freePint®

Plus ...

Jobs,
Discussion,
Tips, Reviews
and Events

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About FreePint

FreePint is a global network of people who find, use, manage and share work-related information. Members receive this free twice-monthly newsletter, which is packed with tips, features and resources.

Joining FreePint is free at <http://www.freepint.com/> and connects information practitioners around the world with resources, events and answers to their tricky research and information questions at the FreePint Bar, our free online forum: <http://www.freepint.com/bar/>.

The FreePint Newsletter is available online in several formats and can be read, saved and forwarded at <http://www.freepint.com/issues/>.

Editorial

When I first decided to go to work for myself, people around me had the strangest reactions. Friends would call or drop by at odd hours of the day proposing coffee or marvelling at how much time I could dedicate to the garden. My mother would regularly give me job tips: the dry cleaner down the road was looking for counter help, or the Safeway was looking for cashiers.

These people didn't seem to realise that I already had a job. They thought of me on holiday working at my home office, and never considered the reality.

That, as any independent information professional knows, is quite different than a holiday. It's about paying bills, finding clients and taking on a host of business-related activities that are utterly foreign and new.

Joanna Ptolomey knows how it goes working for oneself, which is why she wrote her feature on how independent professionals can create a business development plan that pays. It will form the basis of a talk at Online Information in December.

We also have two more previews into other presentations at Online. Judy Koren, an information professional and professor at the University of Haifa in Israel, writes about collaborative search. And Mary Ellen Bates and Amelia Kassel contribute a special collection of Tipples based on some of their tag-team presentations at Online.

Keep your eyes on FreePint in the next weeks for more sneak peeks of presentations at Online. Then stop by and visit with the team. RSVP to let us know you'll be there. You'll have a chance to join our 10th birthday celebration, plus other events throughout the week.

Oh, and if you haven't already voted, drop what you're doing and immediately vote for the FUMSI Award for Most Useful Article: <http://freepint.com/events/online-info-2007/citation/>.

Sincerely,

Monique Cuvelier Editor, FreePint
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My Favourite Tipples

by Mary Ellen Bates and Amelia Kassel

Our workshop at the Online Information Conference on Monday, 3 December 2007 includes a review of specialised search techniques and a comparison of the best resources for specific business research projects. Here are our favourite business and company research Tipples:

- OFFSTATS - Official Statistics on the Web <http://www.library.auckland.ac.nz/subjects/stats/offstats/> is a well-organised portal for 'official' statistics sites around the world. This includes government agencies, international organisations, NGOs and similar sources.

- Country Insights <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-en.asp?lvl=8>, from the Canadian Centre for Intercultural Learning, contains information on all aspects of business culture for countries around the world.

- Credit reports are an oftentimes overlooked source for company information among information professionals accustomed to using the more traditional company research vendors. On CRF Service Provider Resource Guide, 2007 <http://www.crfonline.org/CRFResourceGuide.pdf>, go to Credit Reporting and Information Resources - International, pp. 42-45. It profiles a dozen credit reporting companies with international coverage.

- Skyminder <http://www.skyminder.com> reports from every region of the world including 50 million private and public companies. Because of the fresh reports from a variety of credit report vendors, Skyminder is both a D&B partner but also alternative.

- Wolff Worldwide <http://www.wolffworldwide.com/default.aspx?action=1&subaction=1> is a global network that specialises in providing reports from two or three credit reporting companies per country with access to more than 50 million companies in 238 countries.

See Mary Ellen Bates, owner of Bates Information Services <http://www.batesinfo.com/>, and Amelia Kassel, president and owner of MarketingBase <http://www.marketingbase.com>, live at their presentation at Online Information 3 December 2007. For more information on the talk, see: Mining the Web for Business and Company Information: Digging Up Hard-To-Find Gems <http://digbig.com/4txfh>.

