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ABOUT FREE PINT

FreePint is an online network of information searchers. 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://web.freepint.com/>.

EDITORIAL

London had its first snow of the year last week. I was fully prepared, donning my fur hat and boots, as I'm heading off to Moscow and St. Petersburg on holiday next week. A friend gave me a copy of an invaluable little book "Culture Smart Guide to Russia" <http://www.cultureshockguides.com/>. These useful pocket-sized guides are great for both social or business travel and cover many other countries too.

The Hutton Report was released in the UK last week. The report strongly criticised the BBC while largely absolving the UK Government of blame in connection with the suicide of weapons expert David Kelly. Opinion polls showed that people trusted the BBC more than the government. The BBC apologised and the chairman, and director general resigned. The whole affair has opened the BBC up to wide criticism but has opened up the government to even more criticism by an outraged British public.

Was the BBC kow towing to Tony Blair's government? Russian Media Minister Mikhail Lesin certainly thought it was. A Russian news agency reported that he was amazed by the repentant tone of the BBC. "Such statements painfully resemble those of Soviet writers responding to the criticisms of the Communist Party during the years of Soviet stagnation," Mr Lesin said. He also warned the BBC against "sterile coverage, not only of Iraq but also of other government-related activities" <http://digbig.com/3par>.

Like many other former Soviet republics, Ukraine has undergone significant political and economic changes since independence. In Vasyl Pawlowky's article on researching business information in Ukraine and its neighbouring countries, he shows that with good language skills it is possible to find information, but there is still a climate of corruption. He highlights that after recent fraud scandals, business scrutiny and corporate governance is on the agenda world-wide and not just in countries with newly developing economies.

Time will tell whether the Hutton report will have ramifications for all journalists who want to expose wrong-doing in the public interest. One thing however, is certain - in January 2005, the Freedom of Information Act comes into force and public bodies in the UK will have a legal obligation to be open and accountable both to general citizens and the media. Paul Pedley examines this important legislation in our other article today. His full report can be purchased at <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>.

As the chill winds of winter blow over this little island, I think I'm prepared for the far more extreme Russian winter but I'll keep you posted.

Enjoy your FreePint

Annabel Colley Editor
FreePint <annabel.colley@freepint.com>

FREEPINT JOBS
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

The FreePint Jobs Update is being circulated widely every two weeks. This free newsletter now has 1,100 direct subscribers and is posted at the Bar and in the Bar Digest (circulation 11,000).

To see the Jobs Update No.66 visit <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27440> and to subscribe, modify your account at <http://web.freepint.com>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Records Reference & Compliance Manager
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2951>
Join RM team, responsible for records reference system, manage staff, develop strategy for e-records and paper records.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment

Intranet Content/Library/Information Management
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j2978>
New position for proactive intranet content person with excellent I.T. skills and info management qualification to develop new systems.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

NB: There are 35 other jobs in the current edition of the Jobs Update <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27440>.

VIP and VIP Eye -- Second issues now available

The second edition of VIP includes an in-depth review of Hemscott Company Guru and guest comment from Clare Hart, CEO Factiva.

VIP Eye analyses business information industry news announcements and alerts you to new products and product updates.

Full details and samples available at: <http://www.vivaVIP.com/>

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Factiva offers a wide range of learning preferences to ensure that we have the right tools to suit you. Expert-led face to face and online sessions at introductory or advanced levels are conducted in cities around the world. View the full schedule and register <http://www.factiva.com/learningschedule>. Factiva Learning Programs, a comprehensive collection of learning options.

"An Introduction To Freedom Of Information"

ISBN 1-904769-03-9

This report covers the role that publication schemes play in the UK's freedom of information regime; the rights of applicants; the handling of freedom of information requests; complaints procedures; the exemptions; fees and charges; the importance of having good records management systems and procedures in place; and the interface between data protection and freedom of information.

