Free Pint ®

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<http://www.freepint.com/
issues/070302.htm>

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Editorial

We can't help it. It's part of our nature. Information professionals just like to help. We enjoy the challenge and stimulation of searching for information, researching a topic, sharing the results. We are proud of our profession and the stereotypes annoy us. When we get a chance to explain what we actually do then we get a genuine respect and interest in our work.

I know this as a qualified information scientist, every information professional knows this, and it's been great to see the responses to the current topic at the Student Bar which asked "Why did you choose librarianship?" <http://www.freepint.com/go/s2164>.

I had two aims when starting Free Pint. One was to promote myself and the services I offered as a freelance information consultant. The other was to offer the information profession a way to market itself and the value of professional research skills.

Four years later, and members of the information profession have done themselves proud. They have produced an archive of over two hundred original fully researched articles on the Free Pint Web site, and fourteen thousand answers to research questions at the Bar.

However, there must be many topics we haven't covered yet, and thousands of personal collections of URLs for a vast range of topics which are crying out to be shared with others. Free Pinters love to read Information-related case studies and hear discussion around the issues of importance to the profession.

So, why don't YOU write an article for Free Pint?

Is there a research topic you know a bit about? Do you have an opinion on a professional issue? If you have an unusual job title then could you tell members about your daily activities? Can you think of a way of inspiring the next generation of information professionals who are working towards a qualification or have recently graduated?

As well as helping other Free Pinters, you will also be promoting yourself and your organisation by demonstrating your understanding of a topic. You can also add a biography paragraph at the end of the article which will be widely seen as we near our 50,000th member.

If you have an idea for an article, then please write to Free Pint's Editor Rex Cooke by email to <rex@freepint.com> or see the information for authors at http://www.freepint.com/author.htm

Today's issue is packed with valuable contributions from Free Pinters. There is a case study about performing research on a tight budget and a discussion about ensuring a return on investment from your corporate portal. Other contributions include a member's favourite Web sites, a review of an interesting book about one-to-one marketing through customer relationship management, and our regular round-up of the latest from the Bar and additions to our event and job listings.

It's worth remembering that the sharing of knowledge is a powerful way to help others and to help yourself. Free Pint is definitely one of those places where the more you put in the more you get out.

Best regards
William Hann, Founder and Managing Editor <william@freepint.com>

About Free Pint

Free Pint is an online community of information researchers. Members receive this free newsletter every two weeks 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 the substantial archive of articles, book reviews, jobs, industry news & events, with answers to your research questions and networking at the Free Pint Bar. Free Pint Regulars (paid-up members) also receive a weekly current awareness newsletter, discounts and publicity.

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

Four issue free trial of the Free Pint Pub Crawl

Have you considered subscribing to the Free Pint Pub Crawl? Would you like to try it out for a few weeks first? Set up your four week free trial today at:
<http://www.freepint.com/pubcrawl>

My Favourite Tipples from Sarah Hinton

- <http://www.hoovers.com> - Great site for finding companies, offers a fair bit of free information which usually includes a company's top competitors.

- <http://www.chemweb.com> - Free to register, provides a comprehensive platform for chemical information. Offers free full-text access to a varying list of journals for set periods of time. Recently voted one of the best science sites out there!

- <http://www.countyweb.co.uk> - Useful site for UK regional company searching. Also ranks companies by county.

- <http://www.marketresearch.com> - Aggregator of 1000s of market reports across all sectors which you can then purchase in sections. Free to search.

- <http://www.worldbank.org> - Super resource for free statistics, demographics and industry data, this site has a lot of useful information.

Sarah Hinton is information manager for the Generics Group, a technology consultancy and investment company based near Cambridge.

Email your top five favourite Web sites to <simon@freepint.com> or see the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

Free Pint Gold

This time last year we highlighted a number of energy portals. This was followed by an inspirational article about finding charities online and resources for volunteering your own time.

- Free Pint No.82, 1st March 2001. "Electric Power Information Sources on the Web" and "Putting your money where your mouse is - online charities" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/010301.htm>

Two years ago the tips article looked at travel sites, focusing on those with an online booking facility. The feature article in that issue covered chemistry 'webzines', and we'll be returning to chemistry resources soon in this newsletter.

