

SLA's Alignment Project

By Tom Rink, Division Cabinet Chair

Membership Value and Benefit

The Alignment Project was designed to examine how the role of information professionals and librarians, and their professional association, must evolve to meet the needs of a changing world. This effort, which has already involved more than two years of in-depth research, has not only yielded valuable insights on positioning the association and the profession, but a strategic course to ensure that the significant value of librarians and information professionals is effectively communicated and understood. Specifically, the results and subsequent rollout of the Alignment Project will yield multiple internal and external benefits.

Internal Benefits

- Provide members with clarity of role and value
- Motivate members to communicate their role and value
- Provide a compass for communication
- Ensure messages are delivered in a consistent and compelling manner.

External Benefits

- Build recognition for information professionals in the marketplace
- Differentiate information professionals in the marketplace
- Unify and retain SLA's existing network of information professionals
- Attract new professionals to join SLA

What Members Get

In addition to those things we will do at the association level, such as looking at the possibility of a new name for SLA, we believe that members will value a series of simple, practical identity tools they can use to demonstrate their value to their organizations. Using the language and messaging we have refined through solid research, we will develop identity tools such as the following:

- Talking points and strategies to use when speaking with your senior managers and middle management of your organization that will help them to see the urgency of having the best possible information to back decisions and the role of the information professional in providing it.
- Terms and concepts to use – and to avoid – in writing job descriptions for information professionals and in describing your own work.
- Outreach ideas, techniques and templates to use in raising the profile of the information profession among key audiences, including others in your organization, people in allied professions, students, professionals working in your organization's discipline, and the local business community. (For example, presentations at staff meetings, to local business and professional groups, etc.; putting together an annual communication plan for your information unit and for your SLA chapter.)

Alignment Rollout Stages

The Alignment Rollout involves three stages, each designed to build consensus, motivation and collaboration along the way.

1. Inform and educate the members about the results of the Alignment Initiative and why it is important and relevant to them. Specific activities would include:
 - Communications from SLA board and leadership (articles in Information Outlook, etc.)
 - Updates to Alignment Project section of SLA Website (<http://www.sla.org/content/SLA/alignment/index.cfm>)
2. Inspire and compel members to believe in the new communication framework and the role they have to play in supporting the new positioning.
 - Alignment briefings to members
 - Communication from key influencers and alignment “ambassadors”
 - Outreach through local chapters and divisions
3. Members need the tools and infrastructure to deliver consistent messages so that the core purpose comes to life internally and externally.
 - Create guidelines for adopting the communication framework
 - Develop message documents and templates of materials that incorporate the new language
 - Create an intranet/portal as a central hub for members to access research and communications tools

The bottom line is that this initiative was undertaken to help define a position for SLA as well as the profession. The preliminary results of the research show that the core values for the profession include leadership, accountability and results, and service. The core values for SLA include continuous learning and professional development, knowledge sharing, global networking, competitive advantage, and bottom-line benefits. The key messages for SLA are professional development, global networking, and a unified voice.

One thing that was announced at the conference related to the project is that the name of the association is scoring low points in terms of acceptance and recognition. So the discussion about a potential name change is starting again. You are invited to participate.

On Twitter you can use the hash tag #slaname. If you think 140 characters is not enough, you can also use a wiki set up especially for that purpose at

<http://wiki.sla.org/display/SLAKM/SLA+Alignment+Initiatives+~+SLA+Name+Change>.

To learn more about Align in '09, stay put for an Alignment Project portal on the SLA website, coming very soon. You can already find info at <http://www.sla.org/content/SLA/alignment/index.cfm>.

There is some additional reading in the article from the January 2009 issue of Information Outlook by Gloria Zamora, Cindy Romaine, and Bill Fisher. It's available as a PDF on the Information Outlook section of the SLA website at <http://www.sla.org/io/2009/02/651.cfm>.