comes up with the answer.
- BigCharts <http://bigcharts.marketwatch.com/> - Excellent interactive charting and invaluable access to historical quotes. Complements Yahoo! Finance and keeps our student users very happy.
- Sporting Life <http://www.sporting-life.com/> - All the key sporting facts and figures in one place - the results service is incredibly fast. Almost compensates for the demise of the old print copy.

FREE PINT BAR In Association with Factiva a Dow Jones & Reuters Company

The FreePint Bar seems to get a good mix of those topics which arise time and again and those which are being discussed for the first time, even after 20,000 questions and answers.

For the former, don't even mention the numerous 'Help with my dissertation topic' postings at the Student Bar. For the latter, though, there was an item recently about summarising newsgroup discussions <http://www.freepint.com/go/b23353>. It's an interesting question, especially since the prevalence of discussion groups and blogs means we may yet need another level of such sites to summarise the latest from the sites summarising the latest from other sites!

On other topics: Do you know of any research on the usability of 'rating' systems? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b23409>; How about the cost savings of performing surgical procedures for outpatients rather than inpatients? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b23478>.

- The FreePint Bar is a free resource for FreePinters to help each other with information queries <http://www.freepint.com/bar>.
- Help for students on information-related courses is available at the FreePint Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student>.
- To have the latest postings come to you automatically by email, sign up for the twice-weekly email digest <http://www.freepint.com/member>.

See you at SLA in New York!

Factiva is proud to sponsor keynote speaker Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State on Wednesday, June 11. In addition Factiva is also sponsoring two pre-conference events on Sunday, June 8 entitled "Beyond Marketing: Consultative Strategies for Information Professionals" and "Learning is Hot: Simple, Cost-Effective Tools & Tips for Building Effective Learning Programs." To get more information, visit www.sla.org. Hope you can be there!

EVENTS

<http://www.freepint.com/events>

The AIIP Annual Conference is on the 1st-4th May in Providence, RI, US <http://www.freepint.com/go/e169>. It "... provides opportunities to meet leaders in the information industry, develop contacts for subcontracting, attend pre-conference seminars as well as free vendor training, and learn about the latest information products".

Aslib Engineering Group AGM and tour around the recently refurbished IEE Library of the IEE library is on the 1st May in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e202>.

The Mobilising Knowledge 2003 conference is on May 8th, organised by Aslib/IMI and taking place in London. For anyone interested in knowledge management <http://www.freepint.com/go/e185>.

STN will be hosting two free patent forums, in Cambridge on Tuesday 13 May and in Manchester on Friday 16 May <http://www.freepint.com/go/e182>. "These sessions will provide an overview of patent searching on STN and the databases available."

The SLA European Chapter is holding a meeting on the 13th May in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e192>. Factiva will share aspects of best practice in taxonomy design and talk about Factiva Intelligent Indexing.

The Aslib IT&C Group Conference is on the 14th-16th May in Chelmsford, Essex <http://www.freepint.com/go/e194>.

The Scottish Law Librarians Group have organised a full day course titled 'Taking Stock and Going Places' on the 15th May in Edinburgh <http://www.freepint.com/go/e198>.

If you are in California on the 19th-22th May go along to 'CPweek: annual conference of the CoP on CoPs' organised by CPsquare <http://www.freepint.com/go/e184>.

The Society of Public Information Networks (SPIN) have organised 'epi2003 - Engaging the user: e-Information and e-Services' on the 22nd May at the National Motorcycle Museum, Solihull. "Meet and discuss today's issues in electronic public information" <http://www.freepint.com/go/e203>.

Submit details of your event today for free promotion. Simply complete the form at <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

TIPS ARTICLE

<<http://www.freepint.com/issues/010503.htm#tips>>

"Risk management: an additional axis for information professionals?"

By Terry Kendrick



Terry Kendrick is Director of Information Now Ltd <<http://www.terrykendrick.co.uk>>. He originally trained as a librarian in the late 1970s but since the mid 1980s has been freelance initially as an information broker and, since 1990 as a marketing planning consultant. He has worked on assignments for over 50 large organisations in 17 different countries. He still maintains close contact with the library and information world and regularly presents workshops for the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) as well as doing occasional strategic planning-related consultancy for library and information services.

Terry teaches modules on the University of East Anglia executive MBA and is currently undertaking a PhD in risk management applications in strategic marketing planning.

