



IM Leader Profile – James Castle

Background

I was taught to read by my older sisters when barely three and my love of the written word was further reinforced with regular trips to our local branch library; on many occasions I was left by my mother under the watchful eye of the library staff, amid a stack of 'Ant and Bee' books, reading aloud and oblivious to a growing pack of listening children as she nipped across to the Co-op to pick up some groceries. From then on I always had an ambition to work with books or in libraries and as my academic career developed this also encompassed the realm of research.

My first job in the sector was as a library assistant at a busy university campus which exposed me to the world of subject librarians, inter-library loans and the World Wide Web which, in the autumn of 1995, was a very different beast. I studied for my MA in IM whilst still working but made sure that I kept my options open for post-qualification employment. I landed a junior role at a small boutique law firm which allowed me to learn a wide variety of legal librarian, cataloguing, research and current awareness skills; at that time we were still clipping and photocopying from the daily broadsheets and I revelled in the role of distributor and archivist and this was really my first pure IM role as I would be asked to track down recent cuttings based on very scant information from the requester. I learnt that IM was not just about the world of books and journals....

Career

With my skill-set enhanced I looked to further my career with a larger City law firm, initially responsible for current awareness and tracking the progress of legislation through Parliament but soon entrusted with coordinating a project to implement a single LMS solution across all libraries who, at the time, were using a variety of different solutions. Managing a multi-national team of librarians and migrating data in different formats into a single set of cataloguing rules and standards was a challenge, and I had to develop a new set of IM skills as the project progressed.

Developing a general IM skill set then allowed me to make a bold move into oil & gas exploration where, despite knowing nothing about the industry, I was employed to initiate and oversee all IM planning and development for a small company based in London but with interests in Africa, Asia and Russia. Initiatives included implementation of filing and folder structures/naming conventions, a hard copy library, launching a new document management system and dealing with day-to-day current awareness and research enquiries. I thrived under the pressure but unfortunately the company didn't and by the end of 2008 I found myself made redundant.

After a few months I secured some temporary work with a utility company, which involved implementing processes and procedures to store and retrieve documents archived off-site. This was quite challenging and involved educating the business to understand that the only way things can be effectively retrieved is if they are effectively described and organised. My next step back in full-time employment came as a result of an agency recommending me to a services company based on the IM skills listed in my CV and I spent two years helping to reorganise and re-educate bidding teams in the use and interrogation of internal information and knowledge databases. My current role sees me back in oil & gas exploration with the focus being on making sure that business analysts across the organisation effectively share and benefit from external data, information and internal knowledge via a dedicated BI platform whilst also managing information from external suppliers to ensure we have the right tools for the business.

Future aims and ambitions

My current role sees me use the IM skills I have developed over the course of my career in what is very much a 'non-library' environment, sitting with a team of analysts and not in the company's Library Services department which remains focused on the delivery of books, journals and technical information & data in both hard copy and electronic format. I think it is important for the profession and for individuals to consider opportunities that use IM skills outside of what we perceive to be the more 'traditional' realm of library and information work. This, I feel, will also encourage more people from outside of this 'traditional' sector to become engaged with CILIP and seek to develop IM skills in other working environments.

This is of particular importance I think in oil & gas, where document and information management has been the domain of the IT departments as the data and information can be extremely technical – more need to be done to say to the industry that actually you need to have IM skills and not a technical background to understand best how this should be organised, shared and exploited. My ambition would be to see this industry have a similar support network for IM professionals as the legal sector currently has in the UK.

We also should not lose sight of the human element of IM. For generations we have been encouraged not to share information in order to gain an advantage over others, from examinations and inter-house competitions at schools to competing against others for employment opportunities, and we cannot expect a fundamental shift in how we share information to happen overnight.

Advice to new IM professionals

Develop a broad set of IM competencies initially rather than focusing on a specific skill; the former makes you more appealing to less traditional employers looking for people with IM experience and also gives you greater mobility within the profession.

Organise your information to answer the questions – e.g. if people always ask for presentations or reports then these should be in a dedicated folder/area.

Don't undersell yourself; the ability to answer a difficult enquiry quickly will be due to your superb IM skills but the requestor needs to understand your value versus Google.