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Library & Archive Assistant

Help provide and maintain the library and archive services of the Museum of London Group.
Recruiter: Museum of London
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7918>

Senior Information Officer

Provide WRAP's Information Manager with project management, administrative and general support.
Recruiter: WRAP (Waste & Resources Action Programme)
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7934>

Records Manager

A qualified Records manager is required to assess organisational RM practices and culture.
Recruiter: Weekes Gray Recruitment
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7944>

Assistant Librarian - London

We have a full time temporary Assistant Librarian position within a government organisation involved in helping young people.
Recruiter: Aslib, The Association for Information Management
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7948>

Sourcing Manager

Put your financial vendor management and negotiation skills to use at this leading investment bank.
Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment and Services Limited
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7950>

Information Officer

Non-departmental public body are currently seeking to recruit an Information Officer, based at their offices in Coventry.
Recruiter: TFPL
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7955>

Global Knowledge Co-ordinators (2)

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SUPPORT? Are you passionate about K.M. Best Practice? Two newly created roles as client migrates to Sharepoint.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment
Country: United Kingdom
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j7963>

NB: These are just a selection of information-related jobs in the Jinfo database <http://www.jinfo.com/>. Receive the latest job listings weekly with the free Jinfo Update. Free to subscribe at <http://www.jinfo.com/>

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FreePint Bar

Monique Cuvelier is editor of the FreePint Newsletter. She has edited, launched and written for many magazines, newspapers and websites in the US and UK. Learn more about her at http://www.onopoly.com/support/team/.

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- Those involved in further education are arguably always looking for ways to promote their institutions. But how many are using blogs? One researcher is looking for answers <http://www.freepint.com/go/b202828>.

- One FreePinter has been trawling for statistics about small- to medium-sized businesses, including how many there are. Check the thread for some helpful resources <http://www.freepint.com/go/b198132>.

- A discussion about using Meltwater News for monitoring <http://www.freepint.com/go/b166323> endures with a lively discussion about its merits and other competitors.

Also make sure to check the November VIP <http://www.vivaVIP.com/> for its comparative roundup of The Big Three.

- Surely the steam iron has been a boon to wrinkled clothes everywhere - or so you might tell yourself as you dress for work - but most of us take its history for granted. One 'Pinter is looking for a history <http://www.freepint.com/go/b201618> and pressing for answers at the Bar.

- Has anyone seen 'The Red Sailor'? This book written by Patrick O'Hara is dear to one Bar member's heart, but she's having trouble locating this out-of-print item. When you've searched the usual paths and found nothing, where do you look next <http://www.freepint.com/go/b199549>?

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Details and online nomination form: http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2007/citation/>

"Methodology Mixer: Professional and Business Development for the Independent Worker"

By Joanna Ptolomey

Working as an independent worker can be a professionally liberating and exciting experience. You are more in control of your own destiny and there is an increased chance to get involved in enjoyable and satisfying work. On the flip side it can be risky; basic concerns like finding work, opening up new opportunities and remaining financially solvent can be constant companions. Unlike work as a regular employee, there is no monthly cheque and no guaranteed supply of work.

Business aside, there is also the question of personal and professional development. How do you manage that? When you start out as an independent worker, every day that you are not working on a fee-paying project is a zero income day, and it can seem extravagant to sit reading about Web 2.0 when you have no work on the horizon.

A couple of years ago I began to investigate whether there was a way to combine both my business and personal development activities to have a measurable tangible outcome on my business.

Joined at the hip

One of the first things I encountered as an independent worker was the difficulty in separating myself from the business. Instead of working against this, I knew that any method I tried needed to work with it.

Your clients will almost certainly be commissioning work on the basis of your ability to manage and deliver value added work on time and to

budget, not just because you happen to offer particular services. As an independent you are required to do the business planning, marketing, client management, administration, provide the information services and be the only one on the coffee rota!

So what if you find yourself lagging behind in your own professional development and are not sure about business development? You can miss all the cues that things need to change and that you are missing opportunities. You can quite quickly find that your market has moved on or changed and that the services you offered are no longer required.

The pilot project

I would anticipate that very few independents (especially solo workers) have a budget for personal and business development. Hats off to you if you have, and it is a goal of mine to allocate part of my earnings specifically for this purpose in the future. Happily or fortunately, I realised that in the first instance I needed only to allocate time to this process. My first step was to develop a short pilot programme (with me as the guinea pig) and you can read the outcome of this pilot in Jinfo Newsletter no.132 <http://jinfo.com/newsletter/Jinfo-Newsletter-132.pdf>. This article discusses my efforts including what worked, what didn't work and the tangible results of my efforts.

