

BUSINESS LIBRARIES: MEANS AND FORMS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

By Elisabeth Simon

The subject

Business information used to be an unknown topic to and in libraries in France and Germany. This was different in Great Britain where public libraries at Sheffield offered as early as 1922 for the first time this kind of service. Due to the structure of the public libraries to serve as a host for special services as e.g. the Citizen Advice Bureau after the Second World War and other services which lead to the community centres in the seventies in as well Great Britain as well United States business information was offered in very different libraries and under different forms of organisation. Universities as well previous Polytechnic libraries, information units in other agencies as well National libraries e.g. the British Library and the National Library of Scotland are today working in this field.¹ If one is strolling through London these days you will find the sign „business links“ everywhere. The service also led to the foundation of a „group“ inside the British Library Association which comprised professionals from all types of libraries anticipating a development which will prevail in the future development of libraries and the information field.

„Information for commerce and industry“ was the first big conference at Cologne in 1988, organised together by the British Council, Cologne, The Foreign Relations Bureau, Berlin, the Anglo-German Foundation and the Library Association.² This conference was followed by a seminar at Hatfield, which introduced the German audience to the service HERTIS of this very polytechnic at Hatfield.³ These events remained for the time being without a result in Germany;

-
- 1 John Coll: Business Information from a National Library. The Scottish Experience. Würzburg 1997. (A paper given at the international seminar organised by the Foreign Relations Bureau. I will be citing as Würzburg 1997. Papers of this seminar will be published as proceedings at the end of this year)
 - 2 Library Services to Industry - Information für Handel und Industrie - Ein deutsch-britischer Konferenzbericht edited by Monika Segbert among others, London, Anglo-German Foundation 1988.
 - 3 Informationsdienste für Handel und Industrie Workshop Hatfield 1989. Edited by Hans Peter Thun. DBI Materialien 89.

too much of the necessary administrative and political framework was missing as well. Cooperation between different types of libraries and strong user orientation because this service should be particularly shaped for a clientele which does not necessarily come to libraries. The discussion whether this service should be more understood as a micro-oriented tool or a macro-oriented one seems to be solved now after long years of discussion if the aim of libraries to earn money with it or the aim to improve the infrastructure of a community, a region or a country is more important. It seems that now the aim to improve the economical situation of a city or a region is more prevalent. The global market made accessible by business information for the public has been reached better than the aim to improve the financial situation of libraries on a daily basis. This may have something to do with the community mind of librarians, which is, in a way, common to all librarians in the world.

Whereas this service became more and more important and led to the European Business Conferences organised by TFPL, Great Britain, which are able to draw a big international audience to different places in Europe, in Germany the service did not gain the interest of neither the administrative bodies nor the libraries. This might be partly due to the „Chambers of Commerce“ which are obligatory in Germany for business people and which were offering this kind of service, although they did not always reach their clientele especially at the small and medium enterprises. The same clientele was also the target of a big project carried out in the eighties and turned out to be a failure for probably the same reason. It should be praised though, that the results of this project were very honestly and well documented⁴ which shows, generally speaking, that the project was probably planned and organised in a much too academic way to reach the goal and clientele for which it was meant for. In a country such as Germany before 1989, the necessity to offer a service for developing a business-friendly infrastructure was not regarded as one very urgent. This was e.g. quite different in Ireland⁵ where big efforts were made to integrate this service in all libraries and information services, as well in the professional education where the library students had to do an internship of six weeks in a firm or cooperation and the staff of the universities were forced to look for these places and come into and stay in contact with the

4 Ralf Schmidt: Modelle der Informationsvermittlung. Analyse und Bewertung eines experimentellen Programms. Heidelberg Physica 1992, 320 S.

5 Elisabeth Simon: Information, Aufklärung, Wissen, Buch und Bibliothek 44, 1992, H10/11: 916 ff. Compare also „Management Group of the Northern Ireland Library and Information Plan 1990-1991“.

business world. The success of this program was to a mutual benefit since it promoted the understanding of business processes on the one side and to the importance of information on the other side. This approach can be compared with the staff structure of the Commercial and Technical Information Services Europe - Business Services Dow Europe about which Elisabeth Mangold reported during an international conference about Business Information at Würzburg, June 28th till July 4th, 1997⁶ Ms. Mangold is replacing nearly one third of her staff of this information unit each year by scientists. She hopes that in this way the information personnel will get involved more with the real needs of the scientific user of the unit, on the other side scientists should learn about the advantages which a good information service has to offer. Although she confesses that the scheme does cause more work and more involvement with new staff is necessary, this will be counter-balanced by the advantages.

