



Association of Independent  
Information Professionals

## *The Independent Information Professional*

Information Brokering as a profession probably has its roots in the 1960's, when a few individuals and library organizations realized that the computer and the photocopier, harbingers of the significant role to be played by technology in the information revolution, would have a major impact on the organization and retrieval of information. The ability to deliver documents, copies of published articles, and similar material to the academic, business and professional communities, on-demand, presented an opportunity to those with enough foresight and entrepreneurial spirit to turn the need into a service business.

The concept of a company that legally obtains information for others, and charges for this service, can be documented as early as the 1930's. It was in the late Sixties and early Seventies, however, that organizations like Rice University's Regional Information and Communication Exchange (R.I.C.E.) and Information Unlimited opened their doors. The latter was founded by Sue Ruge and Georgia Finnigan, industry pioneers who went on to form, respectively, the highly successful Information On Demand and The Information Store. While both of these companies were later sold to larger organizations, R.I.C.E. celebrated its 30th anniversary in business in 1997

The profession probably was first chronicled in 1977 in *The Directory of Fee-Based Information Services*, and in 1979 with the *Journal of Fee-Based Information Services*, edited by Kelly Warnken of The Information Alternative. Rights to these publications were purchased in 1983 by Burwell Enterprises, Inc., of Houston, TX. With its first edition in 1984, Burwell identified 334 such services in eighteen countries; the 13th edition, now titled *The Burwell World Directory of Information Brokers*, lists approximately 1000 companies in 38 countries.

The realization that others had joined their ranks or were interested in forming new information brokerages made information professionals increasingly aware of the need to organize. The Association of Independent Information Professionals was formed in 1987 when 26 entrepreneurs from Europe, Latin America, and all corners of the U.S. attended an organizational meeting in Milwaukee, WI. Although their companies offered a variety of services, the common thread was their involvement with information – retrieving it, organizing and analyzing it, or consulting regarding its use and management.

Information brokers in the 1970's frequently held a degree in Library Science. In recent years, however, colleagues with advanced degrees in science, law, business, medicine, or other disciplines

have joined their ranks. These newcomers have combined their education and years of experience with entrepreneurship, starting companies that serve a wide variety of clients, sometimes including their former employers. These experts, along with those holding Library Science degrees, can handle both general and highly-specialized questions or assignments. For projects outside their realm of expertise, or where additional skills or knowledge are required, their colleagues in AIIP are available for referral or subcontracting.

The need for professional standards was recognized and addressed in the creation of the AIIP Code of Ethical Business Practice, which outlines the responsibilities of members and the standards to which they adhere. Continuing education, whereby members maintain and upgrade their skills, has been an important part of the program at each of the organization's conferences, which are held annually in major U.S. cities. Additional programs on copyright, liability, and other legal issues keep AIIP members abreast of developments in these areas.

Independent information professionals provide information services to organizations of all sizes and types, either in conjunction with existing staff or by contract. Although document retrieval and delivery, literature surveys, and data-gathering are still the mainstay of some information brokerages' work, other companies gather data, analyze it, and provide comprehensive, high-quality substantive reports that play a key role in their clients' decision-making process.

As corporate America has downsized, re-engineered and sought to address issues of quality and productivity, its needs have changed. Information professionals meet these needs, utilizing improved tools of the trade such as full-text databases, specialized software, better communications technology, and the Internet. For companies which lack in-house research departments, or where existing departments cannot handle the full volume of information requests, working with independent researchers is a viable option.

Whether the independent researcher is called an information broker or an information professional is a matter of choice. The terms are often used interchangeably, and some AIIP members use both to describe themselves or their companies. Regardless of what they are called, these organizations charge for services rendered and for costs incurred on behalf of their clients.

## **Business and Industry**

As today's business and industry executives face the need to stay competitive and informed, many information professionals work with companies to meet these needs. Typical clients range from small business owners to Fortune 500 companies, insurance and investment firms, advertising and public relations agencies, and manufacturing and service industries. With the vast amount of information and the various formats in which it exists, business clients need assistance in determining their information needs and locating the appropriate sources. Some information professionals have discovered new opportunities in training their clients in basic research and Intranet development, while others provide value-added services including analysis of research results. As relationships develop, companies see the benefits in time and dollar savings by working with information professionals and allowing their employees to focus on their own areas of expertise.

