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About FreePint

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 and events, with answers to research questions and networking at the FreePint Bar.

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

Editorial

It was just at this time, nine years ago, that I was working on my plan to become a freelance 'information consultant'. I felt I had the right background, with a degree in 'information science' and having worked for a few 'information vendors'.

The minor detail of how to make money seemed less pressing than thinking of a trading name, creating stationery, learning about the legislation, setting up computer equipment, etc.

Of course, how to make money is the million-dollar question (literally), and I was very grateful then, as I still am, to the support I received from independent information professionals who had already made the leap.

It is, of course, your network of contacts that will make the difference when working for yourself. Isolating yourself from face-to-face events and hiding your light under a bushel are guaranteed to make it harder for you to earn a living and build your business.

Last week's SLA conference in Toronto, Canada, was a great opportunity for information professionals to meet and build that network. In today's FreePint there are two reviews of the conference, both of which highlight the importance of networking. We also have an article with a number of excellent tips on starting out as a freelance consultant.

Many of the exhibitors at the SLA conference will also be coming here to London in December for the Online Information show. So remember to cast your vote for those who provide outstanding customer service:

"Online Information / FreePint Award for
Best Customer Service Team"
<http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2005/>

If you are thinking of striking out alone and working for yourself, then take advantage of the expertise and support available at the FreePint Bar <http://www.freepint.com/bar>. Many of us have already made the move and we're more than happy to share our experiences, either online or over a coffee. One quick bit of advice though: do give some thought to how you're actually going to make money.

Best regards

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The Jinfo service enables you to search for and advertise information-related job vacancies.

The Jinfo Newsletter is published free every two weeks, and contains a list of the latest vacancies along with job seeking advice. The latest editorial is entitled "So now you have to choose some one".

To read the latest Jinfo Newsletter and to subscribe to receive it twice-monthly by email, visit <http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/>.

Here are some of the latest featured jobs:

Information Officer
One of the leading London based law firms is seeking an Information Officer to work as part of the Information Unit team.
Recruiter: D A Solutions Ltd
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4085>

Research Executive
Researcher required at leading information services plc to research/update information from a range of sources for our websites
Recruiter: j4b plc
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4090>

Head of Information (Legal)
Legal Information Manager for newly created role to develop prestigious law firm's know-how and legal information.
Recruiter: Glen Recruitment
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4098>

Researcher
Researcher - London - GBP25-30K. This is an exciting opportunity for a bright, ambitious graduate to take on a key research role. Recruiter: Penna plc
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4099>

Centre and Portal Administrator
Responsible for ensuring the efficient and effective administration of the Centre's activities and updating & care of the website.
Recruiter: Sheffield Hallam University
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4114>

Information Services Manager
Law library management experience in Manchester? 9 month FTC, staff and resource management to deliver enquiry and CAS services. Recruiter: Sue Hill Recruitment
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4125>

Corporate Finance Researcher
Do you have a logical approach to information retrieval and an ability to think creatively about research requests? Recruiter: City Professionals
<http://www.jinfo.com/go/j4128>

 [The above jobs are paid listings]

NB: There are 30 other jobs in the current edition of the Jinfo Newsletter
<http://www.jinfo.com/newsletter/> and over 80 in the Jinfo database <http://www.jinfo.com/>.

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<http://www.internet-librarian.com>

First review of China Insight in May VIP

The May issue of VIP includes the first extensive review of China Insight. Newly launched by Xinhua Finance, it combines data on Chinese publicly listed companies with software developed by Mergent. This issue also carries an in-depth review of Mergent Online.

<http://www.vivaVIP.com/>

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"A simple & elegant solution to those clunky strings - thank you!" Information Resources Manager, Chelmsford, UK (May 2005)

<http://www.DigBig.com/>

My Favourite Tipples
by Jan Verbogen

Jan Verbogen works for the Belgian National Institute for Health Insurance and Incapacity. Commuting to Brussels by train, he reads about 100 books a year.

Submit your top five favourite Web sites. See the guidelines at <http://www.freepint.com/author.htm>.

- If you do project management support work, Gantthead <http://www.gantthead.com> should be in your favourites folder. News, interesting articles, templates, book reviews, discussions, tips; everything a PSO needs is there.