In general terms this short-term pilot project was successful both financially and professionally, but most importantly I began to see

the bones of a methodology that I could use to help drive my professional and business development on a regular basis. It also confirmed my hypothesis that personal development issues were not standalone items, but could be embedded into any of my proposed business strategies.

My pilot project had also convinced me that a structured and methodical approach to business and personal development would have the potential to yield tremendous results.

Bones of the methodology

I believe that actually doing projects for clients is the 'easy bit'. As an information professional I love my specialist subject areas, finding information and delivering bespoke solutions for individual clients. This is my real comfort zone.

Each independent worker has their own specialist area of expertise but there are some key common areas that need to be addressed on a yearly basis to keep yourself and the business moving on the right track, such as:

Audit/analysis of your market

- What markets do you work in?

- Is there enough work in this market?

- Who are you competitors? What makes you different?

- Have there been any changes to the structure of your market?

- Do you have enough clients?

- How much work do you get from individual clients?

- What would be the effect if you lost a particular client?

- Could you be taking your skills and using them in another market?

- What is your cash flow and turnover like?

- Do you do a few large projects or lots of small projects?

- Do you have too much work?

Audit/analysis of the services you offer

- Are you services valuable to your client? Do you have evidence?

- Do you have protocols for service delivery?

- What services are you never asked for?

- What services do people ask for most often?

- Are you making plans to develop other services and diversify?

- Do your clients know that you can do other types of work?

- Are there times when you could subcontract work?

Marketing/awareness techniques

- Are you aware of the key players in your market?

Who holds the purse strings?

- Do you take opportunities to publish, educate or communicate in a variety of professional journals and industry titles about your projects and/or your skills?

- Do you make a point of scheduling in appointments throughout the year in an effort to network and keep up to date with what is happening in your sector?

- Do you focus on key areas of professional reading and make time to actually read them?

- Are you visible at key events and do you know what to say when people ask you what you do?

These key areas are neat and succinct and allow for the development of some lovely activities and goals to challenge us with. However, the story is generally never that straightforward and there needs to be a narrative that holds all our ideas and plans together. Driving a business forward requires other skills, like asking hard questions about what makes us tick personally and our commitment. I don't believe that most independents are driven solely by financial needs. Sure, we need to make a living and pay our bills but I don't believe that is the only driver.

I suppose most of us have asked these questions. What is important in our life, what drives us to work in this sector, how committed are we to our endeavours and what gets us out of bed in the morning? I call this my 'personal constitution'.

Personal constitution

Developing a personal constitution is one of the most important processes that you can do for your business and yourself. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why do you work in this sector?

- What is important to your work/personal life?

- What are your fundamental goals in working as an independent?

Everyone has different answers to these questions and we have all arrived at independent working through different (and sometimes bizarre) routes. In my formative years I tested the quality of concrete on construction sites, which makes for a whole other story.

But here is my personal constitution, and I believe it provides the foundation for everything I do.

- I work in the health sector, which includes the NHS, voluntary sector, academia and education, and believe in equality and access to healthcare for all

- I believe that through the work I do I can actually make a difference to the health of the man in the street (albeit by an indirect and sometimes circuitous route)

- I work part-time and flexibly, to enjoy my family life with two small children

- I like challenging work and also a variety. I know that I have a short attention span and get bored easily

- I like to be involved in projects where the outcome has a tangible benefit to the client. The report, directories, presentation, database, training, and consultancy has immediate uses and benefits and will help drive their business.

Methodology

Think about what makes you tick and remember that your personal situation can change from year to year. It is an important component for a happy working and personal life.

This 4-step methodology can be used to build up a bespoke plan for yourself and your business.

1. Consider what is 'your glue' to hold things together.

- Develop your 'personal constitution'

- Re-assess this every year or each time you go through this process.

2. Consider the three key areas of your business and look for personal development associated with these activities.

- Audit/analysis of your market

- Audit/analysis of the services you offer

- Marketing/awareness techniques.

3. Consider when you would like to start your plan and for how long.

- I use the start of a new financial year to set the wheels in motion, but you can start it at any time

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- Make it bespoke to you, just like your services are to your clients. Most of my projects need to billed by financial year-end and that's usually when they are finished. There is usually a little lull as new budgets start and people start thinking about summer holidays so I take this chance for a slow down in workload.

