

Putting Intelligence in Employees' Pockets

THE HEAD OF TECHNOLOGY INTELLIGENCE AT BP SAYS THAT CHANGING THE MISSION OF THE CORPORATE LIBRARY ENABLED IT TO BEGIN MONITORING THE LANDSCAPE FOR DISRUPTIVE TECHNOLOGY TRENDS.

BY ANGELA MCKANE, MIS

In 2002, oil and gas company BP assigned the running of its Naperville, Illinois, physical library and print subscriptions to a U.S.-based information management firm. Ten years later, following my appointment as information capability manager, BP worked with its information management partner to develop an entirely new concept for the corporate library. That concept called for the library to transform from being a storehouse for information to providing on-demand digital content, delivering subscribed publications and tailored research to BP engineers and scientists worldwide.

My prior BP experience included roles in knowledge management, records management, and digital security. Before joining BP, I had led data privacy and data management compliance for a number of organizations, including

Transport for London, a local government body responsible for London's road, rail, bus, and river transit services, and the London Underground.

The evolution of BP's information service accelerated further in 2017, and management appointed me to a new role leading technology intelligence. My team became part of the Business Development group, under the umbrella of Group Technology.

Recasting the Library Model

This evolution of our team followed a fair degree of introspection within the broader organization. Starting around 2010, BP realized that it needed to change in many respects, and the company began a program of modernization and transformation. My role was created in 2012 with a view to addressing what was perceived as an underperforming service in some respects.

Digital technologies were offering new possibilities for curating and disseminating information to teams across the company. At the same time, digital technology was drastically changing the expectations of current and prospective users of my team's services. The physical library in Naperville really wasn't cutting it anymore, unless you were based there. Employees in the U.K. or Europe, especially the R&D staff, never connected with the library, and it was patchy to even get access to journals.

The changing technology landscape led the Group Technology Leadership team to ask how BP could build a staff that excelled at search and discovery of information and possessed the skill to build the right network of internal and external contacts—a network that included my colleagues in information technology and services, competitive intelligence analysts, executives, team leads, data analysts, curators, and AI specialists. We had to transform the service from a library function to a high-value intelligence offer.

In 2012, we took the first step in this process by recasting the existing library model. My team and I achieved some quick wins, such as consolidating subscriptions and reworking contracts that were in place but not being

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used. We also made certain that the contracts reduced compliance risks while enabling digital sharing of content and collaboration between globally dispersed teams. Our quick successes won buy-in from executives, who entrusted us with more funding to further transform the service.

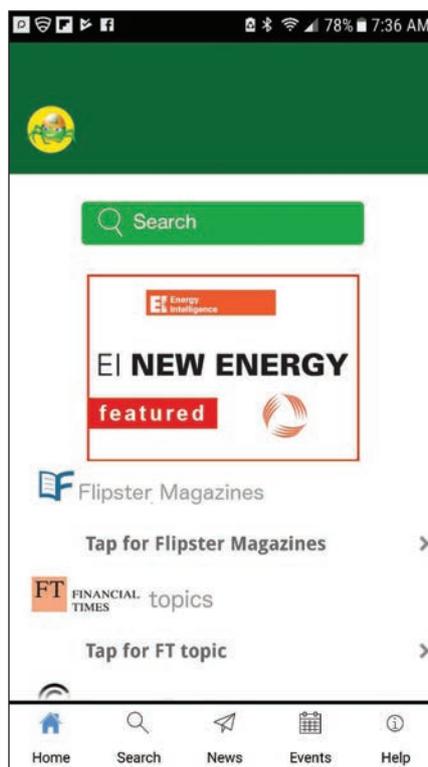
Next, we developed a plan to take the BP Library fully digital and, in fact, go mobile. Making a pitch for a library app, my team and I told company executives that, although the days of the corporate library space were numbered, we were on the cusp of enabling BP employees to carry around 1,000 articles in their pockets. (We consciously evoked Steve Jobs' unveiling of the original iPod, when he said, "This amazing little device holds 1,000 songs, and it goes right in my pocket.")

The executives decided to let us build and launch an app on BP's app store in January 2016. The app, which is hosted and maintained by library software maker Demco, Inc., attracted 1,000 active users within 12 months. Adoption then doubled to 2,000 users, and it's still growing. These numbers, coupled with the thousands of BP employees who visit the digital library platform on their desktop PCs each day, testify to the value of digitally transforming what had been seen as a dying service.

Leading the Team

Although the app launch was a success, closing the library spaces and digitally transforming the service offer was a significant change for some team members. As with any change, the transition was not without some pain—especially in the early days.

Today, my global team consists of 10 people who think of (and describe) themselves as technology intelligence providers. Although a third-party contractor supplies most of the team members, we are all aligned with, and continuously adapt our services to meet, BP's information and intelligence needs. Digital technologies provide us with flexibility in determining where team members are based and how they support BP's engineers and scientists



The BP library mobile app enables employees to access thousands of articles.

across time zones.

For example, Steve Boyle is a Colorado-based technology specialist on my team. He's been part of the oil and gas industry since the 1970s, having worked earlier in his career at Marathon Oil in a research center. He was also employed at a synthetic fuels company and, after that, was in charge of a few labs that are now part of ConocoPhillips.