<http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>

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MY FAVOURITE TIPPLES
by Diane Barnett

Diane Barnett is an Information Officer (Rare Disorders) for the charity 'Contact a Family' which advises for families with disabled children, and also covers rare disorders in adults <http://www.cafamily.org.uk>.

- <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/encyclopedia.html> - Medline Plus, the online encyclopaedia of the US National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

- <http://www.emedicine.com/search.html> - the search page of eMedicine, which has a most extensive list of rare disorder information.

- <http://www.tagish.co.uk/> Tagish - huge resource of contact details for government departments, hospitals, etc.

- <http://www.royalmail.com/> - Free postcode/address finder programme from the Royal Mail.

- <http://news.google.co.uk/> - Excellent site to get the latest news.

EVENTS

United Kingdom:

- "eLearnInternational World Summit 2004" 18th - 19th February <http://www.freepint.com/go/e241>

- "Knowledge Sharing, Creativity & Innovation" 24th February <http://www.freepint.com/go/e293>

- "Communities of Practice in Action" 25th February 2004 <http://www.freepint.com/go/e292>

- "Getting the best out of free Internet patent sources" 26th February <http://www.freepint.com/go/e297>

- "Building and sustaining a Collaborative Working Environment" 4th - 5th March <http://www.freepint.com/go/e274>

- "The Adaptable Enterprise" 15th March <http://www.freepint.com/go/e294>

Spain:

- "Gartner Symposium/ITxpo Barcelona 2004" 14th - 17th March <http://www.freepint.com/go/e270>

Australia:

- "Re-designing Your Intranet 2004" 16th - 19th March <http://www.freepint.com/go/e282>

Penny <penny@freepint.com>

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

The Bar seems to get busier and busier and mentions of it continually crop up all over the place. It's also nice to see stronger links forming between members of different Willco communities <http://www.willco.com/customers/>. A strong relationship already exists between the Bar and the VIP Lounge, where Editor Pam Foster is asking for feedback on Net Snippets <http://web.vivavip.com/forum/Lounge/read.php?i=25> and ICC's Plum <http://web.vivavip.com/forum/Lounge/read.php?i=23>. VIP number 2 is just out, with an in-depth review of Hemscott's Company Guru and CEO Insight contribution from Factiva's Clare Hart <http://www.vivaVIP.com>.

Back at the Bar, and I'm sure someone can help find a UK subscription agent for Portuguese journals and magazines <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27390>? What about data on how much sports equipment is sold over the Internet <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27395> or the surprisingly complicated enquiry about the number of car insurance policies which include breakdown cover <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27398>? It is amazing how a seemingly simple query can often include so many complicating factors.

Webmasters are always well supported at the Bar. There's been plenty of sympathy for the person who is taking over management of a charity's site and who can't get control of the old pages <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27219>. Likewise, someone else is trying to stop email addresses being 'ripped' from their site <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27425>. The emotion also runs high when an invaluable site is unavailable for a period of time, and there was much elation at the return of Oneacross.com <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27141>. When you lose something valuable that you've taken for granted, it makes you very glad when it returns.

Finally, it's nice to see suggestions for the redistribution of surplus books <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27330>, and help with interview technique <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27323>. If you're looking for a job yourself, or even just monitoring your employment value, then sign up for the twice-monthly Jobs Update <http://www.freepint.com/go/b27440>.

William Hann <william.hann@freepint.com> Managing Editor, FreePint

The FreePint Bar is where you can get help with your tricky research questions, for free! <www.freepint.com/bar>

Help with study for information-related courses is available at the FreePint Student Bar <www.freepint.com/student>.

Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <http://web.freepint.com/>.