- Free Pint No.57, 2nd March 2000. "Travel related websites" and "Chemistry Webzines - How to find the right news for you" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/020300.htm>

In 1999 we ran a quick-fire set of "... 12 extra ways to promote your website without even turning your browser on". Popular contributor Martin White <http://www.freepint.com/go/r21970> gave an invaluable overview of data privacy and highlighted resources for researching the differences between EU and US legislation.

- Free Pint No.33, 4th March 1999. "12 Offline Ways of Promoting Your URL" and "Data Privacy Web Sites" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/040399.htm>

Looking back, 1998 did feel like the early pioneering days of the Web. That's why it was timely to run a piece aimed at journalists wanting to introduce others to the Web. Every time we cover market research resources we hear approving noises

from Free Pinters. Such was the reaction four years ago too.

- Free Pint No.9, 5th March 1998. "But what is it good for?" and "Market Research Information On The Internet" <http://www.freepint.com/issues/050398.htm>

Free Pint Bar
In Association with Factiva
a Dow Jones & Reuters Company
Reviewed by Simon Collery
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/070302.htm#bar>

Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXXX in the address <http://www.freepint.com/go/bXXXXX>]

I had an email from an active Free Pinter yesterday pointing out that there are always some questions raised in the Bar that could be answered with a quick bit of Web searching. I agree and would say that there are even some questions that could be answered by a quick search of the Free Pint Bar. On the other hand, some seemingly basic questions can elicit a very interesting response and the sort of answers one would have to spend a lot of time searching for.

For example, a posting about copyright got a reply which suggested a useful alternative to negotiating directly with a publisher when you want to reproduce proprietary images (15916). Similarly, a Free Pinter who wanted to find out how to get a tape of a recent TV show received several suggestions for how to go about it, though, in the end, he found out himself (16005).

Meantime, researchers have been busying themselves with things like rural broadband supply (16119), Internet Service Providers (16283), keeping customer data clean (16265), ice cream brands (15981) and getting an ecommerce function going (16065). Still awaiting a response are questions about examples of inspiring entertainers (16236), old trade exhibition literature (16154), UK owned companies in Eastern Europe (16088) and free scientific news sources (16275). I'm sure there are plenty of good resources available to help answer these ones.

Business researchers have been posting about UK credit card payments and VAT (16302), shopping cart facilities for ecommerce (16147), UK company parent subsidiary relationships (16257) and getting access to McCoy Power Reports (16201). And we are waiting for answers to queries about a particular accountants group (16156) and a list of UK family owned businesses or some suggestions about how to research them (16285).

There have been industry specific postings about the African TV market (16254), the Kenyan Telecoms market (16306), UK Internet gambling (16211), UK marketing agencies (15924) and UK broadcasting and publishing (16074). If any Free Pinters know about archival products in France (16244), pharmaceutical clinical development in Europe (16247) and water cooler market (16110) we'd love to hear from you.

The lion's share of questions in the last two weeks have been about quantitative data and most of them have been answered. They were about market research brokers (16079), parking attendants (16205), Latin American GDP figures (16152), European bankruptcies (15910), UK crime and street lighting (16213), the global pharmaceutical information sector (16144), UK missing persons (16256) and woman in science worldwide (15954). Questions about high speed car chase bans (16293), speed cameras (16276) and UK renewable data (16209) have yet to be answered. We wait with baited breath.

Technical queries have been as plentiful as ever with ones about P3P (16048), Q and A software (15957), content management systems (16023), checking bookmarks daily (15913), email folders (16140), Excel databases (16260),

converting Word documents to HTML, en masse (15939), Web databases (16210), finding the Euro sign (16184) and superscripts (16047) on a keyboard and keeping a computer on 24/7 (16289). Though plentiful, they've all been answered.

As well as searching for business information resources and reviewing them (16109) I sometimes look at good resources that are not business related, such as this excellent repository of Shakespeare's Sonnets (16290). And there's a whole host of recommended resources and articles in the latest issue of the Internet Resources Newsletter (16253). Also, if it's international standards you are interested in, you'll find plenty of data in the sites suggested in this posting (16165).

Language related postings included ones about reference sources for French slang (16309), a few Latin queries (16037, 16091, 16038) and a request for a list of derogatory terms for a customer in various professions (16000).

There were miscellaneous postings about training in data mining (16135), getting a book published (16245), the history of European cutlery (16287), renting a video camera (16271), signs for public swimming pools (16017), a free draw of scientific textbooks (16274) and some follow up information on a old Internet story and Internet PR stunts in general (16234).