- Keep yourself organized at all times with 'Getting things done', the productivity and life-management process developed by David Allen. 43Folders <http://www.43folders.com/2004/09/getting_started.html> helps you get started.

- <http://www.langa.com/index.html> is the website of Fred Langa, former editor of Byte and Windows Magazine. Subscribe to his newsletter to keep informed about PCs, software and best practices.

- Wherever you are, you can always access your favourite RSS-feeds using Bloglines <http://www.bloglines.com/>. I use it to read up on books and literature.

- <http://www.j-walkblog.com/blog/> - John Walkenbach's blog about 'stuff that may or may not interest you'. The lighter side of the Internet.

Register for Search Tips from Factiva

Factiva's monthly newsletter, "InfoPro Alliance" gives you the inside scoop on latest search tips, research tools and new sources.

Register today and you'll find credible information faster.

<http://www.factiva.com/emails/2005/freepinttext512>

Reward good customer service :: Nominate today

This is your chance to reward excellence by nominating the online information vendor who, in your opinion, has provided you with outstanding customer service.

Cast your vote for this year's "Online Information / FreePint Award for Best Customer Service Team":

<http://www.freepint.com/events/online-info-2005/>

FreePint Bar
**In Association with Factiva
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It's been three weeks since the last Bar Summary. A number of questions remain unanswered and there have been some interesting discussion threads.

Are you willing to talk about rates for competitive intelligence work <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32321> or able to recommend a reliable subscription management service for newspapers and magazines? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32398>. Is there any recent research into the information needs of SMEs? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32373>.

There have been some interesting comments on the changing role of the information professional <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32357> and someone considering doing a Masters is asking about CILIP's Certification Framework <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32301>.

CILIP's Umbrella 2005 conference takes place at the end of the month, and FreePint is looking for two reviewers to share their experiences <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32251>. There are also many other information events at this time of year, and FreePint's events page is bursting with them <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32374>.

Regarding technology, do you know of bulletin board software that can be used purely through email? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32285>. Do you have experience of computer equipment to assist blind users of an education library <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32226>. Or perhaps you know of EU companies that develop software for small industrial products, e.g. small printers and labelling machines? <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32319>.
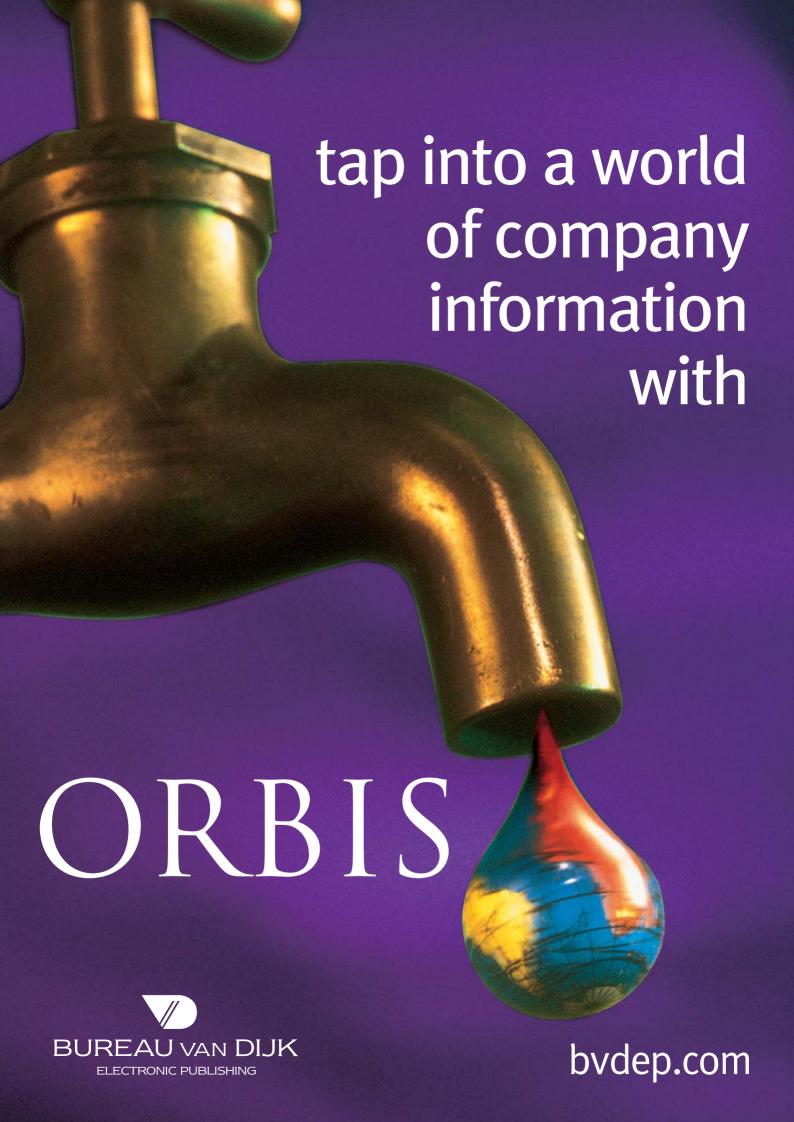
A programmer is looking for advice on selling his shareware <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32340> and there's been some good advice on putting out a Website tender <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32193>.