TIPS ARTICLE

"Disintegrating Digital Fences: Finding Business Information in Ukraine and its Neighbouring Countries "
By Vasyl Pawlowsky

Vasyl (Bill) Pawlowsky spent one year at McGill University's McLennan Library Reference Department and seven years as a Senior Information Specialist at Pratt & Whitney Canada in Montreal, Canada, before departing for Ukraine in 1999. After spending two years as a consultant on democracy development issues and a year-and-a-half as a journalist/editor of a Kyiv-based business weekly, he returned back into his profession as Head of Information Services at the Kyiv-based Law Firm Magister & Partners <http://www.magisters .com/> in January 2003. In addition to his position at Magister & Partners he is Advisor on International Cooperation for the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, a Kyiv-based NGO specializing in public opinion polling and sociological research.

There are many different business websites available on the Internet. However when the question deals with countries in newly developing economies, in particular Ukraine, Poland and Russia, the task at hand becomes a little more difficult. The 'disintegration of digital fences' in the region is primarily due to the fact that businesses, governments, the financial sector and regulatory bodies understand that the lingua franca of the business world is English. As a result, many efforts have been made to provide information that is comprehensible to the global community. This review will cover three useful sources that provide reliable business information in the given geographic territory: stock exchanges; specialized websites, including English language media; and sites funded by the international development community.

Taking stock

The equities market in Ukraine and many of its neighbours is not as developed as in market economies; however, I have found that the stock exchanges and their affiliated projects provide one of the most reliable sources of business information. The First Securities Trading System <http://www.pfts.com/eng/>, Ukraine's largest stock exchange, runs a site called iStock <http://www.istock.com.ua/eng/> that has as its objective creating "a modern disclosure system in the securities market for provision of informational transparency of the issuers' corporate activities". The system provides companies with the means to file annual reports, and provides company news free of charge. The reports date back to 1997 and a news archive allows for searching on company news. Russia, with a much larger equity market, clearly has a number of sources, however, one of my favourite sites is <http://www.rustocks.com>. Like its Ukrainian counterpart, Rustocks.com's aim is "to facilitate the process of information disclosure for issuers". With free registration, there is a fair amount of information on Russian firms that are trading on the Russian markets; however, like many other free services, it offers a premium service for which you can pay. I am unaware of any similar sites in Poland, though I have found the Warsaw Stock Exchange site <http://www.wse.com.pl/index_e.asp> useful and it does provide basic information on its listed companies, many of which have a solid web presence providing full disclosure and much of their information in English.

Getting the goods

Early last fall, one of our firm's lawyers called me asking if I had seen the latest on the United States Trade Commission's decision to increase tariffs on a number of different products originating from Russia and Ukraine. "I need to know all the different manufacturers of the products on the list and their contact information by tomorrow afternoon," he hastily requested. Fortunately, I was familiar with the Industrial Ukraine site

<http://www.ukrindustrial.com/en/> which allowed me to track down the required information for Ukrainian producers. One caveat, although the site lists 5,500 enterprises listed on the Russian-language site, less then half of these are available in the English language version. Nonetheless, the site allows one to search by product or service and provides users with contact information, products produced, and like many commercial projects, a region or area in which domestic businesses are looking for international partners.

Trying to find the Russian manufacturers of the products needed was much more difficult, often first finding an article which referred to both a company and a product, then searching for the company's website, often found on the B2B Russian portal <http://www.rusmarket.com/>. For more general business information, it is well worth checking Pravda's site <http://english.pravda.ru/>, as well as The Economist's country profile for Russia <http://www.economist.com/countries/Russia/m oreover.cfm>. I highly recommend The Economist country profiles as a starting point for any research on the region.

A good place to start for company information in Poland is the Polish Chamber of Commerce at <http://www.kig.pl/en/>. Its searchable company database, which covers nearly 2 million basic company records and more than 100,000 full records, can be searched using very basic boolean searching, though you will have to know the Polish spelling to find what you are looking for. In addition, a fee-based service of obtaining credit reports on Polish companies listed on the site is available.

Two other sites worth mentioning are the <http://www.poland.com> portal, due to its simple uncluttered look and useful links, and the Warsaw Business Journal at <http://www.wbj.pl/>, which provides current news stories, and promises soon to provide a search facility of their archives. For the most part, specialized sites can be very useful, though one should not forget the local traditional print media that has migrated to the Web.