Information professionals are increasingly recognising that information only has significant value when it is being used. Collections and access to databases do have some intrinsic value but will often, in themselves, be judged more as a cost than a value.

The trick for information professionals, of course, is to base their activities clearly and unambiguously around moving their organisations forward. Weasel words such as "added value" are to be avoided as, often, these no longer have the desired effect of a decade ago unless backed up with real outcomes. Much better is to clearly find the axes of value creation in the organisation (doesn't matter if it is a "for profit" or "not for profit" organisation - these axes will be there) and lock your services on to these axes.

In recent times risk management has become a central concern of most organisations, whether in the private or public sector. This is certainly evident in my consulting activities where I see risk management now as a fundamental part of board and senior management team responsibilities.

However, although "front of mind" in many organisations, there appears to be little formal relationship between risk management and in-house information services. A number of parts of the information supply chain have recognised this need and are now offering products directly supporting risk management activities. See Lexis Nexis' 'Thindex' as an example of this <<http://www.lexisnexis.com/riskwise/thindex>>. Are library and information units offering risk management support? Or are we being bypassed in the supply chain for risk management information support?

Clearly here is an opportunity to align the information service with a core organisational concern. To simply believe that, implicitly, the information service is there to support these concerns is to miss a great opportunity to make the connection explicit. Organisations have to manage risk; and the process of identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating and monitoring risk is very information-intensive. Why wait for the board or senior managers to recognise your role? Push it.

A number of factors in the organisational environment have combined to catapult risk management onto the management team agenda. These factors include:

- Political unrest / terrorism
- Industry rivalry requiring more risks to be taken to win good business
- Globalisation
- Corporate governance / recent scandals
- Stakeholders expectations (in both profit and non-profit organisations)

The UK government is also keen to improve its responses to risk and in November 2002 the Cabinet Office published its extensive report on "Risk: improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty"

<<http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2002/risk/risk/home.html>>.

Every process and activity within an organisation has risk associated with it. Some of the more immediate risks are:

- Strategic positioning, development, deployment, reputation and review
- Corporate governance: accounting, disclosure, regulatory & compliance
- Market (financial): interest rates, credit risks, currency risk, investments, liquidity
- Operations: process risk, supply chain risks
- Systems and information technology
- Human resources and management, labour strikes
- Market (marketing) - new product development, choice of segment (geographic, behavioural), changes in consumer acceptance, product choice, pricing choice, channel choices, promotional choices, sales practices
- Environmental risks
- Intellectual property protection
- Others!

Most of the major management consultancies now have risk management products on the market. Ernst & Young have developed proprietary methodology and tools, such as Risk Universe(TM) framework for classifying risks, a complexity-modelling tool to identify risk interdependencies, and RISKWeb(TM) technology to manage, monitor and report on risks (search from <<http://www.ey.com>>). Price Waterhouse Coopers are another example of a consultancy with a thriving risk management division (search for Global Risk Management Solutions from <<http://www.pwcglobal.com>>). All of these consultancy models are extremely information intensive and involve risks such as strategic, operational, financial, compliance, reputational and environmental.

In September 2002 The Institute of Risk Management (IRM), The Association of Insurance and Risk Managers (AIRMIC), and 'ALARM: The National Forum for Risk Management in the Public Sector', published the new 'Risk Management Standard'. It is clear that risk management is becoming a potential catalyst for some organisations.

The information professional's contribution to the effective deployment of risk management could be significant. Here are a few initial ideas based around a potential risk management process:

- Identifying risks - traditional information search and retrieval
- Analysing risks - turning information into intelligence
- Evaluating risks - putting this intelligence in the context of the organisation's ability to reach its objectives
- Treating risks - identifying ways to support the management of risks
- Monitoring risks - providing traditional current awareness and selective dissemination of information services

Related Free Pint links:

- 'Information and Libraries' articles in the FreePint Portal <<http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>>
- Post a message to the author, Terry Kendrick, or suggest further resources at the FreePint Bar <<http://www.freepint.com/bar>>
- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/010503.htm#feature>>
- Access the entire archive of FreePint content <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

The information professional may already be doing some of these support services already. Good. However, we may need to redefine some of our service offerings to reflect new terminologies and concepts whilst essentially using many of our core skills. It is as much about the way we do it as what we actually do.