There have been a number of specific industry research enquiries: the top UK capital project investors <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32316>; global chemical production levels <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32320>; database of shareholders of quoted European companies" <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32317>; and children's TV media research <http://www.freepint.com/go/b32315>.

Finally, there is an interesting discussion at the Student Bar about a FreePinter's son's Open University scientific and technological degree <http://www.freepint.com/go/s4402>.

Penny Hann, FreePint
<penny.hann@freepint.com>

*The FreePint Bar is where you can get free help with your tricky research questions <http://www.freepint.com/bar>
Twice-weekly email digests of the latest postings can be requested at <http://www.freepint.com/subs/>.*

Tips Article

"Two Views of the SLA Conference, Toronto, June 2005"
By Mary Hudson and Joanna Kaczmarczyk

Mary Hudson is the information librarian for finance and economics at Southampton Institute, a university college, soon to be a new university. She first attended SLA whilst working in the tax library of Deloitte and Touche and returned again this year for the first time since the late 1990s. Even though she is no longer a Special Librarian, she found the conference still relevant and useful to attend.

Joanna Kaczmarczyk is a "solo" researcher providing information services to European offices of Warburg Pincus International, a US based private equity firm. Previously, she worked in research teams of Goldman Sachs International and Hermes Pension Management. She is also a member of Private Equity Information Professionals group recently formed within the Business & Finance Division of SLA.

Here are two reviews of the SLA conference which took place in Toronto on the 5th-8th June <http://www.sla.org>, from both a US and UK slant:

By Mary Hudson

Introduction

From the moment I walked down the road and saw the NYPD police car and police officers, I knew I was in for an exciting few days at the SLA Conference in Toronto. The Mayor of the City declared the week "Special Librarians' Week in Toronto" and there were electronic welcome signs at the airport.

Organisation

Based around the Conference Centre in the city centre, close to both the VIA rail station and the main underground shopping centre, the SLA Conference was an astonishing feat of organisation.

Between four and five thousand librarians were expected and there was a comprehensive mix of day courses, classes and half-day seminars arranged, in addition to the main conference programme.

The registration and pre-registration worked well, although the queues were quite long at times. The colour coding for name badges clearly identified exhibitors, attendees and first-time attendees. (Much is made of this and there is a Special Reception for them).

As at previous SLA conferences there was a free Cyber Connection, where members could use email or access the internet or, of course, access the SLA Conference Blog.

This year, food was available at certain times of the day in the Exhibition Hall, provided by the major conference partners. It included coffee breaks in the mornings, an international selection one afternoon and an ice cream bar break on another.

The giveaways in the exhibition hall ranged from iPods and DVD players to bugs, pens and sticky notes. Unexpected items at the conference included the Greek statue performance artist who held his pose for two hours on Monday and the attendee massage that was available each day.

Exhibition Hall

The Exhibition Hall on the first floor was similar to Online with about two hundred and sixty exhibitors and more than four hundred booths. There was a positive mix of technologies with major publishers, software firms, e-book publishers and market research companies all present.

