

'WHO KNOWS WINS', by Keith Hart, Independent Consultant

This is the full version of the report which was edited for publication in ICLG News to save space.

The '*Who Knows Wins*' conference was organised by the Library Association and took place at the BBC Training Centre at Wood Norton Hall near Evesham on November 1-2. Over 50 delegates (mostly Information Managers from the commercial sector of LIS) heard a star-studded cast speak on topics selected to help senior managers realise the importance and worth of their information, and to define the role of the profession into the next century.

The conference was a healthy mix of plenary sessions chaired by our very own Alison Crammond, until recently Chair of the ADLG (Aerospace & Defence Library Group) and more informal workshops. Alison set the tone for the whole conference in her opening remarks, pointing out that in matters of information management it is *"up to us to make sure the librarian's role is emphasised"*.

The first speaker, **Dr Nigel Horne**, Director of the KPMG IMPACT Programme, introduced his session by reminding us that although the effects of the 'information society' were clear to librarians and information staff, those most responsible for managing information, the Board of Directors, were in need of education.

KPMG IMPACT therefore set up **the Hawley Committee** in 1994 to create an agenda for Boards of Directors, providing a structure for the discussion of the information society and how they ought to respond to it. This 10-point agenda is being used by Directors to produce information strategies and to measure compliance to that policy.

IMPACT has now moved to the next phase of the project, involving IBM and other leading companies, to develop a simple Information Management Index which indicates the health of an organisation with respect to its information management. Dr. Horne also discussed work being carried out by Paul Strassman and others to establish methods of assigning a value to information, especially important to organisations like tax authorities, investors, and financial analysts, who are beginning to regard information as an intangible asset, one which helps account for the gap between a company's balance sheet and its market value.

Other objectives of IMPACT include the job of publicising the importance of the management of information, and influencing the Accounting Standards Board so that they introduce changes to the "Operating & Financial Review" so that information policy is on the list of 'subjects to think about when writing your Chairman's Report'.

There were a number of questions and comments from the floor, raising vital issues like

- *"if we treat information as an asset then surely we also have to consider it as a liability?"* (Woody Horton),
- *"one person's information asset is an information liability"* (Chris Turner), and

- the importance of recognising the hidden costs of *"the inability of departments to share information, leading to multiple copies, out-dated information, etc."* (Carol Cairns).

Professor Chris Turner, Vice-Principal of University College Winchester and a past Professor of Information Systems at the University of Brighton, addressed the role of the old professional in this new world. He discussed aspects of managing intellectual assets, the leveraging of knowledge skills, and the trend towards using multi-disciplinary teams to get things done, often without the involvement of LIS managers.

The keyword of this session was 'grapple' - LIS managers have to

- grapple with the challenge of performing the traditional role of 'find & deliver', then add value to the information found and delivered,
- grapple with the treatment of information as a strategic asset (*"the institutional imperative to do this comes from the top"*), and
- grapple with the fact that although strategic vision is required to achieve these things, individuals are trained to be even more specialised than before.

The session ended with a provocative issue - why don't more LIS staff regard their profession as a stepping stone to senior management? Why are most of them happy to remain as Librarian or Information Manager when they could aspire to become Chief Executives of organisations?

The audience was happy to respond to many parts of Professor Turner's comments and some felt that many LIS staff do have strategic vision - what they lack is a responsive management. The role of the educators of LIS staff was discussed - should all students be taught management skills? Should the term 'library school' be outlawed?

The session finished by considering why LIS managers are often not invited onto important multi-disciplinary teams which resulted in Professor Turner's advice that we should be the pro-active managers forming the teams, not waiting to be invited onto them.

The second day started bright and early (words not appearing in the same sentence very often for many of the delegates) with breakfast talk tables on a variety of subjects including the networking of information products, the value of formal management training to LIS staff, automatic indexing and translation, and the treatment of information as a resource. And I was looking forward to a discussion on cereals management.....

Day Two of the conference proper was started by **Dr Woody Horton**, an information management consultant with wide experience in federal agencies and a prolific author. Fresh from his recent Masterclass on Knowledge Mapping at the LA, he gave an upbeat assessment of 'The Role of the Modern Information Professional for the Millennium'.

His opinion is that librarians have a 2 or 3 year window of opportunity to become modern information professionals and that might mean changing some labels and job

titles. He used the example of the Director of Knowledge Systems Laboratories at Apple to illustrate how our role is increasingly one of using tools and systems to turn information into knowledge (adding value to find & deliver, as Professor Turner put it earlier).

He described the modern information professional as a 'superman', requiring 4 core competencies:

- skills to structure, classify, and map knowledge;
- knowledge of IT including networking and telecommunications;
- analytical skills with particular regard to reading financial statements, balance sheets, profit & loss;
- leadership skills to prepare information strategies, implement them, identify alternatives, reveal hidden assumptions and to prepare a vision statement.

Dr Horton then revealed results from a recent survey of 3000 information professionals in 31 countries. The general trends were not surprising - lots of downsizing and cost-cutting, increasing end user access to information, technology as the driving force rather than information content, greater democratisation, and an ever increasing rate of change.

Dr Horton finished by reflecting that when he returned in some years time we would have gone through the phase of calling ourselves Directors of Knowledge Systems Laboratories and would be Wisdom Administrators for our organisations. Take note, he did not actually say we would be wise.....

After a well-earned coffee break the delegates moved to the first of their two chosen workshop sessions. The choice was wide and some filled up very quickly - the complete list consisted of: information audit and putting value on information (Liz Orna); a case study on implementing an IRM strategy (Liz Maclachlan); presenting a positive image (Eleri Simpson); influencing top management (Sylvia Webb); and marketing your service (Sarah Jones).

Everyone I spoke to was very pleased with their choice of seminar and lunch was filled with talk of marketing plans, networking with top managers, and 'guess which LA representative had their best colour for a positive image identified as apricot'?

The final talk was given by **Peter Snook**, Sales & Marketing Director of Reed Information Services, about 'Electronic Resources - Is there a role for the information professional?' This speaker thought that the laziness of end users in finding their own information was the only thing that prevented us from being overtaken by technology completely. He also challenged the profession to increase their communications skills, and this from a man who thought that a Learning Resource Centre was a new-fangled way of describing a library!

Peter also emphasised the importance of repeating your message in order to ensure it was heard and properly understood - a repetition of 7 times was his recipe for success. However, the timetable of trains departing from Evesham station on a Saturday evening prevented us from listening to his other 6 versions, so the conference was wound up by Alison Crammond just about on time.

So, what will I remember about the 'Who Knows Wins' conference?

I will remember:

- Dr Horne's words, "the balance sheet today is almost worthless in terms of measuring the value of a company" (take that, accountancy profession),
- Professor Turner and Dr Horton exhorting the delegates to examine their role and their abilities in regard to the core competencies (Krypton, here I come!)
- Finally, I will remember that the most obvious phrase to sum up the times in which we live was not uttered by a single speaker :

'Who Dares Wins'. (You know it makes sense.)