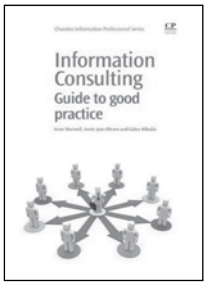
Reviews

Submissions and suggestions for reviews should be submitted to the Editor, *keywords@asindexing.org*.



Irene Wormell, Annie Joan Olesen, and Gábor Mikulás. Information Consulting: Guide to Good Practice. Chandos Publishing (Oxford, England), 2011.

Freelance indexers can be considered as self-employed information professionals. So, it might make sense to branch into other related pursuits while self-employment, such as teaching, mentoring, and consulting. Thus, I was intrigued to come across the new book entitled Information Consulting: Guide to Good Practice..

While consulting (as opposed to teaching) on how to create, edit, or manage book indexing projects undoubtedly has relatively low demand, related fields such as periodical and database indexing, web indexing, and thesaurus or taxonomy development do in fact lend themselves to consulting. From my experience in taxonomy work, I have found that there is only a very fine line between freelance work and consulting in this field. In fact, the nature of the work might not be that much different, but it is rather the relationship with the client that differs. A freelancer does what the client says. A consultant, on the other hand, makes recommendations of what needs to be done, and then may perform those tasks to varying extents.

The book Information Consulting did not fulfill my expectations or needs, however. I was looking for guidance on consulting specific to the information/knowledge/content management field. Typical scenarios are companies which have a lot of documents or other content that they need indexed, managed, and then accessible in a system with a searchable/browsable user-interface. Advice I would seek from a book might be:

1) Who are the people in an organization with whom I should speak on information matters;
2) What are sample questions I should ask these people as I conduct background research;
3) What other information should I ask for;
4) What type of technical systems questions should I ask and when I should ask;
5) How do I plan for schedule of a project with how much time needed for different parts;
6) When do I determine that it is too much for me alone and I need to subcontract;
7) When is on-site vs. remote work considered appropriate or acceptable;
8) How frequent and long should client phone meetings be, etc.

I did not find the answers in this book.

The "information" field is variously defined, I learned. In the introductory chapter "What is information consulting" the "list of terms people in the field use to describe themselves" caused me to think I had perhaps picked the wrong book: information broker, freelance librarian, information specialist, information retailer, infomediary, cybrarian, infoentrepreneur, and intelligence manager. Later in that chapter, a table on the scope of different information consulting roles proved quite informative: specialist on call, expert advisor, old hand, fixer, creative designer, architect and builder, facilitator. Although this broadened scope of activities was more reassuring, the book never went into more details of the nature of the consulting assignments.

Rather than being a book about consulting within the information management field, this turned out to be a book on how to get into consulting in general, run a consulting business and deal with clients, in a title that is merely marketed at information professionals. Most chapters are about consulting in general with only the occasional mention of "information consulting." The chapter on how to make a business plan seems to be even more generic than consulting, as it has a section describing one's "products and services," listing "distribution channels," and selling on credit. Consultants generally do not sell products, use distribution channels, or sell on credit.

The book's approach, therefore, is more that of considering the audience, rather than the field of information consulting. This is most clearly the case with the title of chapter 9: "Take a leap from being a librarian to becoming an information consultant." (But what if I never was a librarian?) This theme appears in other chapters as well. As example is the statement: "…information specialists and librarians are often much more word-oriented than business people in general. This means that your client might find a graph describing a specific situation much more useful than a report…" (p. 100) I don't want a book telling me, because I am a librarian-type I might be providing wordy deliverables. Rather, I would want a book telling me that the nature of information consulting projects tends to require graphs (if that is in fact, true). On a rare occasion that a specific information consulting task is mentioned, that of conducting and information audit, it is only within the context of the applicability of librarian skills, and not to provide guidance on how best to perform information audits.

Most valuable and unique are perhaps the seven case studies in the appendix, with their Background,

BY HEATHER HEDDEN

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Challenge, Approach, Results, and Lesson Learned. They are quite varied, so perhaps less than half would be applicable to any one reader's interest. Although I was initially excited to read that the first case study was about a project to create a corporate thesaurus, the section on "Approach" dealt only with a "time study" which determined to what degree employees were wasting time seeking information.

The chapter "The clients speak" is also very interesting, as it includes original research of survey responses from clients answering questions on the following: why they chose to have a consultant (which tended to be of the research needs type), how they chose the consultant, list of qualities sought in a consultant, what worked well and what was challenging, what they would do differently, and other advice for future consultants. Some of this information would definitely be beneficial for planning consulting work.