Differently from the libraries in Germany and other countries, the libraries in Central and Eastern Europe became very interested in the service from the beginning on after 1989. It has to be taken into consideration though, that „business,, is seen in a much more broader context as it was done previously. Due to the history of these libraries they call business services everything which has not to do with the strict educational role of the libraries the only one libraries had before the wall came down. This sometimes leads to misunderstandings. Libraries were in the first place only interested in the earnings which such service could offer. Sometimes it is a sheer way to survive; sometimes they consider this service as ways for earning a living for themselves and sometimes for the library. It belongs to the dark chapters of the East-West Cooperation in the field of libraries that the illusion to earn money with this service or even to privatise libraries was nourished by so-called Western councillors who quite often had not been successful at all in this field in their own countries.

At first, a general interest to learn and apply this service could be generally observed but then great differences appeared - in the same way as countries and libraries started to differ. However, there is a general agreement that this service should be installed in the libraries in Central and Eastern European countries by all means to help and inform people about business and the market and to pave the way for a better business information structure in the countries concerned. Therefore today, you will find units and services which work for a better information and promotion of businesses and industry in the region, as for

6 Ms. Mangold did not offer a paper, but she can be approached through the Foreign Relations Office, Berlin.

example at Szczecin⁷ where such a unit was installed by cooperation of the municipal library and the World Bank and INFOCUS.⁸ Infocus is a very creative magazine which tries to combine user and the market and serves not only as an exchange of experiences but allows also advertisement of products. The editor of this magazine reported very clearly about the manifold difficulties which the former bloc countries are facing. People, especially the younger ones, were neither educated nor allowed to work with information or business data. They are not used to interpreting nor to using them for building up their own „business“. This might explain the somehow obscure business situation in these countries which needed quite a time to be market driven.

The business libraries in Russia were developing these services for survival and they were offering all services which seemed to be needed, therefore, they were not only working with information but doing business as publishers, book stores, copying services, editors of yellow pages and agencies for joint ventures. One of the most successful library in this field is the library for Foreign Literature at Moscow which is in very good shape but confronted with a desolate situation of their funding agency, the Ministry of Culture. This sometimes may cause problems - Russian libraries which are very successful in doing business do not regard their authorities in government and administration very highly. Other libraries not only at Moscow but in the region have somehow followed this example. Libraries publish and sell books, they rent rooms and office space, they provide a very elaborate copying service, serve as advisors and accompaniment for western investors. As a matter of fact joint ventures with libraries as an intermediary have a high success rate which was reported during a workshop at the European Business Conference at Berlin 1997.⁹ So coming up with a unique term seems to be impossible. The service relates more to the situation of the library in the community to which it is orientated, but much more than other services depends on the professionals and their dedication, knowledge and especially to their will to learn and adjust themselves permanently to new situations for which in most cases they have not been educated.

7 Business Information in Libraries. Conference Proceedings of the 2nd International Symposium of Librarians, Szczecin, 19-21 October 1994.

8 Jelena Hankova: INFOCUS - a new Czech monthly journal about information sources, services, systems and networks in: Proceedings of the international seminar „New Library Strategies“, 3-9 September 1995.

9 Elisabeth Simon: The Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States: The Provision and Availability of Business Information in: Programme of the 7th international conference on „European Business Information“, March 1997, Berlin.