It is evident that the information professional's natural skill base will be stretched and challenged by the range of responses that can make an input to risk management. However, with the right skill set, information professionals are in a good position to help organisations deal with risk in a meaningful way.

The killer skill set to develop is:

- Understanding of underlying risk management models to ensure that you are speaking the right language
- Information search tools and techniques should be nothing less than leading edge
- Analysis and interpretation skills may need to be developed further as information professionals develop from 'gophers' (go for it and bring it back) to 'consultants' (problem solving in context)
- Presentation skills - remembering information only has value in context and use

If you have a Chief Risk Officer or something similar, make contact today. They could be anywhere in the organisation from finance to their own department. They may be functional or enterprise-wide. They will be in profit and non-profit organisations. Chances are though that somebody somewhere has a clear responsibility for keeping the senior management team appraised on risks and their management. And you can be sure that they need all the information help and support they can get.

Get up to speed quickly -- select bibliography and webliography:

Bibliography

Shimell, Pamela (2001). *The Universe of Risk: How Top Business Leaders Control Risk and Achieve Success*. Financial Times Prentice Hall; ISBN: 0273656422

Bernstein, P. L. (1998). *Against the gods: the remarkable story of risk*. John Wiley & Sons Inc; ISBN: 0471295639

Webliography

AIRMIC's "Risk Management Standard" September 2002 <<http://www.airmic.com/RiskManagementStandard.asp#insiderms>>

Institute of Risk Management <<http://www.theirm.org>> Association of Insurance and Risk Managers <<http://www.airmic.com>> Association of Local Authority Risk Managers <<http://www.alarm-uk.com>>

Examples of private sector risk management companies with content rich websites: <<http://www.riskinfo.com>> <<http://www.riskworld.com>> <<http://www.riskwaters.com>>

TIPS - GOLD

Examples of recent reports by consultancies (check out their sites, free copies may still be available online. These things come and go!):

2002. *Managing risk in Europe 2002: a survey of mid sized firms*. London, Marsh.

2002. *Strategic Risk Management: new disciplines, new opportunities*. Boston, CFO Publishing Corp.

2001. *Understanding enterprise risk management: an emerging model for building shareholder value*, KPMG.

2000. *Risk management and the value added by internal audit*, Institute of Chartered Accountants.

GOLD

Mike Mecham touched on international law sites in his tips article in FreePint No.111 and Laurel A. Clyde looked at Weblogs, what they are, types, how they are created.

- FreePint No.111 2nd May 2002. "International Law" and "Weblogs and Blogging - Part 1" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/020502.htm>

Two years ago Trevor Harvey's looked at investment sites. Gil Feiler wrote about the development of Middle East business sites.

- * FreePint No.86, 26th April 2001. "Investment Funds" and "Searching for the ultimate Middle East business site" <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/260401.htm>>

In 2000, Emma Turner and Karyn Meaden wrote a tips article on aviation sites ranging from air accidents to the airline handbook. Rachel Arenstein wrote on how the internet can help students speak another language from using email and chatrooms to following the latest news on their favourite pop stars.

- FreePint No.61, 27th April 2000. "Top sites on the Web for Air Transport" and "The Internet as a tool for teaching English as a Foreign Language" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/270400.htm>

Four years ago Richard Nelsson listed the places where mountaineers, surfers and walkers go for details on such things as the weather, land access and climbing routes. Roddy MacLeod looked at how e-journals work, e.g. why some are free and some are subscription based.

- FreePint No.37, 29th April 1999. "Finding Outdoor Information on the Web" and "Something for nothing? Engineering e-journals" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/290499.htm>

In 1998 Martin White wrote on the importance of creating an effective intranet. FreePint's William Hann wrote about a new product from IAC.

- FreePint No.13, 30th April 1998. "Intranet Resources on the Web" and "Access IAC Direct Through InSite Pro" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/300498.htm>

FREE PINT BOOKSHELF<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>**" Building an Electronic Resource Collection - A Practical Guide "****Written by Stuart D Lee****Reviewed by Veronica Bezear**

Veronica Bezear is an Information Officer working for Surrey County Council's Adults and Community Care service. She writes here in a personal capacity.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the FreePint Bookshelf
<<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/build.htm>>
- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk
<<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/A SIN/185604422X/free pint0c>>
- "Building an Electronic Resource Collection: A Practical Guide". ISBN 185604422X, published by Facet Publishing, written by Stuart D. Lee
- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the FreePint Bookshelf at
<<http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>>

This book advertises itself as a step-by-step guide for those new to the field of e-collection development, and a useful source of best practice for the more experienced professional. It fulfils both of these criteria in a surprisingly small number of pages (125pp for the body, 147pp including glossary and index).

