

Communication in an Industrial Library

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First, let me express my appreciation for the opportunity to participate in this session. As I hope you will see from my comments, I consider communication an extremely important aspect of library and information work, and am therefore happy to contribute anything I can to this discussion.

I have been asked to speak about our library as an example of corporate/industrial libraries. I must stress here that my talk will give you an idea of what we do in one corporate library only — that of Burlington Industries, the textile manufacturer. I have found over the years in my dealings with textile and other special libraries, that the kinds of services offered and the means of communicating with users are extremely varied.

Part of the reason for this variation is due to the fact that most industry libraries are organized and their services developed to serve the needs of a fairly specific community of users. That community of users, its geographic boundaries, the size of the staff and the budget determine the services provided and these parameters vary widely in industry.

To understand the reason we communicate along the lines which we do

within Burlington, you need to understand the structure of Burlington Industries as a company, and our position as an Information Services group within that company.

Burlington is a multi-national company, composed of 22 manufacturing divisions. These divisions are operated as individual profit centers and are united to the Corporation through 7 executive vice presidents who report to the President of the company. Burlington manufactures no fiber and no apparel. Our business is making yarn and fabric.

These 22 divisions produce such varied products as yarn; greige or unfinished fabric, which is then sold to other Burlington divisions or to commission dyers and finishers for further processing; dyed and finished fabric both woven and knit, for use in all major markets (men's wear, women's wear, children's wear); hosiery and socks; fabric which goes into the home furnishings areas such as sheets, pillowcases, bedspreads, towels, mattress ticking; carpets and rugs; drapery fabrics and draperies; industrial products, such as fire hoses, pipe wrapping, tire cord fabric; furniture and lamps.

The marketing and merchandising headquarters for each division is located

in New York. The manufacturing headquarters for almost all the divisions are in the Corporate Headquarters Building in Greensboro, North Carolina. The Corporate functions such as research and development, purchasing, accounting, payroll, engineering, industrial engineering and operations research are also located in Greensboro.

Each of these divisions, then, in addition to a marketing headquarters and manufacturing headquarters has manufacturing plants. These plants, about 130, are located in 10 states and in 9 foreign countries. In total, there are about 70,000 employees of Burlington Industries worldwide - about 62,000 in the U. S.

As you can see, then, the Company manufactures a very broad range of textile products in many different locations. The physical distribution of the company gives us, therefore, more of a communications challenge than if our people were all located in one or two buildings.

Where, then, does the information function get in this picture - who is it charged to serve, and how does it attempt to do that? Information Services was organized in 1964 as a department of Corporate Research and Development. It was chartered, however, to serve not only the Corporate R&D personnel, but anyone in the Company who needed information from the published literature. Information Services does not maintain confidential internal information, with the exception of the Corporate Research & Development project reports. Our services are provided from the published literature.

We are physically located at the Company's Corporate Headquarters building in Greensboro, where there are about 1,000 staff people in the Corporate departments and manufacturing headquarters I previously mentioned.

Our user community, of course, is composed of personnel employed in plant and

division locations throughout the world. This gives you the idea, then, that the majority of our services are provided for people who are unable, because of physical distance, to come into the library to seek the information they need.

How, then, do we try to serve people in all types of jobs in some one hundred and twenty locations with interests in almost every aspect of information available and sometimes not available? Basically, we communicate through our services. Currently we provide services in three areas - library, alerting and searching.

The library itself, with a collection of about 10,000 volumes is made available to all of our locations through a computer-generated book catalog which is located in either the training or personnel department.

The book catalog is supplemented with quarterly lists of new books and with computer-generated supplements every 6 months which are inserted in the catalog.

As with any of our services, books can be borrowed by phone call, written request, typed memo, etc. We are quite flexible; we lend books for a month and if the person needs it longer, he can renew it as long as someone else is not on the waiting list.

In the way of alerting or SDI services, we provide a monthly publication containing the table of contents pages of about 25 business, management, personnel and training journals.

A second formal alerting program provides standard profiles in 15 major textile areas. These monthly bulletins provide the recipient with abstracts of articles and patents appearing in the recent literature that relate to one of 15 major textile topics such as weaving, dyeing, finishing, printing and environmental conditions. These, of course, are of interest to our textile manufacturing personnel and are sent to over 200 people in various plant locations.

With both of these services, we are trying to provide users with the knowledge of available current information in a form that is concise, easy to scan and that doesn't require more than 15 minutes each month to review.

We also have a fairly extensive informal program of alerting. From materials which we review on a daily basis, such as the Federal Register, patent indexes and some 200 journals, we disseminate "items of interest" on a fairly restricted basis, to those who are working in or responsible for particularly significant areas. Most of our lists for this service have been built by personal contacts over the years.