Free Pint Student Bar
<http://www.freepint.com/student>

[Note: To read a posting enter the message number in place of XXXX in the address <http://www.freepint.com/go/sXXXX>]

Students have been researching female entrepreneurs (2285), thriving during a recession (2304), integrated information services (2241), popular music on the Internet (2237), Intranet news feeds (2316), Foucauldian analysis (2323), knowledge management and Intranets (2236), online courseware (2281) and knowledge management resources (2300).

The Student Bar has also seen postings about courses in Web design (2310), Celtic symbols (2318), distance learning librarianship courses (2231) and advice on finding and choosing a graduate traineeship (2297).

Simon Collery, Content Developer
<simon@freepint.com>

If you have a tricky research question or can help other Free Pinters then do post a message at the Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar> or the Student Bar <http://www.freepint.com/student>.

Factiva Learning Programs Launched

Factiva Learning Programs is a comprehensive suite of global learning tools for the enterprise. The suite of programs includes industry-leading e-training, online tutorials and product demos, regular Web-based seminars, targeted reference materials and acclaimed classroom training for corporate knowledge workers and information professionals. Visit http://www.factiva.com/learning

Free Pint Jobs
<http://www.freepint.com/jobs>

As well as the listings below, you might also like to check out the new weekly Bar posting which lists the latest additions to Free Pint Jobs. This week's edition is at <http://www.freepint.com/go/b16308>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Information Scientist
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1620>
An Information Scientist role to support key internal customer groups and aid the support of the cross-functional product teams.
Recruiter: Pfizer Ltd

Information Assistant
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1628>
Small, dynamic law firm require qualified Lib/Info grad. with 1yr experience to perform range of duties including law/bus research.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment

Intranet Development Manager
<http://www.freepint.com/go/j1652>
Intranet development; design, content, promotion - use your information skills and knowledge of Frontpage and other web tools
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment and Services Limited

[The above jobs are paid listings]

Free Pint Jobs is THE place for information-related vacancies. Whether you're job searching or have a position to fill, you should be using Free Pint Jobs.

Candidates: It is free to search the database and you can set up a profile to be notified weekly by email of relevant new vacancies.

Advertisers: List your vacancies and receive significant publicity. Match your job against the 400+ stored job seeker profiles. Listings start at just 145 pounds (about US$200 or 230 Euros).

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

Fed up with plain text?

You don't have to receive a plain text version of Free Pint. You can have a fully-formatted version emailed to you in Adobe Acrobat format. Or receive a brief notification it's available online. Simply modify your account online and choose the edition to suit you:
<http://www.freepint.com/member>

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

There's still plenty of time to find out about all the information- related conferences happening in March. So here's a run down ...

Frost & Sullivan are holding their "Next Generation Internet (NGI) Asia Conference and Exhibition" in Langkawi, Malaysia, the first time an NGI conference has been held in Asia <http://www.freepint.com/go/e121>.

Stateside, their "5th Annual Advanced Marketing Research Executive Summit, West" takes place simultaneously in San Antonio <http://www.freepint.com/go/e127>. In Florida there is the Association of Dissemination and Information Centers' (ASIDIC) Spring Meeting <http://www.freepint.com/go/e115> whilst up in Washington, DC, "Computers in Libraries 2002" from Information Today "... offers something for all interests and all levels of knowledge in the library and information management fields" <http://www.freepint.com/go/e112>.

Back in the UK, "Internet Librarian International", also from Information Today, is on in London <http://www.freepint.com/go/e114>. Up at the University of Glasgow, the "1st International Conference on IT & Information Literacy (ITIL 2002)" will talk about how "... the preparation of individuals to be effective information-users as students, as employees, and as citizens becomes an imperative" <http://www.freepint.com/go/e75>.

Details of these and many other conferences in the information industry can be found on the Free Pint Events page <http://www.freepint.com/events>.

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"OnetoOne B2B: Customer Development Strategies for the Business-to-Business World"
Written by Don Peppers and Martha Rogers
Reviewed by Helen Clegg

This is the latest offering from marketing gurus Don Peppers and Martha Rogers on one-to-one marketing or customer relationship management, as it is also known, and this time it's all about one-to- one in a B2B environment. The UK edition runs to over 300 pages, but don't let that put you off. This has to be one of the most readable business books in print at the moment and is hard to put down once you've started it.