In only five chapters the author covers: a brief history of electronic publishing; key differences between electronic and traditional collection building; an overview of what resources are on offer; specific advice on e-books and e-journals; and detailed step by step advice on assessing, acquiring and finally delivering the dataset (one thing to get used to when reading this book is the author's use of the word 'dataset' instead of 'electronic resource').

This is very much a book that can be read sequentially, although it falls naturally into two parts - background to be aware of before you start the process, then a detailed guide through the process, including clear flowcharts to summarise key points.

It covers its subject thoroughly and when an aspect is not dealt with the reader is normally referred to another publication where they will find information on it if required. The style of the book is no-nonsense and practical just as the title suggests. The layout is clear and spacious.

Particular features which I found helpful were: flowcharts explaining key stages of the process; an overall summary of the steps to take in the process, which strangely does not form a chapter in its own right; a glossary of terms; and a rich bibliography including organisations and mailing lists as well as articles and books, with most

items on the list including web addresses. Interestingly, however, bearing in mind the subject matter, the book does not appear to have an accompanying website of its own.

My favourite section was some common-sense advice on licence agreements and what you should expect them to state clearly. Amongst other aspects this included usage statistics that will be provided, user support available and guarantees of long-term access to the material. This is probably one of the first sections I would refer to if buying a new electronic resource, along with its excellent evaluation checklist, which the author acknowledges is composed of work collated from other institutions.

There is, perhaps a slight bias in the book towards academic institutions, but this is only really noticeable in the references and examples given and does not limit the usefulness of the book. I have no hesitation in recommending this book both as a quick read to get an overview of the subject and also as something to keep as a handy reference tool to refer to when required.

Free Pint Forthcoming Articles

* Visual Representation of Information * Business Continuity and Recovery - An Asian Perspective * Internet Resources on IT * Family History and Genealogy * Alternative Search Strategies * Online Discussion Groups * Vendors * Children and the Internet * Charities * Writing for the Web *

If you have a suggestion for an article topic or would like to write for Free Pint then please contact <penny@freepint.com> or sign up for the Author Update at <<http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>>.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

" UK Freedom of Information Act 2000: The Road To Implementation "
By Stephen Wood

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Steve lectures on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes on web development and management, knowledge management, network management and information policy. Research interests include knowledge management and freedom of information legislation. Before moving into academia Steve worked for HM Treasury as Intranet and extranet manager.

Introduction

In March 2001 Richard Wakeford wrote an article in FreePint <<http://www.freepint.com/issues/150301.htm>> outlining the key issues surrounding Freedom of Information (FOI). This article aims to look at the UK Freedom of Information Act two years on from this date as UK public sector authorities plan and develop strategies to ensure full compliance with the Act by the final deadlines in 2005.

The UK Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000 gives citizens access to information held by public authorities, enabling them to participate "in the discussion of policy issues and so improve the quality of government decision making" and "holding government and other bodies to account". It applies to all public authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland is implementing its own legislation). Details of all the bodies covered are listed in the full text <<http://www.legislation.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000/20000036.htm>>. Secondary legislation has also been passed since 2000 covering issues such as the timetable for implementation and fees regulations (currently in draft form) <<http://www.lcd.gov.uk/foi/secleg.htm>>.

Background

Since Wakeford's article, Government responsibility for the Freedom of Information Act (and Data Protection) has switched from the Home Office to the Lord Chancellor's Department <<http://www.lcd.gov.uk/foi/>>. The Information Commissioner <<http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk>> is responsible for the enforcement of the Act and the promotion of good practice across the public sector.

A detailed examination of the many features of the Act is not possible within the scope of this article. For a detailed critique, the article by Tom Cornford -- "The Freedom of Information Act 2000: genuine or sham?" (Web Journal of Legal issues, June 2001) <<http://webjcli.ncl.ac.uk/2001/issue3/cornford3.html>> is recommended.