The service

For the first time since its foundation the president of the Library Association of the United States chose the motto „Libraries - Global Reach. Local Touch.,, and explains: „Ours is a smaller world. As librarians we have a responsibility to provide collections and services that will help Americans to understand our increasingly diverse society and prosper in the new world economy. We must also unite with colleagues around the world in advocating funding, information equity, copyright and other issues that will shape the global information infrastructure.,, (Barbara J. Ford, president, American Library Association 1997- 98)

This is an extraordinary statement for a library association in a very vast country which was from its foundation on based on a very local and strong community be it a university or a small city. Now, it stresses not the possibility but the necessity to reach out, to co-operate internationally which refers so much to business information. The double face of business information demanding strong international cooperation and otherwise to rely on deep involvement at the local base does relate to all library services today but especially to business information. If in 1994 it could be said: „The need for international cooperation for providing information services with special reference to business information“¹⁰ so today you might turn this upside down: „Business information with specially refer to international cooperation are needed for providing a good information service.“

The conference at Würzburg which served as a very lively and fruitful exchange of experience of 17 different countries was a good example for this observation. Before describing in more details the different experiences, the whole audience agreed on some general observations:

- business information always requires a close regional as well as international cooperation. Without it this service cannot be offered;
- business information is, in the first place, an input for the development of a region and, therefore, also for libraries. They give libraries a good possibility to play an active role in the development of their own country, as an example the National Library of Scotland. They will also profit from the economical recovery of the region. So by playing an active role in this service they help themselves;

10 Elisabeth Simon: The need for international co-operation for providing information services with special reference to business information in: proceedings of the international seminar of „Information Technologies and Information Services“, 20-24 October 1994, China, Collection B.

- they offer libraries the possibility of gaining some of their own funds which they can use for other services which are not funded sufficiently. An example was given by the Municipal Library of Cologne which used these additional funds for some services in their children's library.¹¹

If we look at the different services we may ask when was it successful, when did it not succeed. According to some information we got e.g. from Hungary, on the framework of the European Programme Phare, a great deal of business information units were installed in different libraries and a great number turned out to be disappointing. As Ms. Billedi¹² an library information consultant pointed out, the reasons for quite a number of companies going bankrupt in Hungary are as follows: marketing problems, lack of information skills and low level of financial control. Although a good information service could help with these deficiencies, it is also true that a good business information service will be disturbed by them, too. Ms. Billedi continued that the operation of a good business information service requires a good and thorough preparation, cooperation (inside and outside the library) professional training; this is especially important for a clientele which is used to thinking in different terms as librarians do, good quality of service (which cannot be stressed enough, a list of information which is not at hand will not work at all - on the contrary) and financial and technical background. It does not make sense to deny the absolute necessity to invest in this equipment but on the other side, it will be worthless if the other prerequisites cannot be fulfilled as lacking technical equipment is also contradicted by technical equipment which is not used at all: a situation which was quite frequent with the use of on-line services in various countries and can be found everywhere.

Following the already mentioned international seminar at Würzburg, a daily newspaper reported about it under the heading „What does it really want,, (Was will der eigentlich?) which stressed a very important issue of business information, the personal contact and the personal advice and consultancy. From Stuttgart, the office for business foundation was reporting about their really thoroughly and well done service; at least they are offering a lot of brochures and guidelines for services. This is a good start and might even be helpful but on the other side the Business Information Århus, Denmark, a service of the Central Library is presented in the Internet¹³ from which it was contacted for participation

11 Frank Daniel; Establishing Business Information Services in a Metropolitan Area. Würzburg 1997.

12 Ibolya Billedi: The role of information by the transformation process in a new economical structure. Würzburg 1997.

13 Schmidt, Anna, Business Information Århus - an introduction, <http://www.aakb.bib.dk>

in this seminar. Its clear-cut and very well-organised service has a very precise mission. It has one very well displayed brochure presented in the Internet in several languages and it was made for the infrastructure of the region. It is housed as a separate unit at the Central Library which is of common use at nearly all these information units. Office Hours and service approach are at the moment too different from regular library service and therefore to avoid staff turbulence in most cases professionals work in close contact but separate from the daily library routine. The most interesting issue is that the unit organised its work office hours and programme by themselves but also generally it is understood that nobody should work in this unit more than some years, although this is not compulsory. Most of the promotion work was done by visits and, as we were told during the workshop which was held by Ms. Schmidt, the librarian in charge, it may happen eight or nine times that nobody recognizes you or your work - patience may result in most cases from a good co-operation. On the other hand, the library staff really was involved in the business field and after some time got acquainted to the information needs and could respond better. The service relies on very detailed and well-defined information but before negotiating for this service and offering it, the „ice has to be broken“ and the people involved in it have to be approachable and knowledgeable, which should be obvious for all services but does refer to this kind of service even more.

