

Originally published in a slightly different version in  
*Information Outlook*, January, 2006

## ***Information Management***

### **From Special Library to Organizational Knowledge Nexus**

by Guy St. Clair

A few months ago, in the June issue of *Information Outlook*, John Latham touched on one of my favorite subjects when he wrote (in an essay entitled “One Small Step for Cinderella”) about how records management, archives, and libraries are being pulled together in many organizations. Some information professionals might see this as a potential problem, since those trained in information management do not necessarily excel as archivists or records managers, and vice-versa.

Not me.

With my usual optimism I see this trend as a marvelous opportunity. From my perspective, such a convergence of responsibility is the obvious solution for meeting the organization’s information needs. And I go even further, for I would like to see this convergence lead to the creation of a centralized knowledge nexus for the parent organization. From what I’ve seen, that would be just fine for most organizations.

Knowledge services is the management methodology for this convergence. In fact, as we’ve now learned, this convergence is the defining characteristic of knowledge services and I use that very term when I define the concept: knowledge services is the *convergence* of information management, knowledge management, and strategic, performance-centered learning for the achievement of the organizational mission. The three disciplines come together to provide an over-arching and holistic framework for the organization, enabling the many pieces of information, knowledge, and learning scattered throughout the organization to connect and work

together for the common good, for the successful realization of whatever that organization has been created to do.

To my way of thinking (and a solution I recommend to clients), the best way for information professionals to build an enterprise-wide knowledge services focus is to start with what's already there, to identify what's in place and what works and what doesn't work. We do that by using a process we call the knowledge services audit. We go out into the organization and we ask people about their research methodologies and their information needs. We link it all together and we come up with conclusions about where the strengths are, and about what needs to be strengthened. And since users don't always know what's possible, they may not mention certain needs, assuming they're beyond the realm of possibility, and that's where we information professionals get into our role as knowledge services advisors. It's up to us to be sure our users (and our managements) know how good things can be.

Pulling it all together, we make assumptions and predictions about how success can follow if we enhance this function or pull back on that function, or if we eliminate this one or that one altogether. We carefully examine the organization's specialized library, and in most cases, when there is a specialized library already in place, that functional unit (depending on how it fares in the knowledge services audit) turns out to be perfectly positioned to provide the foundation for the organization's centralized knowledge nexus. The re-structured specialized library is the natural and logical functional unit to be Knowledge Services Central.

Of course what we're coming up with here is an idealized picture, and one that in some cases might be difficult to bring to fruition, but it is nevertheless a starting point. As with all starting points, it is subject to change and refinements and, indeed, even subject to serious revision, but it is a place to begin. It is a vision of what knowledge services delivery in the organization can be, and when we have a vision, we can go for strategy. We put together a list of what needs to be done and who is to do it.

We establish milestones and we negotiate performance measures. We identify advocates and champions in the organization (as John so wisely noted in his essay), and we openly and

unabashedly solicit their interest and their enthusiasm, particularly if they are senior management. We work with them and their staffs to identify certain knowledge services projects that will make their lives easier, and we cheerfully take on those projects—particularly the high-visibility ones!—so that when these senior managers look good, the knowledge services team looks good.

Of course the logistics are not easy, and I would be misleading you if I were to say they are. This sort of goal-setting and planning requires a lot of thinking time, a lot of conversation with others, a lot of trying to get the day-to-day stuff done while you think about the future, but in the long run it make all kinds of sense, both for the information professionals in the organization and for the organization as a whole. Start thinking about your specialized library in “big-picture” terms and think about how good it could be as the organization’s knowledge nexus. You’ll be surprised how soon the pieces will start to fall into place.



*Guy St. Clair is Consulting Specialist for Knowledge Services at SMR International, a management consulting practice in New York, NY. His monthly interviews with knowledge services leaders are published at the SMR website ([www.smr-knowledge.com](http://www.smr-knowledge.com)), along with a monthly commentary for knowledge workers (“SMR Monthly e-Notes: Points of Interest for Knowledge Services Professionals”). St. Clair is a past president of SLA. He can be contacted at [guystclair@smr-knowledge.com](mailto:guystclair@smr-knowledge.com).*