4. Embrace reflective practice.

- One of the sheer joys and luxuries of independent working is 'reflective practice'. However I must admit that it took a few years to really trust my own hunches and feelings, and to accept and live with some 'bad choices and mistakes'

- It's so easy to say 'the buck stops with me', but it can be difficult to actually accept this, take it on board and move forward

- Try and find a mentor to help you with this process. It is good to have someone to discuss things with and bounce ideas around.

Personal Examples

I used the above methodology to scope out some key activities for financial year 2007-2008. For each key activity I allocate a proposed action, a training and development function, and anticipated outcomes.

Key Activity: Strategic Annual review

- Proposed action: evaluation client/project type mix, revenue mix and turnover

- Training and development: improve financial management and strategic planning skills

- Anticipated outcome: better understanding of business values, business direction, market position.

Key Activity: New business development

- Proposed actions: Generate ideas for training courses and workshops and consider possible collaborators. Also research Community Health and Social Partnerships sector in Scotland and identify key people

- Training and development: creative thinking, strategic planning skills, financial planning skills, marketing and awareness

- Anticipated outcome: To make a business decision based on evidence on the possibility of developing new courses and identifying probable work markets.

Key Activity: Different types of projects

- Proposed action: handling more complex projects outside 'personal comfort zone', consideration of smaller projects with quick turnaround, managing multiple clients, outsourcing work

- Training and development: Improve research skills, improve information management skills including new protocols for new service delivery, improve time/project management skills, people management skills

- Anticipated outcome: Improved workflow, increased variety of clients, increased variety of projects, better cash flow and increased turnover.

This year I am also considering items such as:

- Audit physical working environment

- Client database development

- Improved marketing and awareness

- Writing a book.

Conclusions

It needn't be complicated to mix your needs as a professional with your business development needs. What I hope you can see is that they are much intertwined and difficult to separate anyway. By starting the process of developing your business you will be already be stretching your skills base and questioning how you can do things better, more effectively and more efficiently. However, by using a methodology there is an element of control and also measurement of what you have achieved.

In the last couple of years I have been using this methodology to help drive myself and my business forward, and it is interesting to see how far I have come in a relatively short space of time. But don't be a slave to a plan and get upset when things don't work out exactly as you'd hoped. Next time around try a different approach. How do you put a value on being more confident in your own abilities, having a good network of people and mentors,

knowing that your products are valuable and suitable for your market and, more importantly, that you are absolutely sure of your market?

You know yourself and your business better than anyone so use the methodology to make it fit you and your situation. And above all, have fun!

Related FreePint links:

- "A 4-Month Plan: Organise and for personal and business development as a freelance information professional" By Joanna Ptolomey <http://jinfo.com/newsletter/Jinfo-Newsletter-132.pdf>

- Discussion on being self-employed FreePint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/go/b12898 4>

- Jinfo <http://www.jinfo.com/>

- "Marketing for the Info-Entrepreneur" By Mary Ellen Bates <http://www.freepint.com/issues/060 504.htm#feature>

Online Information 2007 – Help Us Plan for It

Free Pint Limited will be exhibiting at Online Information, Stand #122. We look forward to seeing you there and to reporting on the event in all our publications. This is one of our best opportunities to hear from you:

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- Tell us what you want to see in our publications
- Share ideas about the direction of the information world
- Network and put faces and voices with names

Will you be there? Let us know by completing the RSVP form at http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2007/, and we'll give you periodic updates on events at our stand, chances to meet our editorial team, and our favourite picks for sessions to attend.

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Coming this year:

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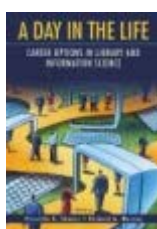Announcement of the FUMSI Citation for Most Useful Article

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"A Day in the Life: Career Options in Library and Information Science"

Written by Priscilla K. Shontz and Richard A. Murray
Reviewed by Kim Dority

Kim Dority is the Director of Content for Disaboom.com <http://www.disaboom.com>, an online resource for people with disabilities, and also does consulting work in information strategy and content development. She teaches a course in alternative careers for LIS professionals in the University of Denver MLIS programme <http://www.du.edu/LIS>, and is the author of "Rethinking Information Work: A Career Guide for Librarians and Other Information Professionals". (Libraries Unlimited, 2006 <http://www.lu.com>). Kim can be reached at <kimdority@gkdority.com>.