More unusual exhibitors included <http://www.sharkrepellent.net> who turned out to be a US firm dealing with corporate governance and takeovers. Their sharks were very popular!

It was a great opportunity to see what was new in my subject area and to talk to suppliers. On the first day of the exhibition there was time to talk and look around as the main conference started on the following morning and most attendees arrived in time for that.

Sessions

There were Keynote Speakers on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday mornings, the first of whom was Don Tapscott, President of the New Paradigm Learning Corporation. An accomplished speaker, he assured his vast audience that we were now in the "information content collaboration business". He raised the issue of how the next generation are "growing up digital" and the effect this will have upon the business world of the future.

The breakfast meetings are an important part of the conference, with regular fixtures such as the Legal Division Tax Roundtable (on Sunday morning) and the Standard and Poor's Business Breakfast meeting. On the Monday morning alone there was a choice of 20 breakfast meetings! These are excellent opportunities to hear speakers in your own subject area, network with colleagues old and new and, of course, have breakfast too.

High-profile speakers included Mary Ellen Bates, whose talk on "The Next Information Revolution" was a fascinating run-through of the expanding concept of searching, including non-traditional searching and what this will mean for the information profession. Two of her examples are:

- <http://www.grokker.com> helps to visualise the search, which may be a clearer way for some people to sort the results of their search

- <http://mindset.research.yahoo.com/> allows you to sort the results as to whether you are intending to shop or to carry out research.

Online University

In addition, SLA chose this year's Conference to launch their own online university <http://www.clickuniversity.com>. In partnership with Elsevier, it is a new online learning system specifically designed for librarians and information professionals. The intention is to provide courses ranging from short courses on particular topics to degree courses in conjunction with both Syracuse University and Drexel University College.

Conclusion

Overall, I found the days I spent at SLA informative and inspiring. It lived up to its theme of "Connecting People and Information". The speakers I listened to were positive and upbeat about the future of information work and I appreciated the opportunity to talk to so many of our suppliers in the Exhibition Hall.

And the NYPD police car and police officers?

Bruce Willis was making a film in Toronto and was wearing an NYPD-style uniform - it was only pretend! It looked real on first sight until I remembered which city I was in.

Toronto coped admirably with both his film unit and over four thousand librarians.

By Joanna Kaczmarczyk

So I have done it! Survived my first SLA conference. And it did require a lot of strength to go through almost five days filled with lectures, seminars, receptions, open days, breakfasts that started at 7am and days that could easily finish at midnight.

Don't think that you would be able to see much of the host city. My guide to Toronto and the surrounding areas remained unopened, except for Sunday (second day of pre-conference Continuing Education series of workshops) when I went for a short trip to Niagara Falls.

Occasionally there was a chance to see the interiors of other buildings (rather than your hotel's or convention centre's) when vendors organised dinners for faithful subscribers to their wares. I was fortunate to spend a delightful Monday evening on a 10,000 square- foot trading floor of the former Toronto Stock Exchange building, now housing the Design Museum.

You do get to know your printed conference guide pretty well. In panic, I kept thumbing though it late at night and early in the morning (and in-between sessions too) trying to remember what and where I had planned to attend. And panic is the right word - as a few people who have done it before predicted, I felt agitated thinking I was missing some excellent session whilst sitting in a so-so one.

Countless conversations with fellow attendees circled around the merits of the speakers, the currency of the subject and overall usefulness of

the workshops. While nobody expected too much fun (we were librarians after all!), it was important to choose wisely because one and a half hours could sometimes feel like a very, very long time, especially if spent in a small room faced with an uninspiring speaker. That's why some sessions, judged mainly by the word of mouth and the celebrity status of the moderator (yes, yes, even in our little world we do have some famous librarians or should I say Information Professionals), were very popular and massively attended. Also, "thought-provoking" seemed to attract attention, as well as anything with "competitive intelligence" in the title, and, of course, so did sessions that did not clash with any of the above.

And there were SLA General Sessions ... I have to admit, there was a moment during the opening session on Monday when the quote from The Mummy flashed in my mind. When I looked around and saw thousands being addressed by Don Tapscott, authority in business strategy, I realised I was surrounded by people who take their profession very seriously and by default, I was one of them! It was a good feeling.