Some examples of how information professionals serve business and industry:

- A large manufacturing firm is considering a new product launch. Working with the research and development team, the information professional identifies current suppliers of similar products and their distribution channels, locate competitors' patent documents, and determines average pricing. Industry experts are located and interviewed about the demand for this product. Market share and forecasting data are presented to help the firm make an informed decision with much less risk.
- A mid-sized company has been successful selling its products within the United States, and would like to break into overseas markets. Working with their marketing department, the information professional gathers some basic information on how to export, and locates studies on current world economic conditions. Trade statistics are analyzed to determine import/export trends, and databases of prospective buyers for their products are searched. Once a prospect is found, the information professional presents a report on business customs of that particular country and any necessary port regulations. A list of potential distributors is compiled, as well as information on conducting the overseas financial transactions.
- A new company has had a profitable first year, and the CEO can barely manage its growth. An information professional determines that a current awareness service to monitor industry publications would save time, along with monthly reports on regulatory and compliance issues. An industry portrait is created by providing complete company and executive profiles on competitors, along with detailed financial analysis of a few key players. Sales prospect lists are developed from existing demographic data, and several associations are recommended for the new company to join.

## **Legal Research**

Other information professionals specialize in providing support to the legal profession through legal research and writing, law library management, and litigation support. They search cases, statutes and other sources of law, and are able to draft legal memoranda, pleadings, motions and briefs. Information professionals also maintain and update law library collections, organize and arrange law libraries, monitor expenditures, plan and implement law library relocations, and recommend acquisitions. Through a combination of online and manual research, they find information about products, assets of judgment debtors, ownership of subsidiaries, and expert witnesses.

Examples of how information professionals serve clients in the legal profession:

- A woman is severely injured when a manhole cover breaks beneath her foot. Her claim for compensation depends on identifying why the cover broke. An information professional performs a literature search that reveals an established product defect from the cover having been warped out of shape by frost heave. The failure of the manhole cover to seat evenly in the warped skirt gradually causes hairline cracks in the cover, and it finally breaks under the light load of the woman's body.

- As a growing law firm expands its areas of practice, its library enlarges beyond the ability of any of its members to keep it organized and up to date. The need does not warrant hiring a full-time law librarian. The law firm hires an information management firm which provides a law librarian two days a week, restoring order and utility to the library. Searching of online legal databases is also provided as needs arise.
- During the discovery stage of a court case, a lawyer asks the adverse party what its expert witness is expected to say at the trial. The reply, if believed by the jury, could destroy the case. The lawyer hires an independent researcher to look for prior publications by the expert. The researcher discovers an article written by the expert expressing opinions opposite to the expert's expected trial testimony. At the pre-trial deposition, without referring to the article, the lawyer asks the expert, "Have you ever expressed an opposite opinion?" The expert tells of testimony he gave in a previous lawsuit. Follow-up questions reveal that the expert is a "hired gun" testifying on both sides of the question depending on who hires him.

## Healthcare

With rapid change underway in the medical and healthcare fields, information professionals have found opportunities to serve individual, public and private sector clients. Providing for the health of the people is the job of millions of individuals, both those providing direct care to patients and those who support the industry by making products and services available. The entire healthcare industry is built on a framework of historical and current information, so that doctors and nurses can provide appropriate care and that manufacturers produce safe and effective drugs and devices. The information is available from the U.S. government, associations, books, journals, electronic databases, and the Internet, and generally requires an understanding of medical terminology.

Examples of how information professionals serve clients in healthcare:

- A woman is diagnosed with a rare disease. Unsure of where to turn, but wanting to be fully aware of her healthcare options, she hires an information professional who contacts the National Organization for Rare Diseases and identifies a support group. The website CenterWatch is monitored to find clinical trials for which she might be eligible. The information professional searches Medline, the electronic database of the National Library of Medicine, to find current therapies being tried for the disease, and physicians who are active in its research. The World Wide Web is used to locate and contact these physicians.
- A company has come up with a device it wants to sell to hospitals. It must first learn from the Food & Drug Administration the regulations governing its sale in the United States. An information professional is consulted to conduct a complete search in the medical literature for evidence of the safety and effectiveness of similar devices, and a review of FDA files for reports of adverse incidents (Medical Device Reports) associated with them. To help prove safety, the information professional researches the toxicity of the materials being used in the device.