Aunt Milly: 'What do you want to do when you grow up?'
You: 'How the heck would I know? I'm a 10-year-old!'

Okay, so maybe most of us were a bit more circumspect in our childhood responses to this perennial question from well-meaning adults, but for many of us, it still remains a central issue. In our professional lives, this often translates into: 'What do you want to do with your LIS degree?'

Although we're now smart enough to answer, 'Well, what are my choices?' the challenge lies in identifying those choices in a field that continues to expand well beyond any definable borders.

Into this dynamic professional landscape comes Priscilla K. Shontz and Richard A. Murray's "A Day in the Life: Career Options in Library and Information Science", an engaging and well-organised collection of personal narratives from 95 information pros who describe a 'typical' workday in their jobs. Generally, contributors all follow a similar format, describing activities engaged in during a typical day, pros and cons of the job (often referred to as 'good things' and 'not so good things'), and how to get a similar job. Within three to five pages, the writers not only cover these bases, but also give us a sense of who they are and what engages them about their jobs. This brings a sense of reality to their assessments: if you have a personality similar to (or different from) the writer's, then you are better able to frame their comments within the context of your own preferences and personality.

Happily, the contributors have been pretty frank in their 'pro and con' comments, so that readers truly can, for example, understand that business travel may entail excitement, exhaustion, loneliness, new sites, sore feet and blown fitness routines - and then make an informed choice about how that fits within their lives.

In addition to the realistic and useful information presented in "A Day in the Life", its other strength is its breadth of coverage. The book's 10 categories offer an excellent sense of both the diversity of types of library/information venues, but also of the different types of work available within those venues. The areas of greatest coverage are academic (27 entries) and the more nontraditional paths: special, consortia, LIS faculty, library vendors, publishing, associations and agencies, and nontraditional, representing more than half of the profiles. The range of jobs within those categories is especially valuable and eye-opening. For example, public librarians include multimedia and electronic services librarians as well as a rural library director, an urban branch manager and a territorial librarian. Among academic librarians are ones working for an overseas American university, an extended-campus programme, a community college and a small college in a developing country.

The nontraditional options are even more diverse: the special libraries section alone covers positions within a nonprofit health organisation, a global financial company, an Internet start-up, an art museum, a film collection, a private social club in Washington, DC, a

national golf association, the American embassy in Oslo, the Congressional Research Service's Legislative Relations Office, the US Armed Forces, a municipal police force and a correctional-facility library (for starters).

The great thing about this book is that there's such a diverse range of jobs profiled here that it can be useful for anyone, regardless of where he or she may be on a career path. For library and information professionals just starting their careers (or for students now contemplating those careers); for professionals considering their next career step; or for those of us considering an entirely new professional direction that still lets us build on decades of experience, the personal narratives here can help us assess a broader range of options than our professional networks might expose us to. It also gives us a more realistic assessment of whether or not the grass truly is greener in the corporate/nonprofit/vendor/international/school world.

Related FreePint links:

- "Rethinking Information Work: A Career Guide for Librarians and Other Information Professionals" Written by Kim Dority Reviewed by Marcia Rodney <http://www.freepint.com/bookshelf/rethink.htm>

- "Thriving on change: The right stuff for resilience in an information career" By Kim Dority <http://www.freepint.com/issues/130406.htm#tips>

- "The NextGen Librarian's Survival Guide" Written by Rachel Singer Gordon Reviewed by Kim Dority http://www.freepint.com/issues/080606.htm?PHPSESSID=306#bookshelf

"Global Collaborative Search: Watch This Space"

By Judith Koren

Judith Koren has been an independent information professional since 1994, serving the high-tech, bio-pharma and general business information sectors. She also teaches information retrieval at the University of Haifa, Israel. Before that she was library systems coordinator and administrator for the academic database network at the Technion - Israel Institute of Technology. In addition, she has recently co-founded ResearchTrail Ltd. You can read more about that at <http://blog.researchtrail.com/> or reach Judy at: <judith@researchtrail.com>.