I wasn't able to maintain it for too long, though. The concept of 'The Naked Corporation' was not the easiest to grasp. How do you revolutionise your organisation with 'Transparency'? How do you get your head around harnessing the 'Digital Capital' of your organisation?

In the next general session, Bill Buxton had a similar message to Tapscott: he stressed time and time again that it was our role, as information professionals, to make sense of all this mess (the technology) and create a kind of transparent order for our clients' benefit. We could also help make the world a better place by supporting our organisations through being honest, ethical, open to critique and revision.

The last keynote speaker, Gary Hamel, "most influential thinker on strategy", echoed Topscott: to survive as information professionals in this breathtakingly fast-changing technological environment, we would need to revolutionise our attitude - become innovative in all aspects of our professional lives and keep breaking the boundaries of existing business models.

These concepts are not difficult to grasp after all, but the challenge is to take these strategies home and try to implement them in our organisations where, in most cases, we need to fight daily for our right to be considered worthy of our costly existence as information departments. It seems obvious to me now, but it made me wonder: when was the last time I did something innovative in my office? When did I question existing ways? How would I react to a change or innovation enforced by my superiors?

Like most delegates I expected practical advice; and some of the workshops and sessions delivered. But, after these few days, I realised there was not going to be a handout with all the answers to take home. It is all up to me. Scary!

And here comes, in my opinion, the greatest benefit of the SLA conference (and membership of this organisation). NETWORKING! I was very sceptical at first, thinking networking is tiresome - you go around presenting your business card to unsuspecting victims, staring at their name tags and introducing yourself until you almost forget your own name. Well, it is a bit like that, except that the pleasure from meeting fellow 'gatekeepers' of the information world overrides all the initial doubts.

What is ResourceShelf?
<http://www.resourceshelf.com>

ResourceShelf is a free daily update containing news of interest to information professionals around the world.

Topics include the latest news with web search engines, research tips, new web resources, and much more.

I was very fortunate to meet, and get to know better, people I used to work with, people I read and heard about, and also some enthusiastic people who want to keep in touch and exchange information. This eagerness in discussing our work practices, sharing experiences and swapping success stories in overcoming our common problems gave me more ideas I could implement in my work environment than most of the formal sessions. We wouldn't even stop talking shop during our shared breakfasts/dinners. That's what is called dedication - I hope our bosses could hear that!

It wasn't all work and no play. Thanks to our European Chapter's well- organised President we had contact details and intelligence of the movements of most of the UK delegates - very helpful when planning shopping or sightseeing trips. Tips on where to find good bars and restaurants or which vendor parties were worth gate-crashing were also exchanged. We did have a very good time!

Canada was a great host of the conference. I did not have much chance to see Toronto, but was fortunate to spend a couple of days in baking hot Montreal. And there, in my B&B, I met a fellow librarian. Motor sports enthusiast (it was Grand Prix weekend after all - he drove on his motorbike from the US to see the race) working for the US government and the army as a librarian in a department dealing with chemical weapons disposal. How challenging is that?! When he learned I had just came from the conference, he said he used to attend for years, but realised that as a librarian there were not many ladders he needed to climb and he felt the conference program did little to advance his career. But you cannot beat it for networking, he said with a reminiscing smile; I couldn't agree more.

{ *credibility counts:* }

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Arthur Weiss is a UK-based management consultant specialising in competitive intelligence and strategy. He first started using online sources for competitive intelligence in the late 1980s and since then has become expert in all aspects of online research. In 1997 he offered the first training course on using the Internet for Competitive Intelligence (at the Online Information Conference) and has continued offering training courses on this topic. Arthur has written and presented on competitive intelligence, marketing and Internet related topics in the UK, Europe, US and elsewhere. Arthur is the managing partner of AWARE, a CI consultancy offering clients CI research, analysis and training. He can be contacted through AWARE's web-site at <http://www.marketing-intelligence.co.uk>.

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"Online Competitive Intelligence: Increase your profits using cyber intelligence"
Reviewed by Arthur Weiss

I started reading Online Competitive Intelligence by Helen Burrell full of high hopes - but the book turned out to be a bit of a 'curate's egg': excellent in parts but inadequate elsewhere.