OnetoOne B2B builds on Peppers and Rogers earlier works, but for those who haven't read The OnetoOne Future, Enterprise OnetoOne, The OnetoOne Fieldbook or The OnetoOne Manager, this matters little, for the book can be read on its own. In the first two chapters, the authors review their basic theory of one-to-one marketing and discuss how this theory can be applied in the B2B world. Moreover, they also describe their own set of tools for creating deeper customer relationships, which they call IDIC, or Identify, Differentiate, Interact and Customize.

Chapters Three to Seven constitute five in-depth case studies, which examine how Dell, Bentley Systems, Convergys, Novartis LP (a subsidiary of Novartis AG) and LifeWay (a Christian resources company) are implementing their own customer relationship management initiatives. These range from account development strategies, knowledge-based selling and organizing marketing process around individual customers, to growing the value of the customer base. Although not all of the five companies profiled here are household names, they do represent diverse industries and are all at different stages in the process of becoming one-to-one enterprises. This wide spectrum therefore provides a wealth of valuable learning material for strategic marketers, planners, indeed for everyone involved with managing B2B customer relationships in a variety of organizations. The case studies conclude with the authors offering advice and pointing out the main tasks ahead for each company.

Implementing one-to-one marketing in a B2B context is harder than in a B2C context, due to the more complex nature of customer relationships. By using a case-study format, the material is much more accessible and digestible, making it easier for readers to follow the implementation steps being taken by each company and see the benefits gained from these steps.

Finally, Chapter Eight focuses on the impact the Internet is having on B2B one-to-one marketing, with Peppers and Rogers offering their thoughts on B2B exchanges, marketplaces and portals. For those wanting to dig deeper and read more on the subject of customer relationship management, the book closes with an excellent recommended reading list, covering books, newspapers, magazine articles, reports, studies and white papers.

OnetoOne B2B is well written and well structured. It vividly illustrates the advantages B2B organizations should gain from investing time and resources in customer relationship management. In the words of Fortune magazine, "if your company is launching a customer-focused strategy, give this book to all of your transition players - it sets the agenda". Absolutely. This book is sure to be a classic.

Helen Clegg is Market Analyst with RR Donnelley Europe, in Amsterdam. She holds an M.Sc. in Library and Information Studies and has worked for a number of organizations in Europe including Bain & Company, BNFL plc and AT Kearney Ltd. Helen can be contacted at <Helen.Clegg@rrd.com>. She writes here in a personal capacity.

Related Free Pint links:

- Find out more about this book online at the Free Pint Bookshelf <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/one2one.htm>

- Read customer comments and buy this book at Amazon.co.uk <http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/1841123129/freepint0c> or Amazon.com <http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0385494092/freepint00>

- "OnetoOne B2B: Customer Development Strategies for the Business-to-Business World" ISBN 1841123129 (UK) ISBN 0385494092 (US) published by Capstone Publishing Limited (UK) Doubleday (US) written by Don Peppers and Martha Rogers

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Tips Article

<http://www.freepint.com/issues/070302.htm#tips>

**" Fossicking for Information ... or ...
What to do on Sixpence "
By Zena Woodley**

My post demands that I track a very large number of retail companies and sectors with a minimum of financial outlay. How do I do this, and what sources do I use?

Apart from scanning incoming journals (and filing, and photocopying ...), I'm trying to introduce a policy of electronic storage of information. Although we hear much about wonderful new ways to achieve information nirvana, please remember that there are very many 'lo-tech' companies out there, who have not the time nor the resources (nor, despite attempted education, the interest!) to dive into the deepest end of the IT pool. And please remember the professionals who support such organisations.

News Sources

Praise be for Ananova <http://www.ananova.com/yournews/yourpage.html> with email alerts I can track sectors for breaking news.

Digital Look <http://www.digitallook.com/> is another excellent source. Again, one can personalise delivery, with up to 50 searches maximum.

There are three sectors which have great importance: food, drink, and clothing. These sites are useful: just-food.com, just-style.com, and just-drinks.com. All offer news updates, and - for a modest annual fee
- offer members more in-depth reporting.

The BBC is wonderful ...

Competitors are a valuable source of information: latest press releases give lots of useful information. Some of the ones I track are listed here:

CIOR <http://www.cior.com/>

Datamonitor <http://www.datamonitor.com/>

Forrester <http://www.forrester.com/>

Mintel <http://www.mintel.com/>

Jupiter MMXI
<http://www.jupitermmxi.com/europelanding.html>

Surprisingly, perhaps, one of the sectors which is very useful to keep an eye on is the semiconductor sector. The well-being (or otherwise) of this market is a flag for areas which may, at first sight, seem to have no connection. I also like to keep abreast of an industry which still enthralls and excites me.