The following two sites both require registration. The Kyiv Post <http://www.kyivpost.com> has long been a source of information for the expat community in Kyiv (or Kiev), though little content is freely available. The two year old Kyiv

Weekly <http://www.kyivweekly.com> provides some business information though not as in-depth as the former; however, there has been a change in ownership and the publication has increased in substance. Other sources that are available for free are the digest of the Kyiv based newspaper The Day <http://www.day.kiev.ua/DIGEST/>, the weekly analytical publication Dzerkalo tyzhnia <http://www.mirror-weekly.com/> and Ukrainska Pravda <http://www.pravda.com.ua/en/>. Each of these publications, to a certain extent, covers domestic economic and business issues, and often provides very solid analysis by some of Ukraine's best analytical journalists.

Running a tight ship

Ukraine, according to Transparency International's <http://www.transparency.org/> Corruption Perception Index is one of the most corrupt nations on the planet. And although it may be perceived as such, one only has to recall recent fraud scandals involving the likes of the U.S.-based Enron and Worldcom and most recently the Italian dairy company Parmalat, which forces westerners to remove their rose-coloured glasses and start truly questioning corporate governance practices. Like everywhere else in the world, this issue has become very topical. In fact, there are a number of sites clearly dedicated to this issue.

In Ukraine, the International Finance Corporation supports and runs the Ukraine Corporate Development Project <http://www2.ifc.org/ukraine/ucdp/ukr.htm>, while in Russia the OECD/World Bank - Russian Corporate Governance Roundtable supports the Corporate Governance in Russia project <http://www.corp-gov.org/index.php3>. In Poland, the Warsaw Stock Exchange touches on this issue to a somewhat lesser degree (see above). The Center for International Private Enterprise <http://www.cipe.org/> also covers corporate governance globally and lists its global partners <http://www.cipe.org/programs/global/index.php>. Among those listed for the regions covered by this review are some of each of the country's most respected think-tanks. These are worth examining when trying to get a better understanding about business and even the economic environment in which businesses must function.

It would not be fair to say that a great deal of information is readily available, but with time we hope the situation will improve. Until it does, many of the links provided should assist anyone interested in business information in the region with a good starting point. Clearly, those without the handicap of language will be far more successful in finding their needle in a haystack.

FreePint

Steve Lee is Web Content Manager for Consumer Direct Online. Consumer Direct, a new telephone and online consumer advice service supported by the DTI, will be launched in mid-2004, and rolled out across England, Scotland and Wales by 2007.

Before taking up his present post, he held a range of information management posts in British Trade International (now UK Trade & Investment), including information researcher, database and website manager, and Information Manager for the Organisation's Freedom of Information Act Publication Scheme.

Related links:

- Find out more about this book online at the FreePint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/success.htm>

- "Building and Running a Successful Research Business" ISBN 0910965625, published by CyberAge Books.

- Search for and purchase any book from Amazon via the FreePint Bookshelf at <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf>

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"Building & Running a Successful Research Business"
Written by Mary Ellen Bates
Reviewed by Stephen Lee

How many of us, faced with another boring task, or more delays on our journey home from the office, have fantasized about using our information skills and working for ourselves? Mary Ellen Bates, author of 'Building & Running a Successful Research Business', has run her firm, Bates Information Services <http://www.BatesInfo.com/>, in the U.S. since 1991, and here shares her experience and offers advice for the prospective independent information professional (IIP).

As the author makes clear, this career choice is about more than information skills alone. The book is divided into four sections - Getting started, Running a business, Marketing, and Researching. Bates first considers what working as an IIP actually entails, and the personal qualities and discipline likely to be required. She then goes on to focus in some detail on the options for establishing and running a business (this is a commercial enterprise, after all), and then on marketing and promoting the firm. Having laid this foundation, Bates gets to grips with the nitty-gritty of information work, and the specific services an IIP might provide to clients.