Business Information as a strategic tool

When we have talked about business information as a service for the development of a region characterised by its local involvement and international cooperation, we already touched on its meaning as a strategic tool. A national library in the general opinion has no other professional strategy than collecting the written output of a nation (at least up to now) or the national heritage, although I suppose this will become a little bit blurred in the time to come in multicultural nations. When Rushdie, before he was damned by Islam, was sent on a British Council tour reading from his books, I was wondering whose representative he was: the previous Indian colony, the new Indian state or Great Britain. Probably he saw himself as a good author who is always an international phenomena but it might easily be that national libraries will face a kind of problem in the time to come when they rely only on the „national“ literature. Therefore, it was an extraordinary experience for the whole audience to listen to the report of John Coll, from the National Library of Scotland.¹⁴ By offering SCOTBIS the National

14 see 1)

Library of Scotland made a very surprising strategic decision.“ Although the National Library of Scotland was committed to such a venture, the resources it could provide (especially in terms of staffing) were somewhat limited. On this basis it was agreed that SCOTBIS should seek to fill obvious gaps in the provision of business information within Scotland rather than be all-embracing. To this end, all business information defined as „theoretical“ i.e. economic theory, management, etc. should be excluded as it was felt that much of this data was being collected by academic institutions. Instead the service would seek to provide national resources in the areas of „company and industry information.“ This is a surprising decision for a national library. It was wise enough to exclude parts of the service which others already delivered and probably quite well. It was considering the wealth of material it had and probably the problems it had with suitable staff. Very often in libraries generally, and especially in this field - do not define the market niche which they could cover well or maybe in cooperation with another agency but they start to compete, in most cases, in services which are already done very well by some other libraries which might in the end hurt both institutions. This library was considering the fact, that its strength was in the collection being a „legal deposit library“. Therefore, it could make publications accessible which had previously been inaccessible to Scottish users. The service also introduced the new media to the users and could easily introduce this shift in usage by the whole library. By the observation that although the library was offering this great deal of material, it had somehow a negative image for business users. Since the library perceived its role as the library of the last resort, the national library provided minimum assistance and rather restricted admission. The new Scottish Science Library incorporating a business service, however, was quite a different animal and it can be perceived that the experience of the business information will consciously or unconsciously influence the approach, organisation and future development of the Scottish National Library.

Strategic planning is absolutely obligatory for libraries in private companies because they must become a strategic resource for the company. Mr. Henning Nielsen's¹⁵ C.V. had apparently made him very suitable for running such an information service successfully. Showing very clearly that if „publicly funded libraries would become a strategic tool for a community survival, life would become more simple.“ Mr. Henning Nielsen has worked in the public sector, became an advisor and salesman for electronic systems before he was appointed

15 Henning P. Nielson: Business Information as a strategic resource in the company. Würzburg 1997.

the library manager of Novo Nordisk A/S co-operate library. The question with which he opened the discussion by introducing the services was, „What is the cost of misinformation.“ As he said it can be everything from „nothing“ to the „death of my company“ - but the question reflects the fact that information represents real value (is an asset in the company) and that information cannot only be missing information but also be „insufficient, wrong, of bad quality.“ He pointed out that there „is a growing awareness among management about the importance of information as a strategic decision tool.“ This values information more than in previous years, on the other hand it also requires good service of excellent quality. By pointing out that in chemical research the timely, correct and comprehensive information might represent an equal value as the research itself and the discovery itself making the checking and proving of a new medicine to a long and very cost intensive process, for the subject of chemistry and its researchers, the access and availability of information plays a very great role. By the way, the founder of the British Library Document Supply Centre which was the very first of this kind of institutions was founded by a chemical researcher.

Let me now only quote the strategic objectives of this information unit which just during the last months had successfully scrutinised:

Strategic objectives:

- Focus on automation and processes in document delivery
- Establish the best possible framework for electronic dissemination of journals to users.
- Widen the scope of end-user searching through easy access to in-house or external databases, Internet resources or other electronic information media available.
- Focus on expert online searching supportive and supplementary to end-user searching
- Focus on online searching supportive to research projects in Health Care and Enzymes (main target of the company)
- Focus on end-user training and sharing knowledge on information.