Online Competitive Intelligence is divided into four sections:

- An introduction to Competitive Intelligence (CI);
- Choosing & using online sources for CI;
- Organising the research;
- References & appendices.

The first section is the best - giving an overview of CI, and searching for online information. Burwell discusses the benefits of paying for information versus using the Internet for free information. She examines methods for handling projects and seeking information, and gives good examples on ways of defining competitors and the types of intelligence that can be found online. I had no problems with this section, finding it interesting and informative.

The next section should be the meat of the book - but in my view, it was not thought through sufficiently, and is the weakest part. It consists of a number of chapters looking at different types of information. I found the style tedious and repetitive with its description of numerous sources yet without really explaining the principles for finding them. This is a major missed opportunity as the book could have advised on techniques for more effective searching for sources rather than its "here is one I discovered earlier - now bookmark it and hope that it never disappears" approach.

On the other hand, to be fair, most readers would not have read through this section in its entirety, but instead just used it as a reference section looking up only those aspects that were needed. Unfortunately, the overall focus is on researching US companies - and the suggestions for non-US research are eclectic (for example, Burwell includes just four lines on the UK government's

web archive, and almost nothing on other European official sources: as for Asia and the Pacific rim areas - these may as well not exist). Considering that business is now global, I think that this is a significant drawback to the book.

The third section is good - consisting mainly of a number of templates that can be used as models for CI reports and profiles as well as suggestions for finding sources for particular competitor profile parts. The final section of the book primarily lists several hundred web-sites. These are broken down by category and notwithstanding the aforementioned US bias this is still useful as a list of online CI resources.

The book is a second edition, and I noticed a number of pages that should (and could) have been updated but weren't - for example in the first chapter Burwell recommends FT Profile for non-US research. FT Profile was acquired by Lexis-Nexis in 2000 and the service was discontinued a few years ago. This is slightly ironic, as on the next page, Burwell correctly says that one way of assessing the quality of online information is by asking if the data is complete and when was it last updated!

In summary - should you buy this book? Well it depends - if you are based in the US, or this is your primary focus then you would find this book a great resource for online CI. However if finding competitive intelligence on US companies is not your thing then you are likely to be disappointed - as the book fails by not offering general techniques for finding sources, meaning that you will be none the wiser when it comes to locating elusive CI information on other regions.

FreePint

Contributors to this issue:

William Hann (FreePint Managing Editor), Penny (FreePint Administrator), Jela Webb, Mary Hudson, Joanna Kaczmarczyk, Arthur Weiss, Jan Verbogen Plain Text <http://www.plain-text.co.uk/> (proofreading).

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Contact

Feature Article

"Setting Up as an Independent Consultant"
By Jela Webb

Introduction

The nature of the workplace has been changing, with organisations slimming down and outsourcing many types of activities; this has given rise to the loss of both job security and long-term employment.

Consultancy may be defined as 'providing independent services to meet clients' needs in exchange for a fee'. Consulting has become a viable option particularly with the focus on the knowledge-based economy. It is important to distinguish consultancy from contracting - a consultant has much greater autonomy, often assisting more than one client at a time, often choosing the hours worked, deciding for themselves whether to work on- or off-site and being responsible for the final product or service.

The consulting industry is diverse and covers a wide range of activities. Broadly speaking it can be broken down into four categories:

1. Strategy firms
2. Full service firms
3. Boutique firms
4. Independents

This article will concentrate on 'independents' - more than 50% of consulting firms are 'one-man bands' and it is increasingly becoming an attractive proposition for many who feel that corporate life is no longer for them. Whilst giving up full-time paid employment to set up as a consultant might be a daunting prospect, with proper planning and a methodical approach, you should be able to fully reap the rewards of working independently. Keys to success lie in having the right personal qualities and skills together with an understanding of management practices.

