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The 2016 Outsell Information Management Benchmark Report

by **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <kstrauch@comcast.net>

The 2016 Outsell Information Management Benchmark Report points out important “tipping points” for the information profession and the people who manage it.

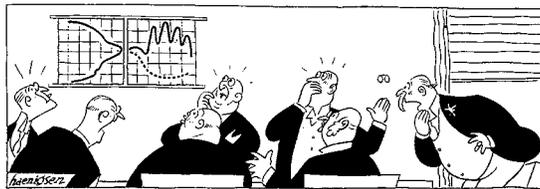
Background

Since 2000 Outsell has surveyed information managers and librarians to construct a profile of the profession. They ask about budgets, staffing, content investments, service offerings, vendors, pricing and contract negotiations.

Responses

296 responses were received from information managers with budget responsibilities. The Web-based survey queried listservs and organizations including **Special Libraries Association**, **Fedlink** and the **Charleston Conference**. The response rate has a confidence level of 96%.

60% of the respondents were from the U.S. with 22% from the UK. Canada, Asia Pacific, Africa or Middle East and other made up the remainder of the regions of the respondents. 34% were for profit companies, 21% from educational institutions (2-4 year colleges and universities and graduate schools), 15% from K-12 educational institutions, 9% were from government-owned sites of institutions; the remaining included non-profit companies, health care facilities and public libraries. Corporate respondents included 16% pharmaceuticals 8% consulting and professional services, 12% non-profit 9% legal, 8% financial and accounting services, 7% publishing and information services.



Budgets and Spending

The budget data were drearier than in past years. Overall growth was anticipated at slightly less than 1% in contrast to the 2016 Outsell Information Pricing Study which found price increases at between 3-5% in most cases. Based on **World Bank** and the U.S. GDP, show that information management budgets are stagnating.

While government and education budgets are tracking similarly to previous years, it is alarming that the expected growth of corporate libraries is a meager 1.3% after 5% or modest growth in previous years.

Future Investments and In What Areas

If respondents had an extra 10% added to their budgets, where would they put it? Answers tracked with previous years — 46% on content and 25% on staffing. Where would they increase investment? Corporate and government anticipate increased spending on data and analytics, the reality is that most are struggling to stay afloat due to sparse budgets and relentless content price increases. In actuality, corporate, government, and education sectors spend less than 5% of their time on data and analytics. One area with little flux is funding models for information centers. For further information, see **Outsell's 2015 IM Business Models**.

Spending on digital content continues to creep up. Government and corporate libraries report well over 80% of their budgets spent on digital assets with the education sector trailing with 70%. The majority of digital spend is for online databases and eJournals. eBook spending is flat. In the education sector the concept of digital courseware solutions is replacing the discrete textbook.

Many libraries in all sectors feel handcuffed by the multitude of licensing options offered by various eBook providers further causing sales to lag.

Proportion of Spending on Content Types

Most respondents report they will continue the investment in content given limited budgets. Spending on scientific and technical information was 35%; medical information 11%; consumer and entertainment 11%;

legal, tax and regulatory information 7%; general business and news aggregation 7%; and company information 5%.

Technology areas such as discovery tools, federated search, and general IT capabilities continue to be areas of investment.

Two areas have increased slightly: authentication and single sign on, specifically in the corporate sector. This reflects the trend toward frictionless access via multiple platforms, including mobile. The blending of work/life roles, globalization, and the accelerated pace of business require workers to have access to information anywhere, at any time, from any place. **Outsell's** recent report on millennials' information usage shows 77% of millennial knowledge workers thought single sign on information access was important.

The second area that saw a boost in anticipated investment this year is in expanded training in using library resources. When millennials were asked for their “go to” resource when researching a company or product, two-thirds said a search engine like Google. Sadly aggregators and online databases were not among the top three choices. Obviously raising awareness and improving information literacy are essential if libraries and information managers are to be involved in the research process.

Staffing and How Staff Spend their Time

Though steady last year, this year the number of staff (managers, researchers, administrative and contractors) has dipped overall by 30%. This is a trend to watch more closely. Slightly over half of staff time is spent on research such as reference inquiries, custom projects, general research and current awareness. Vendor contract management and administrative duties account for 25% of time as well as 5% on marketing and/or building awareness. Even less time is spent on data and analytics.

In terms of skills gaps, the need for different skill sets to match evolving demands is a constant theme though managers are under pressure to do with less and less. Definitely not a recipe for success. On the flip side there's opportunity. Data and analytics are changing the way enterprises operate, how they drive value, and how they contain costs and mitigate risks. Data is content and information managers and librarians have been managing content for years. It's time to get a seat at the table.

The State of Information Management

The concept of information management is disintegrating and will continue to disintegrate without “profound change.”

There has been slippage in budgets and staff, content prices are rising and budgets and staff to manage it are being reduced.

Bottom line: the status quo is not a recipe for success.

What is needed?

Managers and executive stakeholders have looked at information management as a cost center. Instead, they should focus on information management as an investment center.

Cutting budgets and staff is not the recipe for success. Instead, more content management research and analysis; attention and strengthening of technological infrastructure; and data management strategies for information delivery and visibility are paramount.

The boomers generation of information managers must collaborate with the new generation of millennials. Not all stakeholders have the same needs and interests. While content curation, research, and reference are still important, they have diminished in value to the current cohort. Fluency with cognitive computing, data visualization, text mining and other emerging technologies is essential.

What are we waiting for? 🐻