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The Fire of Progress- is lit by inspiration, fuelled by information and sustained by hope and hard work

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The Fire of Progress

by **Martin White** (Managing Director, Intranet Focus Ltd.) <martin.white@intranetfocus.com>
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Publishers have played a very important part of my life for nearly fifty years, and given me a career that over the last thirty years has undergone quite unbelievable (and certainly unforeseeable) changes. Never for one minute have I regretted the decision in 1970, as a nearly failed graduate chemist, to move into information science as a career. My first contact with books arose from the fact that my grandfather ran the very small branch library in the village in Hampshire where I was born. My grandfather also patronised the libraries that used to be run by Boots, a chain of chemists, and so from an early age I discovered the joy of reading and learning, and of using a public library.

Walking into the library of **Southampton University** in the Fall of 1967 seemed like heaven on earth, once I had cracked the Library of Congress subject headings. As an undergraduate chemist, the library was an essential research facility alongside spectrometers and chromatographs. Quite early on in my time at Southampton I had worked out how to use the major secondary services such as **Chemical Abstracts**, **Beilstein** and **Gmelin**, and was soon providing literature research services to my fellow students.

My decision to make a career in information was largely catalysed by a supplement in *The Times* for 17 November 1969, which happens to be my birthday, which is why I remember the date. I still have this now yellowing piece of newsprint as it described some of the early research and information services, notably **Derwent's** patent services. I was also fortunate that **Chris Turner** had just been appointed as an Information Officer in the University Library. He too was a chemist, and a member of the **Institute of Information Scientists**, and was responsible for directing me to a career in information science rather than librarianship.

My first position was as an Information Officer in the now-defunct **British Non-Ferrous Metals Research Association**, writing a hundred abstracts a week, and using a 10,000 hole optical-coincidence card system to retrieve references. That system taught me a great deal about relevance, recall and other aspects of information retrieval. **Clive Mitchell** and **Brian Perry**, both past students of **Jason Farradane** at what was to become the Centre for Information Science at the City University in London, also taught me the skills of handling enquiries and information research. Although over the next 30 years the technology changed beyond all expectation, the basic principles of information management remain the same.

Skipping over the introduction of online searching in the mid-1970s, my next culture shock was visiting the USA in 1978 and discovering the scale of bookshops such as Barnes and Noble and Waldenbooks. There was nothing like this in the UK other than the idiosyncratic **Foyles** bookshop. From that day to this my return baggage from the USA has been close to the weight limit with books that were unlikely ever to appear in the UK for various copyright and commercial reasons.

Although I enjoyed books I had only a limited understanding of publishing when I joined **Reed Publishing** in 1982 as Research and Development Director. There I had the immense good fortune to have **W. Gordon Graham**, then Chairman and Chief Executive of **Butterworths**, as my mentor. Gordon was a visionary of the opportunities and challenges of electronic publishing, and everyone in the publishing industry worldwide that has worked with Gordon has been touched by his wisdom and friendship.

Another visionary that had a very significant influence on my career and my understanding of electronic media was **Haines Gaffner**, who created **LINK Resources** as a consulting business for new media companies in the late 1970s. I worked with Haines as a client, and for Haines as an employee from 1982 to 1989, and there are many successful managers and consultants in the media business in North America who owe much to the erudition and energy that Haines applied to shaping new media businesses. **LINK Resources** had been acquired by **International Data Corporation** in the early 1980s, and another influence in my life was **Patrick McGovern**, the founder and President of the **International Data Group**, mainly from the way that he managed a multinational business, and yet found time to make every member of the company feel that they were important. For example IDG was an early user of 360 degree appraisal.

From 1985 to 1995 my career moved away from publishing into IT until I decided that the impact of the Internet on publishing was going to be very considerable, and moved back into information consulting with **TFPL Ltd**. Most of my consulting clients were publishers trying to develop product and pricing strategies for CD-ROM and Web products. It was interesting to find out how little publishers ac-

tually knew about their customers and how they used the services provided. Without this essential information, working out a value-proposition for business information, in particular, is impossible.

Probably the most interesting project that I carried out at **TFPL** was as a member of the Evaluation Team of the **Pilot Site License Initiative (PLSI)**, a highly-innovative scheme funded indirectly by the UK Government to test out the provision of electronic journals in the academic community. This gave me the opportunity to be in at the beginning of electronic journal development, including a fascinating trip around most of the major US journal publishers in 1997 and my first visit to the **Charleston Conference** in 1998.

So much about the past. What of the future? I have concerns both about the information profession and the information industry. As information professionals we are still regarded as the stewards of physical information resources. Our skills in information systems design, indexing and classification, and what I refer to as the psychology of information use and abuse, are not recognised in business at large.

When did you read an article in *Fortune*, *Forbes*, or any other business journal, that made mention of the role that was being played by either the corporate library or the librarian in supporting the development of the business, especially in these days of intranet-enabled desktops? It seems to me a real tragedy (as a former President) that here in the UK the **Institute of Information Scientists** membership peaked at around 2800, and is now declining such that a merger with the **Library Association** was the only option open.

As for the information industry, it still seems to have a limited understanding of the requirements of users. To me it seems an indictment of the STM publishing industry that there should be a demand for a *Newsletter on Serials Pricing Issues*! Still there are Web sites of publishers that (like some advertisements on television) you just cannot understand the thought processes that went into the design and implementation.

