



On the trail of an information professional

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Information professionals are essentially sleuths and detectives, constantly scanning the horizon for clues, enquiring and searching for information and discovering quality resources that will support both organisational and user needs. Although this 'detective work' is a skill that most information professionals will attest they are born to do, it is highly desirable for all knowledge workers to learn these fundamental skills. Becoming more proficient at finding and evaluating information resources is essential as we rely more and more on the Internet as a provider of resources.

This column follows the trail of an information professional in a year-long journey through the World-Wide Web (Web), learning essential information skills and discovering and collating a 'toolbox' of indispensable resources that will support all knowledge workers.

Competency framework for information professionals

The UK Ministry of Defence has published a framework of functional competencies for librarians and information managers

(www.mod.uk/linked_files/aobutus/libraries/funcomp.pdf). This competence framework was designed to comprehensively represent the range and scope of information professionals and to enable practitioners and their line managers to identify and assess the competencies necessary for effective job performance.

One of the functional competency clusters identified is 'Knowledge and Evaluation of Information Sources'. The competence is identified as knowing and using information sources. The performance criteria are recognized as demonstrating knowledge and familiarity with the various types and formats of information to meet customer needs and demonstrating awareness and use of internal and external information sources. The outcome of this competency is that users have confidence in the information professional's ability to retrieve relevant information.

The second competence is identified as valuating information sources. The performance criteria include demonstrating the ability to investigate and evaluate the features and performance of information sources and systems used. The outcome of this competency is that the information professional is able to make value judgements on competing sources and systems to be used. While this competency cluster is geared specifically towards information professionals, it is essentially a competency that all knowledge workers need to develop in order to work efficiently and effectively with both information and information resources, especially information resources on the Web.

Evaluating Web resources

While locating information on the Web is generally not a difficult task to accomplish, evaluating the information published is a lot more difficult. The pervasiveness of information

that can be found on the Web makes Web resources easy and cheap to use. However, these resources are also unregulated and unmonitored.

A famous Steiner cartoon published in the [New Yorker](#) (5 July 1993) succinctly sums up the drawback of using Web resources, namely, two dogs sit in front of a terminal looking at a computer screen; one says to the other 'On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog'.

The Internet opens up opportunities for accessing and sharing information but it is essential that we validate the integrity of the information before we use it. Evaluation techniques are essential indicators that help us to decide whether to trust information that we find. The following resources are comprehensive guides to learning techniques that will serve us well on our journey across the Internet landscape.

Five criteria for evaluating Web sites	www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/webcrit.html Evaluating
Web pages – Technologies to apply and questions to ask	www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Evaluate.html
Evaluating information found on the Internet	www.library.jhu.edu/elp/useit/evaluate

Indispensable resource toolkit

The 'indispensable resource toolkit' is about identifying Web sites that provide essential information that we may need on a regular basis and which should, ideally, be saved in a 'favourites' folder. Although this toolkit is far from unique, it is surprising how few knowledge workers take the time to identify a core group of resources that can be accessed at a moment's notice, saving both valuable time and energy and, ultimately, money.

Reference sites

If you need a reference resource in a hurry, the Web has an array of on-line reference resources.

Dictionaries	If you need a dictionary in a hurry, the Web has an array of on-line resources. Find an on-line dictionary with which you are comfortable by consulting any of these fine lexicons.	www.dictionary.com www.onelook.com/ www.merriam-webster.com/ www.wcsu.edu/library/odlis.html
Currency converter	Convert any currency on the universal currency converter.	www.xe.com/ucc
Global time resource	Know the correct and current time in any time zone, country or city.	www.worldtimezone.com
Weather forecast	Predict the weather on a daily, weekly and seasonal basis	www.weathersa.co.za

Telephone indexes	Lose the heavy directories and use the electronic yellow and white pages instead.	www.yellowpages.co.za http://196.15.219.249/
Postal reference	Search for postal codes, track and trace registered parcels and renew your post office box or private bag on-line.	www.sapo.co.za
South African map book	Get directions to and from a destination of choice.	www.brabys.com/mapping
South African government information	Access a wide range of information on and contacts in the South African government	www.gov.za
South African information	Live under government and obtain a comprehensive guide to everything South African.	www.southafrica.info.co.za www.goafrica.co.za/southafrica

South African business news sites

There are a number of excellent South African news sites that offer comprehensive coverage of a wide range of information. Add these to your 'news' folder:

Business Day	www.bday.co.za
Financial Mail	www.financialmail.co.za
Business Report	www.busrep.co.za
Finance24	www.finance24.co.za
NetAssets	www.netassets.co.za
Moneyweb	www.moneyweb.co.za
ITWeb	www.itweb.co.za
Biz-Community	www.bizcommunity.com

South African company information sites

There are many reputable sites that offer information about South African business players.

JSE Securities Exchange	www.jse.co.za
Profile of JSE companies	www.profile.co.za/
JSETechnology Top 100	http://196.4.91.173/toptech/default.asp
Best Company to Work For Survey	www.bestcompany.co.za
Financial Mail Top Companies Survey	www.topcompanies.co.za
E-Data	www.edata.co.za

The 'indispensable toolkit' is about identifying on-line resources that meet individual information needs but your work as an information sleuth does not stop here! It is a good idea to spring-clean your 'toolkit' every so often as it can become cluttered with too many resources that are not regularly accessed. It is also a good idea to continually evaluate the resources that you have added to your toolkit to make sure that they still meet your standards

and, of course, it is always fun to go sleuthing for new sites to add to your toolkit from time to time.

Follow the next issue's information trail to find resources on search techniques and the value of using on-line libraries.

References

Barker, J. 2004. Evaluating Websites – experience why it is important. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/EvaluateWhy.html>

Drewett, A.J. and Ryan, P. 2002. Library and information managers. Functional competences framework (revised edition). [Online]. Available WWW: http://www.mod.uk/linked_files/aboutus/libraries/funcomp.pdf

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