The Web's current evolutionary phase, Web 2.0, highlights user-generated content. These days, anyone can publish anything, and everyone shares everything. They do it partly to gain or enhance a reputation ('Here are the coolest/most popular videos on YouTube') and partly out of a real desire to make contact with and collaborate with other people. For the first time ever, the scope of collaboration and social networking is transcending geographical boundaries and aspiring to be truly global.

Since the Web is a major artery for information, the lifeblood of our profession, our tools and 'occupational culture' tend to evolve with it. So we're hearing a new buzzword: collaborative search.

Truly global collaborative search - both international and universal in reach - would be a way for all information professionals world-wide, whether employed or independent, to discuss and help out with the search needs of others. For our clients, end-users world-wide, it would be a way to have access to advice, help with searches, and, if they wanted, the paid services of any information professional. It would involve a place where end-users and info-people could meet and interact; and also where sub-groups could meet, such as info-people discussing search questions between themselves. How close are we to this concept of global collaborative search?

Not, it appears, as close as the buzz implies. As I tried to answer this question, I found that everything out there now could be split neatly into two

types: on the one hand, services for librarians and information professionals, and on the other, services for the end-users. And never the twain shall meet? Let's take a look at what there is, and then discuss what there could be.

Services for the pros

1. Mailing lists

Long before the Web was born, reference librarians virtually lived in listservs such as BUSLIB-L, MEDLIB-L and STUMPERS-L. They were 'push' services - they landed in your email inbox, constantly reminding you that they were available even if nothing at the moment was of interest. And they were great collaborative search tools - a request for help would usually get an expert answer within a day or two. But since the 'Net back then only served the governmental and academic sectors, their reach, while international, was not universal.

The need for subject-focused discussion of reference questions still exists: when I describe mailing lists to younger reference librarians, they tend to look wistful and say, 'I could really do with something like that.'

2. Professional associations

Join SLA or AIIP and you find a community of peers eager to help with search problems (and anything else). They excel in collaboration, from advice to subcontracting. They include community listservs - 'push' search-help services. But professional associations can't reach everyone. That's because they:

- Are aimed at specific subgroups - AIIP at independent information professionals, SLA at 'special libraries' and corporate information centres

- Are, for the most part, US- or Western-centric despite attempts to reach out to a wider global community

- Charge Western-level subscription fees that put them out of reach in many parts of the world.

3. Web communities

FreePint is perhaps the nearest we've come to date to a real global community of information professionals. Its membership is an order of magnitude larger than that of the professional associations. Like them, it's got a place to ask questions -a large percentage of which are requests for help with searches. It's got added services, like a job bulletin board. And the FreePint Newsletter is clearly collaborative - info pros updating other info pros.

But even though FreePint has a wide reach, it doesn't offer everything a search community needs. It doesn't really enable outsourcing - collaboration on projects between professionals, such as AIIP excels at. Like the listservs and associations, it doesn't give access to end-users or enable collaboration between them and professionals.

Services for end-users

1. Answer-type services

These are more about Web 2.0 than about search. Yahoo! Answers, for

instance, promotes itself as 'a new way to find and share information. You can ask questions on any topic, get answers from real people, and share your insights.' This is fun, especially since any real person can reply, and what gives the service its warm'n'fuzzy Web 2.0 feel is that those who reply are from the same demographic as those who ask - they're not info pros. And the answers they supply are more opinion than fact.

So there's a lot of sharing going on, but there isn't much finding (in the info-pro sense of 'looking for') and if you're an information professional, you find yourself wondering whether what's being shared is really 'information'.

But these services indicate a felt need for help on the part of end-users, and a willingness to use collaborative tools to get that help.

2. Expert-type services

These all have one central feature in common - they're a for-fee service, in which the client can check out the experts' profiles but eventually has to choose one expert and pay a fee (usually per-minute) for a consultation. They provide a marketplace, which the collaborative communities lack. But the Experts themselves are competing, not collaborating; and it's sidelining the issue to call the sale of professional services 'collaboration', let alone collaborative search.

Information professionals are conspicuously absent from both Answers and Experts sites. Go into Guru.com or Elance.com or pretty well any other 'experts' service, and you find

at best an 'Internet Search' (!) category where the vast majority of the Experts are programmers/geeks. Why? It's not because 'we don't do that type of information' - we certainly do. Is it because we don't 'do' online help charged by the minute? But reference librarians certainly 'do' online help, not charged extra for at all. Would we feel more inclined to collaborate if the service were vertical - a collaborative-search community, rather than a general experts site?