Like our other team members, Steve sees himself as a consumer and curator of information. In a typical week, he might come across an item in the news about a start-up making fuel out of garbage, or a report that someone has discovered algae that turns sunlight into fuel.

"Our team is part of BP's ventures arm, which considers this sort of thing," he says. "BP is expanding beyond oil and petrochemicals, and we help that process with research."

A typical request might ask Steve to look into a potential competitor or partner in high-tech coatings. Steve

would handle this request by surveying coatings companies, identifying the leaders and the keys to success. For an exercise like this, he would tap patent databases, investment and deal-flow monitoring resources, journal articles, conference proceedings, and news sources worldwide. Ultimately, Steve would distill this information into actionable insights.

That, in a nutshell, is my team's value proposition. In today's big-data world, where a search can reap terabytes of results (much of it of uncertain provenance), the ability to gather high-quality information and distill it into decision-ready insights is a skill not to be underestimated. So I continually ask my colleagues in business development and beyond why they waste time searching for information. The technology intelligence team can conduct a broad and deep search of high-quality resources, assess the key data, and provide actionable insights that support a decision to go for it (or not) in any situation.

Transforming Perceptions

One colleague who understands this value proposition is Rana Ali, a research and innovation advisor at BP Formulated Products Technology (FPT) in Pangbourne, England. Rana has worked at BP for 13 years, and FPT is BP's biggest research and development arm.

When Rana arrived at BP, the Pangbourne R&D Center included a library in a stately room of a historic house that formerly was part of a British nobleman's estate. "The wood-paneled library was stocked with books and research proceedings and a full-time librarian," Rana recalls. "It was a great place to lose yourself in research."

Ten years ago, Angela Strank (now BP's chief scientist) spearheaded the digital vision for BP's library service by making the tough call to close the physical library at Pangbourne. She recognized that scientific journals were being published and made available digitally, a development that was reflected in the dwindling numbers of BP staff visiting the physical library.

At the time, Rana and his researchers had a lot of projects under way. They were looking at legislative and regulatory changes taking place in BP's markets and their potential impact on engineering lubricants and fuels for future vehicles.

"Losing the library wasn't brilliant, but we retained the services of an external library 70 miles away for anyone who still wanted access to physical library space," he says.

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Rana says that when my team was created, it had a transformational effect. We met and talked to his group and asked them what they needed in terms of research and intelligence. We not only arranged for digital subscriptions to the papers and journals Rana's team needed, we also secured funding for them (thus making the offsite library unnecessary).

"Most of what we need in research, we find through the sources [the technology intelligence] team makes available," says Rana. "In our business, we need answers at our fingertips."

What's in a Name?

A lot of thought went into developing my group's function because we differentiate technology intelligence from conventional competitive intelligence. Business and competitive intelligence also exist within BP, but my hope is to build something that's synergistic across all disciplines. At BP, com-

petitive intelligence keeps an eye on the competition and the competitive environment in which the company operates; my technology intelligence component complements this function because we help BP monitor disruptive technology trends that could change the way the industry works or influence oil demand in markets worldwide.

BP operates in a global market. Transitioning to new energy sources necessitates gathering and analyzing

new and less-traditional intelligence than would have been the case in previous years. Our competitors now include players such as Google, Amazon, Apple, Tencent, and Alibaba. We don't want BP to miss something, be it an opportunity, an insight, or an emerging threat. You need only look at Blockbuster's disruption by Netflix to be reminded of technology's role in enabling swift changes in consumer behavior.

A New Mission and Identity

Many corporate libraries would benefit from transforming their offer to provide competitive intelligence services. For information professionals to make the greatest contribution to strategic management, they must have an in-depth understanding of the needs of the organization and its decision makers. Meeting those needs with a sense of urgency and delivering high-value actionable insights in a cogent, concise format through different channels are the goals.

"Today's and tomorrow's librarians need to see themselves as flexible information centers," says Rob Corrao, CEO of LAC Group, which manages real-time and archived information for Fortune 500 companies and government agencies. "That's what broadens the library's mission and helps the corporation."

Corporate librarians also must develop a vision statement if they don't already have one. Creating a plan and embracing a mission seem obvious, but it's surprising how often these tasks are overlooked.

Looking to the Future

In the corporate world, if you operate globally, you have to operate digitally to provide value with content. In my case, I think it helped that I was going in as someone who had a grounding in information systems, but was not a librarian. I was able to look at things in a different way and transform processes (such as the physical library) that were in place simply because things had always been done a certain way. That said, I do see a role for libraries of all kinds as interactive learning centers and knowledge-sharing spaces where patrons can try out the latest technology, such as 3D printing, virtual reality, augmented reality, and even reading rooms with hardback books.

It's a great time to work in data and information, and there is a real opportunity for libraries, corporate librarians, and other information professionals to transform to better serve their organizations. If your library or information or knowledge center is considering a similar change in its service offering, make sure you manage expectations, build trust, and prepare to face resistance from some quarters. Create an environment where people feel comfortable asking tough questions, without fear of retribution. When decisions are made, clearly state that a course has been set. People come on board when they begin seeing goals met and successes racked up. **SLA**