We also stay attuned to people who have recently requested searches on a topic. For example, someone in plant or division request information on productivity. After providing him with a retrospective search, we try to send him relevant articles from the journals received in the library over the next few months. We often find that a search is requested when the subject is becoming of interest, not only to our people but perhaps to the industry itself. Therefore, we do find that for a number of months after the bibliography has been provided, articles of interest appear in the current literature and we feel these are of value to the person making the original request.

The third area of service, then, is that of searching. This activity is described in many ways in public, academic and industrial libraries. Again, since our largest major user community is not located at or near the library, it is the responsibility of the staff to find the information and get it to the requestor in the manner in which he has requested it. The scope of this particular activity ranges from someone holding on the phone while you look up the address and telephone number of a particular company in such directories as Thomas Register, to the preparation of a

bibliography with abstracts containing significant literature references on a particular subject for a defined length of time, which can be as much as 40 to 50 years.

In Burlington Industries Information Services, reference work is done specifically on request and specifically to the needs of the user. That means if someone wants one book, a couple of articles or the whole spectrum of a subject, that is what we provide. We also are specific to try to provide it within the time frame he has given us and maintain communication with him on the request.

The effective communication between a remote requestor and the library staff is extremely important in this aspect in particular. It is essential that the staff understand as much about the question as possible. We have over the years, therefore, used a search request sheet which is pulled when the phone rings or when a memo is received. We try to find out from the requestor the various pieces of information listed on this form, including the length of time he wishes the search to cover, whether it should include articles as well as patents, whether he wants abstracts or full articles, would a book do, how soon does he need it, does he have some reference he is working from, something he has seen on the subject before, etc. etc?

In many cases, if the request for a search is received in written form, we fill out the questionnaire as much as possible and do a quick check of the literature to see what is available. Then we are likely to call the person back and discuss the question with him.

We try to handle questions of all types — either through our internal secondary sources, or through outside services such as the date-bases maintained by SDC, Lockheed, Associations, etc. We cannot, however, answer all questions, and our policy (which we think is very important to

communication) is to say "no" as quickly as possible when we are not able to provide the material.

How then, do we tell the people in our 120 some locations about Information Services and these three basic areas of service which we provide? We try to make plant visits as often as possible to describe our services to the supervisory personnel. Most of the plants have been visited at least once and we are about to begin a second series of visitations.

The information currently being sent to these plants in the way of new book lists, profile bulletins and business/management table of contents serves as a medium to remind the staff there that we do have a library and that it is available to serve their information needs.

Our corporate training, personnel and industrial engineering departments cooperate in this effort by allowing time for participants in their courses at corporate headquarters to come to our department and spend about 15 minutes learning about the services. These courses draw staff from plants throughout the country in all levels of management.

We encourage the corporate departments and divisional headquarters people to send new professional personnel to us for orientation. For these orientations we have prepared a packet of information containing a sample of each of our publications and a booklet about Information Services. We review this packet of information with them and then they are welcome to take the material back to their location.

We also review all personnel change notices. Through our Corporate personnel department, we are informed of changes in plant, division and Corporate supervisory personnel. We review these changes and, for example, send a new plant manager information about our services and samples of the profile bulletins

that have information in them concerning the product which is manufactured at his location. We also try to visit our New York merchandising personnel in each division about once a year.

We also take advantage of in-house newsletters from other departments. For example, we have a regular section in the *Training Newsletter* issued quarterly by the Corporate Personnel Department to all plant and division training personnel.

Communication within the staff is not difficult. We have a staff of 3 and are physically located within about 5 feet of each other. We are, therefore, in contact often during the day. However, we do have at least once a week a formal period of conversation or communication where we discuss questions that have arisen, problems that may be of general nature, policies that perhaps we should consider changing or starting, etc.

I think that perhaps we often feel that because we are in contact with our staff members daily, that this is a sufficient communications mechanism. I believe that a time set aside each week for this kind of more formal communication is very important, despite the pressures of the workload.

Also with respect to staff communications, we try to maintain a continuous learning program which includes orientation to the use of new services, and involving them more in the use of all library materials. We also try to see that the staff takes advantage of Burlington training programs or workshops at local meetings which would be of value. With a small staff it is necessary for everyone to be as knowledgeable about all aspects of library service as possible.

We feel that it is extremely important to know whether our services are serving the current needs of our users. We, therefore, conduct a written survey on each of our formal alerting services once a year.