- A drug company believes it has identified a drug with potential for treating a number of different neurological disorders. Since the government regulates specific indications for drugs, the company must identify which disorder to approach first, before tackling the others. An information professional is hired to research the number of individuals who are afflicted with each disorder, and the current methods and costs of treatment. The company can then determine if the current treatments are lacking in any way, and if their new idea will be more cost effective.

## Public Records

Many information professionals specialize in public records research, providing their clients with information about individuals, corporations and property. These records include civil and criminal court proceedings, bankruptcy filings, 'vital statistics' such as birth, death, marriage, divorce and adoption records, professional and recreational licenses, property ownership, tax liens, vehicle registrations, and Uniform Commercial Code (UCC) filings. Though legislation such as the Public Open Records Act and the Freedom of Information Act were created to make these types of records available to the public, the abundance of information and changing methods of access to it require the skills of an experienced information professional to do a thorough job. While many commercial online and Internet systems offer specialized access to public records, much of what clients need still resides in the files of county courthouses, and can be located through an established network of local researchers.

Some examples of how information professionals serve individuals and organizations with public records research:

- An owner of a corporation wants to sell his business. A prospective buyer wants to learn about the corporate structure, if they have outstanding debts, if they have all the appropriate licenses and permits they need, if they have they been cited by any state or federal agencies for any violations or enforcement actions, and if the company has been involved in significant litigation. The information professional can search local, state and federal court documents to answer these questions.
- A community is noticing that many of the residents are getting sick with similar symptoms. The new power plant in the neighborhood seems to have a lot of warning sirens ringing and many government vehicles visiting the site. The community wants to know what these government workers are inspecting. A citizens' group hires an information professional to check with federal and state agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Transportation, and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration for compliance issues.
- A small business owner is trying to hire a delivery person. They want someone who can drop off the goods and take cash on delivery. The company wants to make sure that the job applicant does not have a history of theft and that the person is a safe driver. The employer hires an information professional who specializes in pre-employment screening to check criminal and driving records, as well as to verify previous positions the applicant has held.

- A couple just adopted a child and need to place the child in daycare while they go back to work. There is a small private daycare facility around the corner from them. The couple wants to make sure that the facility is safe. Not knowing where to begin this process, they hire an information professional to check with local and state authorities to see if the facility has all of the licenses they need. Further work includes checking to see if the employees have a background clear of child related crimes, and that the drivers have a clean record since the children will be driven on field trips. Professional screening of court and driving records can help assure the couple that the daycare center is safe for their child.

## **Banking and Finance**

Information professionals offer a variety of services to consumer banks, investment banks and brokerage firms. The diminishing power of the Glass Steagall Act (1933) is blurring the lines between banks and security firms, as products and services that were once offered solely by one are now being offered by both. Information professionals can provide expertise in data mining or warehousing, and fast turn-around information for merger and acquisition efforts. Locating and analyzing detailed financial information on competitors can provide a strategic advantage in new product development or market planning. The information professional can offer the additional benefit of anonymity in such high-stakes issues.

Examples of how information professionals serve clients in banking and finance:

- A financial institution believes that the market for ATM cards is saturated. An information professional performs a zip code analysis of direct mail and in-branch promotions. The result of this data mining yields a new market segment to direct future promotions. As a result of this analysis, new avenues for profit generation are created and the demographics of potential customers are identified.
- An information professional can aid senior management in directing the overall business focus of the company, which is critical in maintaining profitability. A literature search can help answer such questions as "What are the best cross-selling opportunities? What is the best bundling of products and services that will ensure long-term relationships with our current customers?" Since it takes five times as much effort to acquire a new customer than to retain a current one, an information professional familiar with banking and finance can assist clients in retaining both market share and share of the customer.
- One of the most valuable resources a financial institution already holds is its proprietary market analyses, forecasts and other expert research. However, for a significant number of firms, this information is dispersed throughout multiple offices, on different and sometimes unconnected servers, and is often inaccessible to those who might put it to profitable use. Information professionals can apply their organizational skills in setting up a library to integrate all the data sources a company holds internally, and assist with drafting a routing policy for print materials.

