



Socializing Information

I recently had a chance to talk with Alexandra Deschamps-Sonsino, author of *Creating a Culture of Innovation: Design an Optimal Environment to Create and Execute New Ideas* (Apress, 2020; 140 pages). While the focus of her work is on moving beyond innovation “theater” and enabling people to truly work more creatively and effectively, she also offers a useful perspective on how libraries can be seen as innovation partners within their organizations.

As Deschamps-Sonsino noted, information centers exist within larger entities, made up of people who are time- and attention-poor and looking for shortcuts in order to stay on top of the relevant information in their domain. One of the most popular shortcuts is, of course, social media—including both public platforms and internal collaboration apps such as Slack or Microsoft Teams—and information professionals are beginning to establish their presence on internal enterprise channels as another avenue for championing the library and information services.

Info pros’ expanded presence in social spaces is particularly critical for Digital Native employees who may have never set foot in a physical library and have no idea how they could benefit from information services. As we info pros work to embed information into the workflow and decision-making processes of our users, we need to make information more social—that is, build ways for information to be encountered in the social channels where our users gather—as well as employing the more traditional tools for information discovery.

When I asked Deschamps-Sonsino for suggestions on how info pros could socialize information resources and information centers more effectively, she encouraged us to ask, “What else?” more. If the information center has a physical space accessible to users (and once we all return to the office), apply the “What else?” question to that space. And, whether virtual or in person, can the library host internal events that highlight the organization’s newest projects, or bring in external speakers to stimulate fresh perspectives? Can the library start hosting meetups of users of a particular app or resource to encourage sharing of insights and cross-fertilization of ideas across departments? How else can curated slices of the library’s content be tied more directly to innovative teams’ workflows? How can the library staff scan the organization’s internal collaboration platform to identify new projects and their information needs?

As info pros consider how to best socialize their content, particularly in large or diverse organizations, a hub-and-spoke approach may be effective. Traditionally, libraries acquire resources in anticipation of or in response to information needs

of the organization, and then promote the content to their user groups. A hub-and-spoke strategy requires a more proactive approach: Library staff liaisons regularly reach out to the information gatekeepers in each department or functional area to learn what resources that group needs to either connect them with the information products available or, if necessary, fill in the gaps with new content. Then, the library staff members work to incorporate that information into the group’s workflow and collaboration tools—creating APIs to embed the resource in a work tool, hosting regular meetings of users to encourage more strategic usage, and promoting the resource in the digital watering holes where subject matter experts congregate.

As Deschamps-Sonsino and I were talking, the topic of showing the ROI of information content or services came up. Interestingly, she suggests that there are parallels to how universities have justified the cost of makerspaces over the last few years. As she noted, there may not be a direct correlation between use of a 3D printer and a particular innovation, so administrators look at other metrics that indicate a connection between the makerspace and the goal of fostering more innovative research. Quantifiable measurements could include the number of professors incorporating makerspace projects in their curriculum, the percentage of student projects utilizing makerspace resources, or the number of engagements with local maker fairs, STEM camps, or other community events.

Similarly, libraries may want to look more creatively at how to translate user activities into measurable strategic outcomes once we return to our workplaces. Deschamps-Sonsino suggested that the uninterrupted time a knowledge worker spends in the library, away from colleagues’ chitchat, may be directly tied to that person’s ability to work on creative, innovative projects. Each query in a library resource could be connected to time saved scanning through—or, worse yet, relying on—biased or outdated web material. As those managing makerspaces have learned, you cannot necessarily intuit the value of the resources provided to your users. Just as we are advised to ask, “What else?” when considering how to socialize information resources, we need to ask, “What happened?” after our users engage with the library’s resources, people, or space. Their answers may give us new insight into what our users truly value.

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