3. Community information-sharing tools

Well, we've got wikis. They're good for collaborative content-building; but they're not so suitable a platform for collaborative search.

And we've got social bookmarking sites. You can search them and find collections of bookmarks made by others. You can post your own and find people like you. But, as in answers-type services, what's going on here is sharing and social networking, not collaboration.

Finally, there are a few new services - perhaps in them we'll find our Holy Grail of collaborative search?

* Mahalo <http://www.mahalo.com> is a compendium of subject resources built by Mahalo's 'Guides' or contributors. It's collaborative in the sense that anyone can suggest a link - but then so you can in the ODP or Yahoo!'s directory. Isn't this simply an updated version of a Web directory?

- Trexy <http://www.trexy.com> offers a downloadable toolbar which records the URLs of pages you've visited after using a search engine. This list of URLs is automatically created and uploaded to Trexy's site, where it becomes a 'trail' for the keyword you searched. Other people can see it; and the site co-locates the most popular sites from all the 'trails' suggested for the same keyword, into one list.

This is a cute idea, especially since it does give end-users something that only info pros have had till now: an easy way to share good resources you've found while searching. But collaboration, again, is limited, because you can't share your knowledge of how to search, only the URLs of sites selected from a search-results list. You can't add comments or advice about those sites.

Where does all this leave us?

I emerged from this quick survey with a few conclusions:

- Info pros feel the need to collaborate - to get ideas for how to approach a project; to get suggestions for good sources; and sometimes to outsource to others

- End users feel a need for direct access to people who can answer their questions. They love free community-type services, asking each other, but they'll also turn to professional experts, and at least some of them are prepared to pay for the service

- All the 'collaboration' tools I found are variants of known remedies such as resource lists, social bookmarking and discussion groups. They tend to address either the community of info pros, or the community of end users. There isn't a place where endusers can interact with search specialists (as opposed to whizkids who think they're search experts because they dream in Java)

- End-user tools for finding information don't often involve searching for it; and when they do, they're geared to simple searches - the sort that don't help when you're researching a complex question

- There are no current resources for helping end-users perform complex comprehensive searches - the kind that go beyond brief factual replies to a defined specific question

- Services that try to be global are nonetheless Western-centric: the non-US, non-European market is not well represented in them.

So we need GCS - Global Collaborative Search

A Web-based GCS community would support:

- Searchers collaborating with other searchers to build lists, or 'trails', of 'best resources' for a specific query, lists that are more content-rich than what's now available - not just links but also metadata about the resources and tips on how to use them; AND

- End-users looking for such lists - these are the ones who want to learn how to fish (without having to choose an expert and pay in order to ask the question); AND

- End-users looking for research services - these are the ones who want their fish filleted on a plate with the right sauce added; AND

- End-users and info pros who want to comment on and add to the resource lists already built and the questions already asked; AND

- A way of comparing 'trails' for the same or related questions, real- time; AND

- A way of supplying all this as a 'push' service - sending all the trails for a question to anyone, anywhere, or putting it in a blog or Web page and having it continue to update itself, without requiring you to return to the original GCS website, as more collaborators add suggestions,

comments, other queries and other related trails of sources.

How can we do this? Do librarians and info people want to do this, considering our absence from the experts and answers sites? What's stopping us from reaching out to the wider community of information-seekers? That's what we'll be discussing at the Round Table on Collaborative Search at the upcoming London '07 Online Conference.

I believe that the main things holding us back are lack of incentive and lack of suitable tools. So I and my colleagues have made a start with TrailMap, a Flash search-trail visualisation that solves the last problem in the list above. It's a packaged list of subject resources (Trail) and associated metadata that you can send to anyone or post online, where it continues to update itself real-time. And we've got some ideas about all the other points too. But I've already overrun my space in FreePint, so join us at the Online Conference for the next instalment.