Through these surveys we determine not only the need for the service, but we find out if people have relocated, left the company, etc. We are conscious of the changing requirements of users and the evaluation of our services helps us determine the needs of our people today, as opposed to a year ago. We have in the past made some significant changes in services due to the change in our user group, in our staff, etc.

We have found over the years that the design of the survey form is significant in the percent response. The one-page forms are self-addressed back to us, with even the recipient's name filled in in the "From" category. All that is required of the recipient is to check off the answers.

We also operate fairly informally. We deal directly with anyone in the Company who needs information. They do not need to go through channels, through their supervisor or department head — they can come directly to the library staff for information and as much as possible, everyone's question is treated as equal. Also, we do not charge back directly for any of our services to division or plant personnel.

As far as the attitude of our staff goes — we like to modify the ad and say "we are very friendly." We try to always be friendly, cheerful and encouraging when people come into the library or, perhaps more important, contact us by phone. We think that the attitude of the staff and that extra effort to help someone is one of the most important aspects of library services. I guess you would call us aggressive responders.

We also keep our ear to the grapevine as to what is being worked on in the Company or what is of growing interest to BI and the industry and we try to purchase materials as quickly as possible along these lines so that we are ready before requests begin. An example of this would be

that we started buying metric information a number of years ago and we have a fairly good collection now when our plant people are having to become quite heavily involved.

As I noted previously, there are about 1,000 staff personnel at our location so the library is open from 8:00 to 5:00 for these people to browse or to read for business or non-business reasons. We keep the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, the Greensboro paper and the more popular business journals readily accessible for use during a break or at lunch.

We think identification of IS and the staff is very important. Our forms clearly identify us and our location; the staff has distinctive stationery with which to communicate to users. We clearly mark everything. Also, we use colored pentel pens to write our messages.

We have a separate post office box for IS so our mail does not get mixed up with the Corporate department mail.

We have some great communication helps provided by the Company. The Company has an extensive telephone tie-line network and therefore, we are accessible to plant personnel (and vice versa) without having to make long-distance calls.

In addition, a mail courier service delivers mail to most plants in the eastern part of the U.S. in one day. For example, mail goes every night to the New York office, so we are not dependent on the U.S. mail.

As most small, special libraries, we are very dependent on another aspect of communication — inter-library loan. We use the major libraries in North Carolina extensively for photocopies and book loans. We also use many other libraries in the U.S. to obtain requested material and we are very grateful for the access to these resources. Here we are dependent on the U.S. mail, unfortunately.

We feel it is important to initiate and respond. Sometimes our customers do not know what they want in the way of service. Therefore, when we think something would be good for them, we usually go ahead and start the service on a trial basis and, after an appropriate length of time, we contact them for an evaluation. We get much less response and interest when we simply survey the users and say "do you think such a service would be worthwhile?"

One other aspect we do not want to forget is the importance of communicating with top management. We work on a management by objective basis, with a review of objectives and the establishment of new ones every six months. We also write a quarterly report with detailed statistics for the various services.

An analysis is done annually of users so we can see which divisions have used our services to a great extent and concentrate perhaps a little harder on communicating with those who have not used the services as much.

I was asked to mention several aspects of Corporate or industry library restrictions. One is the fact that many industry libraries have a policy of not serving personnel outside the Company. Our policy at Burlington is twofold:

- (1) We do, on an informal basis, cooperate with other librarians to loan books and to provide photocopies of articles on request.
- (2) Graduate students from the universities in our area are welcome to use our resources to do research in their particular field, if their library does not contain the needed material, and if they make arrangements beforehand.

I probably do not need to point out the reason for this to many of you, but I will. As you know, anytime someone new comes

to the library and wants to use the resources, it takes staff time to explain where things are, how to use the book catalog, etc. In addition, we are often faced with the question of photocopies — can they make photocopies, can we make photocopies for them? We have no means of accepting money for this and our copying machines are busy a great deal of the time with company needs.

Also, the staff has to work in the same reference area on questions which may be confidential in nature and the presence of outsiders would hinder this effort.

We have over the years run into some problems which involve delicate communication. For example, not circulating or lending current journals; or being able to say "no" to helping someone with a question of personal interest that would take a considerable amount of time, without losing the person as a business customer; or not allowing the xerox machine to be used for copying for personal interests. Overall, however, we have found these to be minor in nature.

In summary, then, I can sincerely say that we believe communication is extremely important in all aspects of library services. It is of no value to have the greatest collection and the most knowledgeable staff if you cannot communicate with the user community.

We try to communicate:

Continuously
 Courteously
 Confidently
 Conscientiously
 Cheerfully
 Carefully
 Cost Effectively.