As Bates stresses, working as an IIP isn't simply a matter of sitting at home, surfing the web, and getting paid for the privilege. Professional skills certainly have their part to play; the ability to conduct a successful reference interview, for example, and a thorough awareness of available sources, are as valid in this world as they are in others. To succeed, however, an IIP needs to offer his or her own unique product to clients. In practice, this may well mean integrating open access sources with charged for information services, and with other investigatory and analytical techniques, to get at the information the client wants, and to present it in a manner he or she can use.

There's also some food for thought for those of us in the corporate world. Much of the advice on marketing an information service translates equally well elsewhere, as do the ideas for raising your profile in the professional world - for example, through writing or speaking, or through involvement with professional organisations.

An accessible style makes this title easy to read; it's also illustrated with plenty of personal examples, and hints and tips from other practitioners. Chapters are dotted with sidebars and panels offering practical advice to the reader. The book does have a strong (though not exclusively) US orientation, however, and the contacts and examples included may need some interpretation before being employed elsewhere.

Building & Running a Successful Research Business offers a practical introduction to working as a freelance information professional. It makes it clear that this career option may not be for everyone - but if you're doing more than idle thinking on that delayed journey home, it offers a good place to start your homework.

FreePint Forthcoming Articles

- Marketing for the Info-entrepreneur
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- Electronic Surveillance and Personal Data
- Care and Early Years Education
- History and Historians
- Visual Representation of Information
- Implications of New Law on Copyright

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>.

FREE PINT

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FEATURE ARTICLE
"10 things you should know about the UK's Freedom of Information regime"
By Paul Pedley

[This article is an introduction to a topic which is covered more comprehensively in the FreePint report 'Freedom of Information' ISBN 1-904769-03-9 <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>]

The Freedom of Information Act 2000 promotes greater openness and accountability. It comes fully into force on 1st January 2005. From that date, everyone will have a legal right to request access to all types of "recorded" information held by public bodies. It is likely that these rights will be used not only by members of the public, but also by the media and by pressure groups. The Act covers around 100,000 public authorities such as central government, local government, further and higher education, the police and the National Health Service. There will be a presumption that the information will have to be supplied within 20 working days.

According to TSO (The Stationery Office) a staggering 97% of Whitehall departments are worried about fast-approaching regulations, such as Freedom of Information. Research also found that 30% of government departments did not know what the deadline was for compliance.

Listed below are ten key points about the UK's freedom of information system that everyone should be aware of:

1. Freedom of Information requests under the UK legislation can be from anywhere in the world, and applicants do not have to refer to the Act in their request. There is no formal application procedure. An application simply has to:

- be in writing (this could be transmitted by electronic means such as by email or by fax so long as it is received in legible form and is capable of being used for subsequent reference
- state the name of the applicant and their address for correspondence
- it must describe the information being requested

The requestor may specify the format in which the information should be provided, and the authority must comply where this is "reasonably practicable". The requested format could be:

- in a summary written form
- in electronic form
- by inspection of documents on the authority's premises

2. The Act is fully retrospective

Public authorities will be obliged to provide information recorded before and after the Act was passed. With most of the exemptions, there is an obligation on the public authority to confirm or deny that they hold the information, even if they ultimately do not disclose it because of the "public interest" test. To be able to comply with this obligation, public bodies need to have good records management practices and procedures in place. A civil servant commented to me some time ago that they were more concerned about whether they would have the ability to confirm or deny that they held the information, than they were with disclosing it.

3. The right of access relates to "information" rather than
to documents

Public authorities cannot simply consider whether a document as a whole is covered by an exemption. Instead, they must consider whether any part of the document is covered by one or more exemptions; and where parts of a document are not covered by an exemption, an authority must make such information available in response to a request for information under section 1(1) of the Act.