There is now a statutory right of access to information for UK citizens for the first time. The scope is wider than many other comparable FOI schemes from central departments such as the Treasury to schools, hospital and universities. Less welcome features of the Act are the restrictive nature of many exemptions to disclosure, policy information in particular and the right of Government ministers to intervene to sign certificates to stop the release of information. The key issue in the early stages of the operation of the Act after 2005 will be how the phrase "would, or would be likely to, prejudice the specified interest" will be interpreted by the authorities concerned and the Information Commissioner in the enforcement role. How the public interest test will be applied to certain non-blanket exemptions to force release will also be an important testing point.

FreePint Freedom of Information Exchange ...

... takes place in London on the 22nd July 2003
<http://www.freepint.com/exchange/fi220703.htm>

The timetable for implementation was released in November 2001; it proposed staged implementation of the Act as follows:

- November 2002: Central government publication schemes
- February 2003: Local government publication schemes
- June 2003: Police and CPS publication schemes
- October 2003: Health service publication schemes
- February 2004: Schools, universities and any remaining authorities publication schemes
- January 2005: Full implementation - full legally enforceable right of access to information - authorities will have to deal with requests

The timetable allows for a phased implementation and an opportunity for training and new practices for records management to be put in place. However there has been criticism for such a delay. The Campaign for Freedom of Information <<http://www.cfoi.org.uk>> called the delay "totally unjustifiable", citing the 12 month implementation period in Canada and Ireland. The cynical amongst us may point out that the 2005 implementation date may also prevent any damaging releases before a likely general election in 2005.

Until the full right of access comes into force in 2005 the current non-statutory Code of Practice on Access to Government Information will operate for Central Government and related agencies <<http://www.lcd.gov.uk/foi/codpracgi.htm>>. The Code currently has a low profile and in 2001 there were 4668 requests under the Code compared with 5969 in 2000 <<http://www.lcd.gov.uk/foi/codprac01/codprac01.pdf>>.

Publication Schemes

In terms of current activity visible to the public, publication schemes will have the most impact until 2005, when full rights to request information come into force. Publication schemes specify the classes of information that the public authority publishes or intends to publish, specify the manner in which information in each class will be published and specify whether the material is intended to be available to the public free of charge or on payment. All publication schemes must be approved by the Information Commissioner. A publication scheme can be in the form of a hard or electronic copy.

As stated in the timetable, two types of publication scheme are currently available: central government and local government. One of the most comprehensive is the scheme from the Ministry of Defence, who have developed a

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dedicated website for FOI and their publication scheme <<http://www.foi.mod.uk>>. The scheme uses a taxonomy and allows searching, and offers a new perspective in drawing together the wide range of information the MOD publishes.

The profile of the schemes appears to differ, with only some Departments offering a clear link from their home pages. The quality of the information architecture and usability would also appear to vary greatly.

Publication schemes clarify the right of the public to access information free of charge, for example the HM Treasury scheme states they will supply a printed copy free of charge of any document on their website to those without Internet access <http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/about/publication_scheme/about_pub_detail.cfm>.

Local authority schemes have been public since February 2003 and have also made use of the web as the primary route for accessing schemes. The Local Government Association <<http://www.lga.gov.uk/OurWork.asp?lsection=59&ccat=716>> has been playing an important role in developing Local Government schemes, using several councils as pilot schemes. Again the prominence of publication schemes from authority to authority tends to differ. Many schemes are hard to find and are often not available under "Freedom of Information" in A-Z indexes. West Sussex council <<http://www.westsussex.gov.uk/yourcouncil/ppri/foi/home.htm>> has used the tools made available by APLWAS (Accessible and Personalised Local Authority Websites) <<http://www.aplaws.org.uk>>, the information management tools they make available include a category list. Sussex developed their own category list from this and included citizen focus groups in their testing.

In Higher Education, the Joint Information Systems Council (JISC) are coordinating work on a model publication scheme for HE that will have to be approved by the Information Commissioner. This scheme is currently in draft format <http://www.jisc.ac.uk/legal/index.cfm?name=liis_free>.

It is currently unclear what plans there are in providing a central website that will act as a routemap for the 88,000 or so publication schemes that will have to be implemented. A list of the "first wave" of publication schemes is available on the Information Commissioner's website <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk/ps_fw.html> though without the relevant links to the schemes.