First of these flags is economics. If chip sales go down, it's a fair indicator that all is not well with global capitalism. Those of you who follow such things will also know that chip sales are cyclical. And they've just had their worst downturn in over 20 years. I keep watching to see if there's a light at the end of the tunnel; I think things are getting better, but it's a very slow business right now. Interestingly, chip sales and book-to-bill ratios do reflect upon the bigger retail picture.

<http://www.silicon.com> is a wonderful site. Not only does it have good links, and loads of meaty news - but it also has time for the absurd and laughable.

For example, the latest game to sweep the web is called Googlewhacking. The game involves searching Google's massive two-billion page database for two words that return a "Results 1 out of 1" message at the top of the page. However, a Googlewhack doesn't remain one for long because players post the link on the game's website ensuring that it will consequently return two results. All entries, or Googlefactors, must be verified via the dictionary.com website. Just for the record, "portakabin monkey" got 30 hits, "Cheddar homunculus" got 10, while "slimy sandpaper" got a disappointing 712 - so it's not as easy as it sounds. Click <http://www.silicon.com/a50923> to find out more - or to add any Googlewhackers you might find.

Incidentally, they're currently offering a FREE Butler Group White Paper: Achieving Knowledge Optimisation <http://www.silicon.com/goto-sp4-divine_3101>. This argues that Knowledge Management often fails to deliver an acceptable return on investment, and looks at the critical strategies that organisations need to implement to make it pay.

It wouldn't be retail without the use of statistics - the ONS site is frequently consulted, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/>. This site is not the easiest to navigate, but staff are wonderfully helpful when contacted by telephone! CEBR (Centre for Economics & Business Research Ltd) is another source of information http://www.cebr.co.uk/>, as is BRC (British Retail Consortium) <http://www.brc.org.uk/>.

My favourites are many: uk-wire.com is brilliant for breaking results, with full downloads: waymaker.net is another good source. bloomberg.com is good (and useful for email alerts); they give useful pointers on European companies, too. Hemscott is a valuable source of free information, including reporting dates. These can be checked with the company concerned. ICC are marvellous for UK company coverage, and their documents lend themselves to being downloaded easily. Their European coverage is still in its infancy, however, and a clearer picture needs to be given to the prospective customer of what you get for your money - staff can be a trifle vague when one enquires precisely what is on offer, and the speed of delivery. Some European countries appear indifferent to filing requirements: certainly it's harder to get full information from, say Portugal, than it is from Germany.

And speaking of companies - the web sites range from the wonderful, giving full investor information, plus email alerts, to the woeful. I can understand a small company not putting up investor information - but all too often, searching for a major listed organisation will result in a website that's geared purely for 'show', not listing financial results or even press notices. This is especially irritating when looking for a

European company. Secrecy is very much the name of the game in some areas of retail - but this can be most frustrating!

When stuck for ideas or pointers, an admirable source is Paul Pedley's freebiz.org.

Those of you who have ready access to Amadeus, and other wonderful information resources, should be very grateful!

- I have convinced my analysts of the authenticity of the word 'fossick': their challenge is to use it in a report or newsletter! And for those young things who cannot remember, 6d (or sixpence) was the equivalent of just over 2p.

Zena Woodley is currently working for a retail-oriented market research organisation. She began her information career with INMOS fifteen years ago, and still retains a deep interest in semiconductors. She can remember acoustic couplers, and was familiar with email back in the mid 80s. She has worked in organisations connected with hydrology and construction: she was Information Manager at Aslib for four years. In her real life, she is Secretary of the London County Association, and Secretary for St. Mary's, Rotherhithe - both posts connected with church bell ringing. And when not ringing, she is passionate about all kinds of classical music.