4. Public authorities have to consider the "public interest" in disclosing information

There are a number of exemptions to the general right of access to information. Most of the exemptions have to be considered in two stages. This means that the public authority must first decide whether the exemption applies to all or part of the information requested and, if so, the public authority then has to consider whether the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. These are known as the qualified exemptions. The Information Commissioner's view is that there is likely to be a public interest in disclosing information (or confirming or denying its existence) where this would:

- further understanding of and participation in the

public debate of issues of the day
- facilitate the accountability and transparency of public authorities for decisions taken by them
- facilitate the accountability and transparency in the spending of public money
- allow individuals to understand decisions made by public authorities affecting their lives and, in some cases, assist individuals in challenging those decisions
- bring to light information affecting public safety.

5. A "rich" publication scheme under the Act is the best way to avoid problems with individual requests

Publication schemes are a means by which a public authority can make a significant amount of information available routinely, without waiting for someone to specifically request it. Where public authorities automatically make available a significant amount of information, they should have fewer FOI requests to deal with.

Section 21 of the Act says that information which is reasonably accessible to the applicant otherwise than under section 1 is exempt information. So, if the information is already available under the authority's publication scheme, the authority simply needs to direct the requester to the scheme and explain how they can obtain the information they need.

Once the right of access to information is fully in force, it will be good practice for authorities to keep a log of requests made for information which is not included in their publication schemes and to consider adding the class of information into which it falls as a new class to be covered by the scheme. The log itself could also fall into a class for publication under the scheme.

6. There is separate legislation for Scotland, but the UK legislation still covers the activities of some public authorities in Scotland

Scotland has its own freedom of information legislation, the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 which applies to public authorities undertaking devolved functions.

The UK Freedom of Information Act 2000 applies to certain public bodies that are located in Scotland - for example, those parts of the Ministry of Defence or the Department for International Development which are based in Scotland.

7. The Freedom of Information Act extends the right of access to personal data to include unstructured personal data

Unstructured personal data means any recorded information held by a public authority other than information which is recorded as part of, or with the intention that it should form part of, any set of information relating to individuals to the extent that the set is structured by reference to individuals or by reference to criteria relating to individuals.

Section 69 of the Act inserts s9A into the Data Protection Act, but this only relates to public authorities.

8. There are examples of freedom of information requests and how they were handled available from other jurisdictions

In order to prepare for the right of access to information which takes place in January 2005, public authorities may wish to look at how freedom of information requests have been handled in other jurisdictions. For example, there is a searchable database of requests under Canada's Access to Information Act at <http://faculty.maxwell.syr.edu/asroberts/foi/track/index.html>.

9. It is an offence to destroy information with a view to avoiding disclosure

Where a valid request for information has been made to a public authority under section 1 of the Act or section 7 of the Data Protection Act, a person is guilty of an offence if he alters, defaces, blocks, erases, destroys or conceals any record held by the public authority, with the intention of preventing the disclosure by that authority of all, or any part, of the relevant information (section 77).

If a record due for destruction is known to be the subject of a request for information, destruction should be delayed until after the request has been processed.

10. The Freedom of Information regime does have implications for business

While the Freedom of Information Act gives citizens a right of access to information held by public authorities, it does nevertheless have implications for private sector organisations. For example, where companies do business with public sector organisations, they need to be aware that the s45 code of practice administered by the Department for Constitutional Affairs says that when entering into contracts public authorities should refuse to include contractual terms which purport to restrict the disclosure of information held by the authority and relating to the contract beyond the restrictions that are permitted by the Act.

Paul Pedley is not a lawyer and is not able to give legal advice. The contents of this article do not constitute legal advice and should not be relied upon in that way.

These areas are explored in more detail in the report "Freedom of Information" ISBN 1-904769-03-9 which is available from FreePint <http://www.freepint.com/shop/report/>. The report also covers areas such as the rights of applicants; fees and charges; records management; complaints procedures; copyright and freedom of information; and the interface between data protection and freedom of information.