In the new Information Millennium we have to get the message across to a much wider audience that what you don't know could result in the failure of your business. When I look at the potential impact that good information has on business competitiveness, I am very surprised at how few universities in Europe (and indeed in the USA) offer information management courses, and the limited time spent in most management schools on the subject.

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"The fire of progress is lit by inspiration, fuelled by information and sustained by hope and hard work."

Webworthy

Edited by **Pamela M. Rose** (Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-2408) <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>

*Web sites selected for broad appeal, depth of information, and ease of access. Sites are organized by broad subject area and are visited just prior to publication. Please let the editor know of any sites that are not accessible. Comments and suggestions welcome to **Pamela M. Rose**, Health Sciences Library, University at Buffalo, 3435 Main St., Buffalo, NY 14214-3002; 716-829-2408 <pmrose@acsu.buffalo.edu>. Unless otherwise noted in square brackets following the description, Internet addresses were published in *Science*, NetWatch column edited by **Jocelyn Kaiser**. — PR*

Antarctic

SCAR isn't a description of the Antarctic landscape of rock and ice. It stands for the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research, an interdisciplinary committee of the International Council for Science (ICSU). Charged with initiating, promoting and coordinating scientific research in Antarctica, SCAR also provides scientific advice to the Antarctic Treaty System. The

SCAR Web site provides a good overview of research projects being conducted in Antarctica by over 18 countries, as well as basic facts like 0.4% of the continent is exposed rock and approximately 80 % of the freshwater in the world is ice in the Antarctic. There is also a list of Antarctic related Web sites and access to SCAR publications. <http://www.scar.org/>

Evolution

Mimicry is the sincerest form of flattery, even when it comes to evolution. Hot research topics such as applying the concept of memes (behaviors and ideas copied from person to person by imitation) to human mortality reduction can be found on the Evolutionary Theories in the Social Sciences (ETSS) Web site. Maintained by Johann Peter Murmann, a professor at Northwestern University, the site includes a growing collection of bibliographies, books and reviews, journals, researchers, conferences, associations, Ph.D. syllabi, and a discussion forum that provides a central location for review and discussion of the latest research. <http://www.etss.net/>

Geoscience

From "Dinosaurs 'hunted in packs'" to "University At Buffalo Research Offers First Evidence That Massive Lava Flows Triggered Apocalyptic Climate Changes," the latest Geosciences news is presented on Geoscience Central, along with a number of other services provided by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography. Geoscientists can search for fellow workers in their field, browse the list of upcoming meetings, update their own personal notes accessible from any Internet connected site, or search for jobs. Curious visitors can browse for geo-merchandise or create a postcard from images of fossils. The site is also home to Palaeontologia Electronica, a bi-annual, free, peer-reviewed journal. A visit to Other Resources reveals a nifty mouse-activated map showing the break-up of Pangea from 200 million years ago to the present and a Quickest Conversion operator for Celsius, Meters, and Liters. <http://geosciences.org/>

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Chaos

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— The machine-readable code used for the ISBN on the back of books before we changed to the Bookland EAN.

OEBF - Open eBook Forum — The OEBF developed the standard methods of "tagging" manuscripts, so that they can be transferred from the publisher to all e-book distributors. They are working with the EBX Working Group on standards for DRM.

ONIX - Online Information eXchange — The ONIX standards for book metadata was originally developed by the Association of American Publishers. Now an EDItEUR standard, ONIX International provides a standardized method of XML-tagging information about books, including the basic bibliographic data, but also enriched information such as author biographies, cover artwork, flap copy and reviews.

SAN - Standard Address Number — The American National Standard identifier for the addresses of organizations in the publishing, library and related communities.

SGML - Standard Generalized Markup Language — An ISO standard which is the "parent" of XML and HTML.

SICI - Serial Item and Contribution Identifier — The American National Standard for identifying issues and articles in print and electronic journals. Also see BICI.

SISAC - See BASIC — Special thoughts go out about two of the "founders" and hardest workers — Mary Ellen Klapper and Fritz Schwartz!

TRSDOS - Tandy Radio Shack Disk Operating System — My first computer's software!

U.P.C. - Universal Product Code — The 12 digit bar code used in North America. On January 1, 2005 all North American businesses are asked to change their databases to recognize a 13 digit product identifier to accommodate the 13 digit EAN.

W3C - World Wide Web Consortium — The standardization group for the Web. Their standards include HTML, XML and many more.

XML - eXchange Mark-up Language — A W3C standard that provides more "intelligence" than HTML, commonly used today to determine how text and illustrations "appear" on the World Wide Web.

Y2K - Year 2000 — No explanation needed, nor problems left unsolved. 🐛

The Fire of Progress

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My current theme (as some readers will have seen from other articles that I have written in 2000) is that we need to be information evangelists. We have to get the word out about the need for every businessman, academic, publisher and everyone else in the information chain to take information very seriously indeed. Unless the market for quality information products and services, be they books, journals or CD-ROMs, can be expanded, publishers will be reluctant to invest in new titles and enhanced service functionality. Information always costs money to collect and distribute. Just because a user does not pay for the information they manage to find on the Web does not mean to say, of course, that no costs were incurred by the originator. There are signs that the support of Web services through indirect revenue models, such as advertising and sponsorship, is no longer as attractive as it was.

I have a favourite quotation that perhaps I can use this article to seek out an attribution. "The fire of progress is lit by inspiration, fuelled by information and sustained by hope and hard work." That to me puts information into context. Without it there cannot be progress in science, business or society. 🌱