The index leaves something to be desired. The main problem is the lack of subentry gathering. In other words, often a main entry will have too many subentries, each with just a single locator. It even has sub-subentries, which is not needed for a book and index of this relatively small size (150 indexable pages). It has an entry that matches the title, "information consulting" plus another for "information consultancy." Concepts are not always gathered, as in the case of referral fee and agent fee, which the text says, are interchangeable, but each has a separate index entry with different locators. The index format is also poor, with too much indenting, many line wraps, spacing between lines and no heading letters, so I found it difficult to navigate.

Other features of the book have limited benefits. The abstract and keywords at the head of each chapter are an added touch that may appeal to information specialists, but are really unneeded in a printed book, where chapters are never broken out and accessed separately. The checklists at the end of some chapters have the potential to be helpful, but their quality and usefulness varies. For example, at the end of the chapter on business plans the checklist comprises two bullet points: "Make sure that you make a business plan – it will help you in the long run" and "Get advice and have the plan reviewed by an external party" (p. 55).

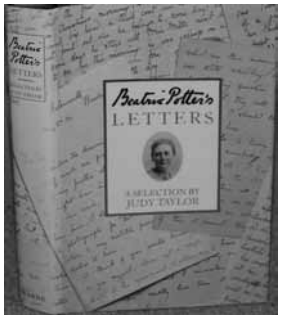
In conclusion, while this was not the book I needed (certainly not all those chapters on how to set up a business), it does have some interesting information and could be quite helpful for some readers, especially librarians or information professionals who are not yet self-employed and who are considering making the change, but at $80, there may be better value books out there. There are 1,621 books on Amazon.com categorized under the subject Consulting, and unfortunately that's the most specific taxonomy term, and there are no categories for specific kinds of consulting. So, there may be a more appropriate book out there, but it could be difficult to find.

— Heather Hedden

Indexing Letters – The VIC February 2012 (continued from page 64)

This one sided correspondence to the same person is almost like an autobiography, as she describes everyday life and personal details written to her sister.

(*Rose Paterson's Illalong letters, edited by Colin Roderick*. East Roseville, N.S.W.: Kangaroo Press, 2000)

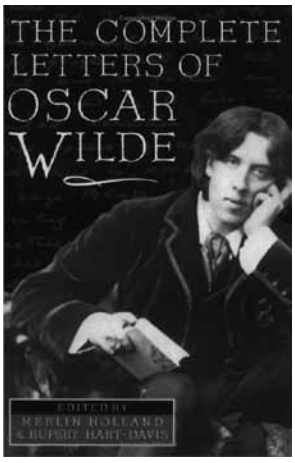


Beatrix Potter's letters: a selection

This is a selection of about 400 letters from a collection of about 1400. Being written by Beatrix Potter they have the added delight of her drawings in the letters. The index is in tiny font and looks as though many subheadings were removed to squeeze the index into the eight pages available. As a result there are several long runs of undifferentiated page numbers, hiding a level of detail from the reader. I can understand that the indexer may have had difficulty adding subheadings to the heading 'sheep or rabbits', but with over 50 page numbers given for her husband, surely useful subheadings could have been used?

(*Beatrix Potter's letters: a selection, selected by Judy Taylor*. London: Frederick Warne, 1989.)

The complete letters of Oscar Wilde



It is a sweeping statement to call these 'complete'. I wonder if further letters have been found. This 1230 page book has a 33-page general index. There is also a separate index of recipients of the letters. On a quick look this means the person may not be listed in the general index. There are no long runs of undifferentiated pages in this index; there are lots of subheadings to help find the information you want. However the index only covers named persons, places, and publications, plays etc. There are no general subject headings.

(*The complete letters of Oscar Wilde, edited by Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis*. London: Fourth Estate, 2000.

Indexing letters compared to indexing autobiographies or biographies

Indexing letters is very like indexing an autobiography or biography but there are some differences. Letters are by their very nature often brief and lacking narrative flow. Shared knowledge between the letter writer and receiver means details are left out. For example 'Visited the Gallery and saw George's latest work' would be understood by the recipient, but an outsider asks 'Which Gallery?' 'Who is George?' 'What was the work referred to?' This is where you hope the editor of the letters is able to answer the questions with notes.

Letters offer a level of detail that may not be covered by an autobiography or biography. For example there may be repeated mention of meals eaten at certain places and even what was consumed. Hence you may need to index references to meals eaten at a particular place and perhaps even what was consumed.

Douglas Matthews' article on 'Indexing published letters' in The Indexer (2001, 22:135–41) noted 'The intimacy of letters can make indexers feel intrusive and embarrassed'. This article by Matthews is a useful source of additional tips on indexing letters.