Implications

Freedom of Information will place a new focus on Information retrieval in the public sector. Research completed by the Home Office as preparation to the Act estimated that there would be approximately 40,000 requests in the first year of operation. A research report on public sector preparation by Anite <<http://www.aniteps.com>> (IT applications supplier) in 2002 highlighted that many organisations were slipping behind schedule and less than half the organisations affected by the Act were making real progress. Also, half the

Unstructured Information Management – New Market and Technology Guide

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It is intended as a tutorial and market guide on how to select a solution suitable for dealing with unstructured textual information. The current state of the market is evaluated and recommendations are given on which types of systems are most suitable for different tasks.

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respondents saw the responsibility as a legal issue lying with their legal department.

There are major implications for UK public authorities in terms of the new emphasis that has to be placed on records management. To quote the Public Records Office (PRO) "Any freedom of information legislation is only as good as the quality of the records to which it provides access". The LA Record in January 2002 talked of a "boom time" for records managers in light of the Freedom of Information Act.

The target for all Government records being managed electronically by 2004 is a key part of the strategy in ensuring the success of the Act. There is a Code of Practice on records management under section 46 of the Freedom of Information Act <http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/foi_code.htm>. The PRO provides a wide range of invaluable guidance and advice on records management, generally <<http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/default.htm>> and specially focused on FOI <<http://www.pro.gov.uk/recordsmanagement/access/default.htm>>, in particular model action plans on records management for different sectors. There is also advice available on selecting an electronic records management (ERM) system that is compliant with the PRO, including functional requirements and lists of approved suppliers.

One of the key issues for those requesting information under the Act will be finding a routemap through the maze of government boundaries and information types, and ascertaining the types of information held. The inforoute project for central government, developed by HMSO <<http://www.inforoute.hmso.gov.uk/>> offers a way to search for information held by government departments but not routinely published. The project has been developed around a core meta data standard for the contributing departments and offers an important insight to understanding the work of a department before submitting a request. This should hopefully help the speed and clarity of the request for both the requester and public authority.

There are clear training needs for public authorities to ensure staff understand FOI and how it effects their work. Courses are now

available from companies such as TFPL <<http://www.tfpl.com>> and ASLIB <<http://www.aslib.co.uk>>. A more legal approach is available from law firms such as Masons <<http://www.masons.com>>.

Many organisations will be able to learn much from the experience of complying with terms of the 1998 Data Protection Act with regards to records management, cultural change and training. Early evidence is pointing towards many organisations combining responsibility for Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

Implications for Business

One of the key implications for business is from the angle of competitive intelligence: the information your competitors may be able to gain about your business activities from information you have shared with UK public authorities and vice versa. The Constitution unit at UCL has produced a useful guide entitled "A guide for business to the Freedom of Information Act" <<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/constitution-unit>>. There are clear implications for information transfer policies and procedures between private and public sector. All organisations are recommended to review this area before 2005.

Awareness amongst the business community at present does not appear to be high and there is much to be learned from the experience of business in Ireland in the way the Freedom of Information Act has been used. In Ireland for example in 2000 an individual sought copies of invoices paid to 18 telecommunications companies by the Irish Government. Eircom plc argued the records were commercially sensitive. Despite the possible competitive damage, the Irish Information Commissioner ruled that the it was in the public interest to release. Further examples can be found on the index of decisions available on Irish Information Commissioner's website <http://www.oic.gov.ie/220e_3C2.htm>.

Conclusion

David Clarke, the Minister who initiated the work on preparing Freedom of Information Act back in 1997, points to the challenges ahead. In conversation with the author in 1999, Clarke stated "I think we are one of the most secretive of all modern industrial societies, that culture has got to change". The UK Freedom of Information Act has the potential to transform the relationship between society and government in terms of transparency and openness, leading to more dialogue, informed policy and decision making. The scope of the Act is truly impressive from schools to central government departments, however Richard Thomas, the new Information Commissioner, has a vital role to play in interpreting the nature of "Public Interest". In terms of preparation, records management lies at the heart of the success of the Freedom of Information Act.

The implementation of the Act over the next few years is a vital period in terms of clear routes to information being available when requests start. The low profile of publication schemes currently does not bode well for starting to raise the public profile of FOI. Information about effectiveness at present is not available. The ease of navigation of these schemes will be vital: in terms of taxonomy development, information professionals have a vital role to play. The profession as a whole also has to make great efforts to promote the Act and the benefits, plus lobby for legal enhancements and improvements when necessary.

Finally

A quick plug for a new Web Log I have set up on FOI: <<http://foia.blogspot.com>> containing news, views and information about FOI developments in the UK. Please email me with any information for inclusion.

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