Related Free Pint links:

- "Information and Libraries" articles and links in the Portal <http://www.freepint.com/go/p69>

- Read this article online, with activated hyperlinks <http://www.freepint.com/issues/070302.htm#tips>

- Post a message to the author, Zena Woodley, or suggest further resources, at the Free Pint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>

- Access the entire archive of Free Pint articles and issues <http://www.freepint.com/portal/content/>

Feature Article
<http://www.freepint.com/issues/070302.htm#feature>

**"The Death of the Intranet.
Long Live the Corporate Portal Quantifying ROI"
By Ian Wells**

As anyone responsible for knowledge management will tell you, information fuels knowledge. It is this basic understanding, and the need to share information, that led to the birth of the corporate intranet - its primary function being to provide access to company information via a central interface. But content has always been the key to a successful intranet; information that appears on these systems must be up-to-date, relevant to the individual and easy to find. With the proliferation of information available today, intranets are becoming a nightmare in terms of management and are failing to satisfy employees. In practice, many businesses have discovered that the ability to access information is not the same as finding the information they need. The sheer weight of information available from internal electronic sources, often coupled with poor search facilities, is causing an information overload. People are confusing information with knowledge. Data 'glut' is such a serious problem that research suggests that in many workplaces, an average worker can spend more than half his or her day processing documents <http://www.careerbuilder.com/wl_work_9905_overload.html>.

Without being able to manage this proliferation of information and bypassing the need to conduct long, time-consuming and often ineffective searches, the intranet stops promoting productivity and becomes a drag on efficiency. More worryingly, employees who become disenchanted with an intranet may stop using it altogether. Information overload then negates the value of the intranet investment. This hazard is amplified when the intranet is extended - as an extranet - to allow other businesses to work with a company's systems. Poor extranet performance means jeopardising relationships with customers and suppliers, something no business can afford to do.

Many organisations also use the World Wide Web and subscription-based electronic information services such as Reuters to provide them with up-to-date, real time information on anything from worldwide news to industry specific current affairs. This adds to the overall volume of information, compounding information overload and making it more difficult for users to get to the information they really need, when they need it.

The answer to overcoming this problem and ensuring that the intranet remains valuable alongside other electronic information sources is to take a personalised and 'instant delivery' approach to information management. This ensures that users automatically receive only the information that is relevant to them, whether it comes from the Internet, an intranet, a subscription-based news service or other internal sources without having to search for it. Without this, companies will wallow in a sea of potentially useful information, but never have the capability to pick out the 'nuggets' that will have maximum effect.

In response, a growing number of companies are using corporate portals as a solution, <http://searchsap.techtarget.com/sDefinition/0,,sid21_gci533557,00.html>. These enable companies to provide employees (or even customers or business partners) with

their own personalised corporate portal. These are similar in concept to those provided by Yahoo! and Excite, but are specifically designed for use within the enterprise. These portals provide better 'context' around work activities and add value to existing sites or information databases through customised connections. In short, corporate portals draw all the available raw data together, making it easier for the correct individual to access the 'nuggets' that are relevant to them through a single point of entry on the corporate network. CIO.com hosts an excellent, if somewhat lengthy white paper, entitled 'A Business Person's Guide to Enterprise Portal Terms and Business Impacts'. It's an excellent resource, whatever your current knowledge level, and can be found at <http://www.cio.com/sponsors/portalswhitepaper.pdf>.

There are a number of different types of corporate portals available, each providing solutions to varying needs. These include vertical, corporate, collaborative, consumer, e-commerce and knowledge portals. Often the type of portal is differentiated by either the area it covers (e.g. enterprise wide, business function, industry) or the service provided (content aggregation, application access, personalised home page, etc.). Such systems will intelligently aggregate information from the various internal and external sources available and automatically deliver only the relevant content to each employee. This means that they are not distracted by searching Internet sites or areas of the intranet that are not of true value to them. Joseph M. Firestone, Ph.D. offers a detailed analysis of a portal's integration into existing enterprise applications and its place within workflow systems in his paper, 'Defining the Enterprise Information Portal' <http://www.dkms.com/EIPDEF.html>.

Typically there are two types of portal personalisation available. For employees within a business the 'voluntary' personalisation route is usually (although not always) the most appropriate. This means that the individual employees themselves choose the content that they wish to receive. This is determined during the initialisation phase, where the employees are prompted to set up their own information profile. They are alerted to the arrival of fresh information either through a browser on their PC, via email or fax. If working remotely from the office, alerts can be received on mobile phones through SMS (Short Messaging Service) or on a WAP device.

Deploying this kind of portal strategy holds much the same benefits for managing the knowledge and information relevant to a company's partners, clients or customers. However, more often an 'involuntary' personalisation route is typical where the purpose of the portal is to disseminate selected information, e.g. in a retail scenario. This means that the company defines the information that is to be sent to the individual rather than the individual making their own choice.

