How to Manage Information as a Strategic Asset

1. Understand the role of Information.

Information can add value to your products and services. Improved information flows can improve the quality of decision making and internal operations. Yet many managers do not fully understand the real impact of information - the cost of a lost opportunity, of a poor product, of a strategic mistake - all risks that can be reduced by using the appropriate information.

2. Assign Responsibility for Leading your IRM Initiative.

Developing value from information resources is often a responsibility that falls between the cracks of several departments - the user departments in different business units, and corporate planning, MIS units or librarians..

3. Develop Clear Policies on Information Resources

Policies for ascertaining information needs, acquiring and managing information throughout its life cycle. Pay particular attention to ownership, information integrity and sharing. Make the policies consistent with your organisational culture.

4. Conduct an Information Audit (Knowledge Inventory).

Identify current knowledge and information resources (or entities), their users, usage and importance. Identify sources, cost and value. Classify information and knowledge by its key attributes. Develop knowledge maps. As knowledge management gains prominence, this is sometimes called a knowledge inventory "knowing what you know".

5. Link to Management Processes.

Make sure that key decision and business process are supported with high leverage information. Assess each process for its information needs.

6. Systematic scanning.

Systematically scan your business environment. This includes the wider environment - legal and regulatory, political, social, economic and technological - as well as the inner environment of your industry, markets, customers and competitors. Provide selective and tailored dissemination of vital signs to key executives. This goes beyond the daily abstracting service provided by many suppliers.

7. Mix hard/soft, internal/external.

True patterns and insights emerge when internal and external data is juxtaposed, when hard data is evaluated against qualitative analysis. Tweak your MkIS system to do these comparisons.

7. Optimize your information purchases.

You don't have to control purchasing, but most organisations do not know how much they are really spending on external information. By treating consultancy, market research, library expenses, report and databases as separate categories, many organisations are confusing media with content.

8. Introduce mining and refining processes.

Good information management involves 'data mining', 'information refining' and 'knowledge editing'. You can use technology such as intelligent agents, to help, but ultimately subject matter experts are needed to repackage relevant material in a user friendly format. One useful technique is content analysis, whose methods have been developed by Trend Monitor International in their Information Refinery, and are used in our analysis services. The classifying, synthesising and refining of information combines the crafts of the information scientist, librarian, business analyst and market researcher/analyst. Yet many organisations do not integrate these disciplines.

9. Develop Appropriate Technological Systems

Continual advances in technology increase the opportunities available for competitive advantage through effective information management. In particular, intranets, groupware and other collaborative technologies make it possible for more widespread sharing and collaborative use of information. Advances in text retrieval, document management and a host of other trends in knowledge management technologies have all created new opportunities for providers and users alike.

10. Exploit technology convergence.

Telecommunications, office systems, publishing, documentation are converging. Exploit this convergence through open networking, using facilities such as the World Wide Web, not just for external information dissemination but for sharing information internally.

11. Encourage a Sharing Culture

Information acquires value when turned into intelligence. Market Intelligence Systems (MkIS) are human expert-centred. Raw information needs interpretation, discussing and analysing teams of experts, offering different perspectives. This know-how sharing is a hall-mark of successful organisations.