These strategic objectives fit the Rationale of the firm: “the discovery and development and marketing of new medicines and biological-industrial products is an information-intensive process. Information is a powerful resource and a critical factor for the competitiveness and success of a company“ - and you might add, if it is used and developed as a strategic tool and according to a strategic plan of the unit.

The difficulties of defining a strategic goal are growing according to the mission of libraries. We can easily understand that a co-operative library is more able to offer a clear-cut goal than a universal one. But by pointing out the National Library of Scotland we want to verify that the instalment of such a unit, which requires very different service and strategic planning, might in the long run even influence the strategy of the parent institution.

How quickly this might happen and how well strategy can be changed was shown by the example of the business information of the so-called Amerika Haus libraries by Nancy Rajczak¹⁶ of the Amerika Haus Library at Frankfurt/M. The complete transformation of the previous Amerika Haus libraries to business centres was already introduced in 1994 by Mary Boone.¹⁷ Taking into consideration that the future is in the electronic library, Ms. Boone said: „Our visitation for the future of the USIS (United States Information Service) Germany Library Programme, based on the conclusions of these analyses is a dynamic, electronic information and communication network through which we can transform ourselves from independent traditional lending libraries into a system of information centres focused on the transfer of information rather than the lending of texts. We will collect a rich mixture of materials in our libraries that include printed books, magazines and government documents from the US since not all information we need is available electronically...“ and furthermore she lay down the vision of a library network for the clients such as legislators, professors, journalists and business professionals. It could be expected, but was nevertheless not foreseen, that here the strategy of how the new information service should be offered led to a complete change of mission. As it was already foreseeable that the idea of a public library in Germany prevailing all these years after the Second World War has been totally abandoned¹⁸ offering now only a business service. It was also obvious in the first place not for a Germany business community but for one in the United States. That means that the idea of bringing people together for joint ventures as e.g. in the papers of Galina Tsesarskaya¹⁹ and the Association of

16 Nancy Rajczak: Government business information services. Würzburg 1997.

17 Mary Boone, Lending Library of Information Center. Consideration concerning future plans for libraries in the Amerika Hauses in: Proceedings of the international seminar „New Library Strategies“, 3-9 September 1995.

18 Elisabeth Simon: Bibliothekswesen in den USA. Eine Einführung 1988, 155 pp.

19 Galina Tsesarskaya: International Association of Business Libraries. Experiences and Perspectives. Würzburg 1997.

Business Libraries²⁰ has been completely abandoned, which was also expressed by the new administrative structure in which the new units are working. The strategy of these units is clear-cut. They provide business information in the first place for a home market; that means for business people in the United States, therefore, serving as an international agency for a national clientele. Although the approach is quite international since by providing information from the German market the more European outreach included in its strategy, it is nationally driven. It might also be doubtful whether this strategy will work in the long run since in a quite traditional society as Germany, business information is only partly provided in electronic form. Therefore, an exclusion of the community which will consequently follow such exclusive strategy will narrow the outlook and maybe prevent access to the right information which does come under so many different formats as the project being carried out in Estonia and presented by the Estonian participants of this conference showed.

Formats for Business Information

Although we have already mentioned the role of the Internet by shortly describing the service of Århus Central Library Denmark, as early as 1988 nearly 10 years ago the present president of the Chamber of Handicrafts in Hamburg had already described the large failure of electronic information with small and medium-sized enterprises especially in craftsmanship.²¹ The project which Ms. Virkus and Ms. Tamre of Tallinn have conducted concentrated on the ways business information is used and through which means. Although the Internet had gained considerably during the last year, local newspapers as well as magazines are the first resource of information for business people followed by word of mouth. Estonia, being a small country but with broad and far-reaching international involvement was a very good example for examining the connection of local and international information. The new European University as a cadre school for young managers - who are, compared with other countries, the youngest in this, the most economically successful, country of the former Soviet Union - is playing an increasingly important role in the education of future managers. The young age of these business people is not only caused by their recent education of new business methods, but also by their international approach. Estonia has been quite

20 Nina Shevelova: Information services for corporations by a municipal library of a large industrial centre. Würzburg 1997.