A portal site which can alert customers via the variety of different mechanisms mentioned above will allow them to focus on the updated information delivered to them as it is published, rather than having to search for it themselves. Delivering this information will help to reduce the possibility of them being distracted or diverted to a competitive site.

Providing the technology offered within the chosen solution allows for it, the portal will be dynamic to the changing needs of the users. Functionality can be developed and features added to suit each individual's requirements. This means that the portal can evolve as the company grows or diversifies. London's largest hotel chain, Radisson Edwardian Hotels, launched its own enterprise portal last

year <http://www.vnunet.com/News/1124303> to reduce IT administration costs, deliver IT services to employees across its 10 sites and centrally manage all data and applications from one central server-farm. It was one of the largest portal installations in the UK last year and serves as an excellent example of the far reaching benefits of portal technology.

Quantifying Return on Investment

When justifying the need for a corporate portal solution this simple calculation should be considered. Taking a company with 1,000 employees as an example, Mediapps <http://www.mediapps.com> has found that each employee uses around 10 sources of information. These range from national newspapers, Reuters or other subscription services, the corporate intranet and other internal electronic sources such as HR or EPR databases. To monitor all these takes 8 minutes. That employee will search these sources around 3 times a day for job specific information. That's 24 minutes every day spent searching or 120 minutes per 5 working day week. Over the course of a year (48 working weeks), this adds up to 96 hours in time spent searching for information. If the average salary of each employee is 18,000 pounds, that's 1,028.16 pounds worth of productivity lost in search time alone. Multiply that by the number of employees in the organisation and the loss in productivity, and therefore revenue, is clearly significant. If the same company used a corporate portal solution to provide both the correct technology and content, the search time is reduced to 5 minutes per day to check the portal 'alerts'. This equates to just 214.20 pounds per employee!

Nucleus Research <http://www.nucleusresearch.com> recently launched an online ROI calculator for companies looking to quantify their investment in an enterprise portal. Using the calculator, customers will be able to measure return on investment based on the improved productivity delivered by the technology. The ROI calculator bases savings over a three-year period, using variables such as average employee salary, IT investment and the average growth of an organisation.

Current corporate portal solutions range from a few thousand pounds to several hundred thousand pounds. Again, the solution chosen will be dependent on the company's needs. However, if the investment is too high, the return will never be achieved. For example, if the solution chosen is very expensive with lots of integration and customisation work to be done, getting the system up and running will take longer and the entry point will be higher. The question to ask is "Can this return on

investment ever be reached?" The best way to approach a corporate portal strategy is to start small and extend it as and when the company and budgets are ready to accommodate the growth. This is where the flexibility to grow and develop the solution you have chosen becomes important. As with most other successful strategies, when deploying a corporate portal solution, the 80/20 rule applies.

The key to effective knowledge management is changing the mechanism on offer to people to search the pool of internal and external information available to them. To ensure the success of a corporate portal strategy, assess who the communities are that will be using the solution and define their information needs by group and individual. Next, look at the existing technology within the company and the array of information sources available to it.

When looking to match the right corporate portal solution with the company's needs, the key elements to evaluate are: ensure that the technology it offers is complementary to, and easily integratable with, existing legacy systems, provides flexibility through open architecture for addressing future growth, offers suitable content synchronisation, achievable ROI and time to market. Ensure that the vendor has local presence and strong

partnerships that will adequately support both the technology and the content of the solution you are buying into.

Bearing these considerations in mind should help towards getting a corporate portal solution off the ground and make the minefield of solutions on offer less daunting for those embarking on this effective route to knowledge management.

Ian Wells is the Managing Director of Mediapps UK and has been instrumental in the development of the company's UK operation. Before joining Mediapps, Ian spent seven years at network connectivity vendor, Attachmate, where he was UK Country Manager. Contact: <iwells@mediapps.com>.

With more than 240 customers, Mediapps is Europe's leading provider of portal-based technology. Mediapps' strategy is to provide not just the software necessary to create a portal but pre-configured information sources as well. When combined with ready to use user profiling, Net.Portal, Mediapps' Portal Generator, can provide rapid results right 'out of the box' with little or no coding required.

Thank you for reading today's Free Pint, and a special thanks to all those who have contributed to this issue in some way.

If you feel it's time to get involved, then send your ideas to Rex Cooke <rex@freepint.com> or visit <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

See you in two weeks!

William Hann, Founder and Managing Editor
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