Establishing your own consultancy is a risk and the pressures associated with it should not be underestimated. You will be staking everything on your own ability and must be able to deal with the downsides as well as the upsides. There is no doubt that it can be a rewarding experience but firstly ask yourself why do you want to set up as an independent consultant. Reasons may include:

- Independence - however, working as a consultant will entail working with and for others so you still need to be able to work in or as part of a team

- Job satisfaction - wanting to do something in your own way and style will often lead you down the self employed (consultancy) route

- Achievement and success - there is a real 'buzz' attached to running your own successful business but be prepared to deal with the challenges this brings and equip yourself to deal with any difficulties

- Money - starting and running your own consultancy does not guarantee wealth. Starting a consultancy when you feel you have no other choice is a situation you should be wary of.

Is consultancy for you?

Consultants need an area of expertise - clients typically buy services that they don't have 'in-house' so you need to think about what it is that you are selling - clients are busy people so you need to make it quite clear at the outset what it is you can deliver and how it will benefit them. Having an area of expertise may mean that you want to concentrate on a specific discipline (e.g. organisational development) or in a specific sector. If you limit yourself to a particular sector then do be aware of the impact of any industry downturn and what that might do to your own business.

Some consultants prefer to market themselves as generalists where they sell a range of skills across the market. A word of caution: clients can sometimes be suspicious of someone who purports to be able to solve all their issues. If you feel that you are more likely to succeed as a generalist then I'd advise you to sell your services as an expert in the client's most pressing area and introduce other generalist skills as the assignment develops.

Self-assessment

It is advisable to undertake some self-assessment and analysis before embarking on a new consultancy venture. Firstly assess your skills, undertake a self audit exercise - detail your skills (technical, business, leadership, selling, organisational) and attributes; consider how you might apply these in consultancy work. Be honest and objective; ask friends, colleagues and family members their opinion.

Consider the type of consultancy projects you would like to work on - have you undertaken similar/relevant work before? Can you provide evidence of your ability? Have you published any work in related subjects? Are you able to construct a portfolio of consultancy projects, references and articles that can help you sell yourself to potential clients?

To run your own consultancy business you need to be pretty resilient and answer some searching questions honestly :- Are you realistic about your own capabilities? Are you motivated and self-disciplined? Do you have a support network? Are you prepared to dedicate yourself fully to establishing the business? Do you have good interpersonal skills? Are you decisive? Do you cope well with stressful situations? Do you 'stick it out' when times get tough? Do you take advice

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and learn from mistakes? Are you in good health? Do you fully appreciate the risks in establishing your own consultancy?

If you are able to answer affirmatively then you have got what it takes to move forward. If not, don't despair - by thinking carefully about the areas I have highlighted you will have identified aspects that need to be worked on and where to focus your improvement efforts.

Marketing

Consultants also need to be able to promote and market themselves. As an independent you will be responsible for your own marketing and although it is relatively straightforward to set up a sole proprietorship consultancy, establishing and sustaining business activity calls for marketing and promotion. Promoting yourself, persuading people to support you and winning clients is crucial to success.

A new consultant may become involved in a good deal of speculative work in order to establish a client portfolio, sometimes you have to 'speculate to accumulate' but be aware of offering too much for free as you will run the risk of devaluing your services if you don't charge for them. It's a careful balancing act, which becomes easier as you become more established.

Most consultants will have contacts in their area of expertise from their previous experience/employment and can target these for work. I always encourage people starting up not to overlook existing contacts as potential future clients.

Stationery, publicity material and business cards should be well designed and printed on good-quality paper. These days, with the advent of the PC and suitable software, it is possible to produce professionally-looking material without going to huge expense.

Other marketing-related activity might include speaking at conferences and local business events, presenting to professional associations and writing articles for relevant industry journals. Local newspapers run 'advertorials' in their business sections so you may want to advertise the launch of your consultancy this way.

Mailing packs can be distributed to potential clients - these could include a CV, details of services offered, details of memberships of professional bodies, details of previous assignments (opportunities may have been possible whilst still in full time paid employment), details of any conference speaking engagements, published articles, references and feedback from previous projects. Think about presenting the material in a creative way - in an unusually shaped parcel or in a tube (this happened to me

once and was a real attention-getter!).

The Internet provides opportunities to establish your own web site for marketing and promotional purposes. The investment in a web site can pay dividends and helps to present a professional image. Do you meet the 'Google factor?' If a potential client types your name into a search engine what results are returned?