21 Dieter Horchler: Information needs of the clientele of the Guild Hall Hamburg in: Library Services to the Industry, 1988, 68.

successful in reviving its international relations and gaining new ones. For this one has to remember that Estonia was one of the most cut-off countries in Europe with negative consequences when it was first able to establish ties to the European Community. But Estonians returning from Sweden, Canada and the USA did not only bring capital for investments, they brought scholarships, internships and visited language schools in other countries for those who wished to learn. Therefore today, - promoted by a very wise political leadership - Estonia is driving its totally destroyed economy to a market driven and internationally involved one and apparently is becoming quite successful. One of the reasons of its success and hopefully continuing success, will be the mixture of tradition and future. For the same time when the new electronic means are introduced - the Estonian University Department of Library and Information Science is publishing a very interesting electronic journal with interviews of the members of the international professional community - libraries are working together for the introduction of a national library and information system INOPAC which probably will enable the country to network and make accessible all material which is available in Estonia. Therefore, according to my personal opinion, quite useless discussion which formats are preferable for business information has not been posed by this project. It can be often observed that in the local community a shop of business is replaced by one which is not needed or does not meet the real clientele of the community as age, available funds and competitors are concerned. Here the local base of business information as coming by the local newspaper, local meetings, events of the neighbourhood, participation in events of the local school is obvious and probably cannot be replaced by sheer written information; the personal involvement is much too important. On the other hand the service Sheila Webber²² was offering by listening and examining Internet addresses which offer business information can be extremely helpful with a media which needs so much time to use. Therefore, the choice of the format is not only according to the business you are in but also depends on the person which is delivering this service and the involvement of the community being served as the example of Århus Business Information showed as mentioned above.

Business libraries for survival

At a time in which all information units, be it public libraries, university libraries or private libraries, are pressed to justify their existence, the importance of the service can play a vital role. In a time when everything that costs money is questioned and the concept of long range planning seems to have been abandoned

22 Sheila Webber: What business information is there on the Internet. Würzburg 1997.

altogether, not only some business but also public administration basic research as well as investments in building up an infrastructure will receive public funding only reluctantly. Therefore, the example of the International Association of Business Libraries in Russia is very interesting.²³ This association not only comprises libraries which offer such services but in most cases make their living doing it. These libraries build their new role and activities in the good standing which they occupied in the public. The so-called scientific public libraries are a feature of the regions of Russia. Some of them have been well supported in regions which have gained wealth after the break down of central power in Moscow. But the most interesting example is Moscow itself where the centre and headquarters work not only as an administrative and consultative body, but by running some municipal libraries are able to gain public support and funding from the municipality. This municipality uses its activities for building up not only a new business infrastructure but also when opening the first computer library in Moscow for the education of future taxpayers becoming a tool for the transformation of a society.

In conclusion, it has to be stated, that basically business information has to be timely, correct and of good quality. It has to be directed to the strategy of a firm, corporation, municipality or a region. It requires special staff, special services and opening hours, which most libraries do not provide at the moment. But this may change. Mainly, business libraries require good communication skills. Business information might often rely more on communication than on providing a large range of material. How different the attitude of Russian business libraries to the American ones in most cases the Russian professionals offer the communication skills by fostering joint ventures²⁴, by accompanying investors to the administrators, by offering not only information material but their position and skills in a community which used these skills for survival during a time when communication was somewhat restricted - libraries very often were a refuge. The Open Society is going to support Russian libraries with a large amount of money for inter-linking them - the new electronic devices and the Internet and electronic mail are excellent means in a vast country where public mail does not work properly any more. It can only be hoped that the integration of communication, information of local needs and international reach will make the provision of

23 Alexander Pournik: Electronic information service - a new type of special public library. Würzburg 1997.

24 „The Project in Bremen“ presented by Dr. Roth Beckman and Dr. Breiling. Promoting the economy in a region - helping to improve the economic structure through information services is aiming in the same direction. The only critical point might be the communication between the parties involved. Würzburg 1997.

business information a great success in this country as any other country would benefit from this. But it should be concluded that this requires a total and comprehensive management approach as Hans Christian Hobohm investigated in his paper: „Changing of management concepts in a digital library environment“.²⁵

Elisabeth Simon
Deutsches Bibliotheksinstitut
Bibliothekarische Auslandsstelle
Luisenstr. 57
10117 Berlin
Germany
simon@dbi-berlin.de

²⁵ Also Würzburg 1997.