Related FreePint links:

- "Search Trails: Back to the Future" By Nigel Hamilton
  <http://www.freepint.com/issues/300807.htm?PHPSESSID=306#feature>

- "CI: Collaborative Intelligence" By Daphne R. Raban
  <http://www.freepint.com/issues/140607.htm?PHPSESSID=306#tips>

- "Embracing the Wiki Way: Deploying a Corporate Wiki" By Leigh Dodds
  <http://www.freepint.com/issues/270706.htm#tips>

FreePint FUMSI Report -- Middle East and North Africa Research Resources

Middle East and North Africa Research Resources   ISBN 978-1-904769-23-1

"The countries that make up the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) have a combined population of over 300 million, and form an area of great economic opportunity for countries wishing to conduct business overseas."

Edited and with original material by Patrice Curtis, this report also draws on research conducted by VIP Editor Pam Foster for a special issue of VIP Magazine (http://www.vivaVIP.com/) featuring products covering the region. The Middle East and North Africa Research Resources report is a comprehensive introduction to online sources providing valuable information on various elements of the region's economy, population and government.

View a sample from this report, including table of contents, introduction and one tool kit activity:
web.freepint.com/shop/report/

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Pharma-Bio-Med 2007 is the specialist conference in Europe that focuses on the role of the Information Professional through all stages of a drug's progression, from discovery research, through pre-clinical assessment, clinical, regulatory, safety, post marketing surveillance, and business and competitor information.
Organised by Pharma-Bio-Med
 <http://www.freepint.com/go/e934>

"INSOURCE 2008: Conference on Professional Information Resources for Business, Management, Marketing and Research"
5 - 6 February 2008

The first INSOURCE 2008 conference will focus on professional information resources in electronic form used in business, knowledge management, marketing, market research, competitive intelligence etc. Unlike many other events the INSOURCE will put stress on the information contents available via the Internet rather than information technologies.

The programme includes the following issues: Marketing reports; Export and import of trade data; Sources for Competitive Intelligence; Company and financial information; Country, region and market risk reports; Monitoring of domestic and foreign media
Organised by Albertina icome Prague
<http://www.freepint.com/go/e932>

![FreePint]

"*I wish you a very happy 10th Birthday - you should all be very proud of what you have achieved and the discussions/help you have enabled.*" -- UK

Tell your story: Provide your FreePint testimonial here:

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Events cont …

Free listings

United Kingdom:

- "Improve Your Employability" 8 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e950>

- "Talking Water 07" 8 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e953>

- "AUKML/CLSIG Open Day 2007" 12 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e940>

United States:

- "ASIDIC Fall 2007 Meeting" 9 - 11 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e867>

Austria:

- "Competitive Intelligence Basics Workshop (ICI-1)" 12 - 13 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e943>

Bulgaria:

- "First SEE Business Information Forum" 8 November
  <http://www.freepint.com/go/e910>

NB: This is just a selection of information-related event listings in the FreePint Events database <http://www.freepint.com/events/>.

Gold

A look back at what FreePint covered at this time in previous years:

- FreePint No. 217 9th November 2006. "Internet Librarian International: Impressions from a First-Time Attendee" and "Election Cycles Primer: How and When People Come to Office"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/091106.htm

- FreePint No. 194 10th November 2005. "VoIP: Threat or Opportunity to the Market Research Industry?" and "Interview with Steve Borley, winner of the SLA Europe Information Professional Award"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/101105.htm

- FreePint No. 171 11th November 2004. "How to Improve your Business Writing" and "Information Auditing: Key Concepts and How To Get Started"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/111004.htm

- FreePint No. 148 6th November 2003. "Records Management, the Aunt Sally of your business!" and "Getting UK Immigration Information and Advice"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/061103.htm

- FreePint No. 124, 14th November 2002. "Teaching In China" and "Free Pint talks to Jakob Nielsen"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/141102.htm

- FreePint No. 99, 1st November 2001. "Web Sources for Climate Change and Emissions Trading" and "Marketing Library and Information Services"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/011101.htm

- FreePint No. 74, 2nd November 2000. "Web Sources for Central and Eastern Europe" and "Portals for business information on the Internet"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/021100.htm

- FreePint No. 49, 4th November 1999. "Key UK Library and Information Science Information Resources" and "Affiliate and Associate Programs"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/211099.htm

- FreePint No. 25, 12th November 1998. "Web Site Promotion Ideas" and "CD-ROMs and the Web"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/121198.htm

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