Networking

Networking is very important and for most consultants it is the single most important business-getting tool. To succeed in consultancy you need to establish a personal and professional network. It is no exaggeration to suggest that your network should be in the region of 200 and needs to be nurtured and updated regularly. It is interesting that whilst so much business (not just consultancy) is obtained through networking, these skills rarely appear on any business school curriculum.

You probably already have a personal network from:

- Family
- Friends and neighbours
- Colleagues
- College/university

and a professional network from:

- Previous employment
- Conferences
- Exhibitions
- Trade associations
- Business/professional associations
- Contacts from presentations attended/given

Make a list and start building and cultivating your network months in advance of starting your consultancy.

Formal networking events can sometimes feel daunting, remember the unease that you feel is no different from how others feel - look out for someone standing on their own, initiate an approach, ask them about projects they are involved in, find common ground. Be sincere and don't be afraid to circulate; set yourself a target of making three new contacts at each networking event.

Develop your 'elevator pitch': describe what you do and importantly how you benefit clients, in a couple of short sentences.

Keeping in touch with many contacts is made easier with e-mail - a newsletter, a launch of your new web site or an e-Christmas card for instance.

Chargeable rates

The amount you charge a client will largely depend upon the market. Ascertain what the 'market rates' are and price accordingly. If you price your services too high then you may not secure any work. Alternatively, if you price too low, then you may not secure work because you may give the impression of a cheap and not very valuable service.

How much can you charge? This is an age-old challenge for new consultants. The five-step plan below gives an indication of how you might work out your chargeable rate:

1. Calculate annual household and personal expenditure (food, clothes, mortgage, holidays, rent, telephone, tax, pension, insurance etc.)

2. Calculate the income required to cover the above items

3. Add all the annual business costs to the income calculation

4. Divide the total by the number of days you plan to work each year

5. Add on the profit you wish to make (a margin of 15% to 25% is not unreasonable)

This will then enable you to work out your daily chargeable rate. It is important to bear in mind that you will not be generating income on every 'working day' of the year. There will be days when you need to build your skills, (attend courses, conferences, exhibitions, etc.), days spent on administrative matters, days spent on marketing activities, days spent putting proposals together, etc. As a broad rule of thumb, I'd recommended using 60% of the available working days for fee income work and price your services accordingly.

Legal aspects and other requirements

Aspects that you need to consider are bank accounts, insurance, tax, VAT, national insurance as well as deciding what form the business will take - sole trader or limited company. It is best to seek professional advice.

Write a business plan, set targets and goals and don't forget your own continuing professional development.

Summary

A single-person consultancy can be started relatively easily and at very little cost. Give it some careful thought and planning - the issues outlined provide you with guidance, there is a good deal to consider and it can be a very satisfying experience. There are risks and pressures associated with it. You need to have the right skills and temperament to succeed. It is important to assess your abilities and aptitude honestly before proceeding with your ideas.

Do your homework, you are taking a chance; if after considering all the issues, you feel you have a viable proposition go ahead - give it 100%. Good Luck!

Gold

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- FreePint No.161 17th June 2004. "The Impact of the US Sarbanes-Oxley Act on Records Management World Wide" and "RSS: Less hype, more action"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/170604.htm

- FreePint No.139 26th June 2003. "Taxation Law Resources Online - Tax Doesn't Have to be Taxing" and "Searching Free Trade Mark Databases on the Web"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/260603.htm

- Free Pint No.114 13th June 2002. "Web Site Usability Resources" and "War & Peace, Famine & Disaster - Finding Work in International Development"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/130602.htm

- Free Pint No.90, 21st June 2001. "Do you Google?" and "Electronic Health Information : A boon and a curse!"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/210601.htm

- Free Pint No.65, 22nd June 2000. "Internet Intelligence - analysing web-sites for competitive intelligence" and "WAP Technology and Services"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/220600.htm

- Free Pint No.41, 24th June 1999. "Answering back" and "Finding Links to the Past: archaeological resources on the Web"
  http://www.freepint.com/issues/240699.htm

- Free Pint No.16, 11th June 1998. "Web Site Marketing - How do they do that?"" and "How to run a survey on the Net"
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- "Umbrella 2005" 30th June - 2 July
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