- An equity analyst at a brokerage firm or investment bank prepares a report on a specific company, industry group or technological advance. The analyst contacts an information professional to ask 'what are the trends, innovative products, new types of services, or delivery methods that small businesses require?' The information professional delivers a report containing news, analyses, quotes, forecasts, fundamental data, brokerage reports and earnings data.

## **Government and Public Policy**

Another niche for information professionals is in the public sector, serving individual government agencies at a federal, state or local level. As policy-makers, these agencies frequently need examples of policies from other jurisdictions to assist in the development of their own missions and goals. This may involve online research as well as primary interviews with similar agencies. As enterprises, they often need technology trends and specific data to design their Information Technology (IT) systems and workplace evolution. As employers, they require identification of best practices in similar agencies, human resource policy and procedures research, and the collection of benchmark examples. Information professionals often operate as temporary contractors or consultants, working through a public competitive bidding framework for jobs.

Examples of how information professionals work in public sector research:

- With the explosive growth in wireless telecommunication services, a city needs to establish an ordinance regulating wireless tower design, placement, and use. An information professional can locate examples of ordinances which other jurisdictions have collected and summarized, and identify resources in national organizations of regional governments. Literature searches and interviews with telecommunication trade associations will reveal pertinent trends and pitfalls to consider.
- A state agency in the process of strategic planning for the upgrade of statewide data networks hires an information professional to conduct a literature search on the experience of other state agencies around the nation. The information professional searches the trade press to identify various technology trends and protocols, and locates vendors for equipment supply as well as planning, construction, and maintenance services.
- A regional government agency seeking to establish or revise human resource policies (e.g. - sexual discrimination, disability access, Internet acceptable use) needs to collect current legal writings and examples of successful policies. The information professional locates these materials, and recommends contact with public interest associations that offer pertinent background literature. Government web sites that announce new federal regulations are located and marked for the agency to monitor on their own.

## Science and Technology

Information professionals also serve clients in fields such as science and technology, often specializing in patent searching, engineering, chemistry, or computer programming and software design. Clients include consultants, other research firms, and high-tech companies. Most information professionals who provide such services have a scientific background themselves, and combine their specific subject expertise with research skills. Information professionals provide summaries and evaluations of scientific literature, interpreting the 'jargon' and assisting with their clients' understanding of technical materials. They also search patent literature, which contains a great deal of information not published in any other medium. Examining the patent documents of others is useful in the patent application process, as well as in competitive intelligence.

Examples of how information professionals serve clients in science and technology:

- A medical device manufacturer wants to develop a focus group to learn how doctors might respond to a proposed new product. The marketing department needs to get a fast foundation in the basics of the technology, what sorts of doctors are dealing with this particular medical situation, the problems with existing technologies, and what the competition is doing to meet those challenges. An information professional helps the marketers become "instant experts" in the field by searching the relevant literature.
- A visitor at a facility is injured by a collapsing walkway. An engineering consultant hired to perform a failure analysis needs to know the relevant regulations and industry standards to help determine if substandard workmanship played a role in the accident. An information professional delivers the necessary standards information, along with articles on similar incidents. Background research on the contracting company is also included.
- A pharmaceutical company in a highly competitive market needs to identify new research directions that competitors have not yet explored. An information professional helps them uncover new, unpatented derivatives of several drugs used in their target market, giving the company several valuable avenues for their drug research. A thorough search of patent literature and relevant scientific journals help assure their research and development team that they would not be infringing on another product in their new product development.

## Document Delivery

Toward the end of a typical research project, the information professional's results will point to a number of specific citations. The most critical piece of the project is generally the actual article or report, yet not all of the information that clients need is available online, either on the Internet or in fee-based databases. Document delivery companies fill in the gaps and complement the services of online researchers by locating and obtaining various kinds of literature, such as photocopies of journal articles, patents, dissertations, government documents, industrial, federal



