



Evaluating digital news services as value added information resources for executive search organizations

Melanie Sutton

Chubb Realisation (UK) Ltd

Post Graduate Diploma in Information Management

RAU University

melanie_sutton@chubb.com.au

Contents

1. [Introduction](#)
 2. [Executive search](#)
 3. [Evaluation of digital news services](#)
 4. [Conclusion](#)
 5. [References](#)
-

1 Introduction

Traditional print media have served as valuable information resources for executive search organizations. To a large extent, the print media have provided these organizations with important information on market sectors and trends, companies and the executives involved in these businesses. However, the Internet is redefining the status quo and blurs the lines that distinguish one medium from another by incorporating the visual effect of television, the depth of newspapers, the intimacy of radio and the niche interests of magazines (McLeod 2000).

This research investigated:

- The information needs of executive search organizations
- Whether traditional print media meets the information needs of executive search organizations
- Whether digital news services as well as the existing print media can meet these information needs
- The added value digital news services as information resources can offer these organizations.

[top](#)

2 Executive search

Executive search organizations are research and information intensive environments that provide organizations with professional consulting services to assist them in appointing suitably qualified and experienced leaders in executive positions. Executive search organizations use specialized research methods to source qualified and skilled potential candidates to clients.

The search process can be defined as a detailed and intricate process to achieve a match between the client's human capital requirements and the candidate's career goals. The process usually targets passive candidates, in other words those not actively looking for new opportunities. The search carries a retainer fee that secures experienced, well-qualified consultants, teams of industry specialists, research techniques and information management practices, as well as access to valuable information that is not public knowledge.

Executive search is the most modern and cost-effective method of sourcing skills where a high degree of difficulty exists in accessing these skills by way of advertising or word of mouth searches.

2.1 Information needs in an executive search environment

Owing to the degree of information intensity in executive search organizations, information management practices are a high priority. Subsequently there are very defined information needs that have to be addressed on an ongoing basis. To a large extent, the media is used to provide this information.

Typical information needs include the following:

2.1.1 People information

Award winners

All award winners are potential candidates for executive search organizations. High profile executives who receive or are nominated for awards such as the current entrepreneur award are of particular interest as they are potential candidates for high profile assignments and non-executive positions on boards of directors. Table 1 gives examples of publications that contain names of award winners.

Table 1 Examples publications that contain names of award winners

<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes several very useful annuals such as <i>Ranking the brokers and Ranking the analysts</i>. These publications are only available to subscribers
<i>Enterprise</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes an annual called Enterprise 200 black professionals which is a digest of prominent black candidates

Movers and shakers

This refers to executive appointments in organizations and executives who are potentially in the marketplace. This information is typically used to update executive search databases that store information on all potential executives. Table 2 refers to publications that contain the names of movers and shakers.

Table 2 Examples of publications that contain the names of movers and shakers

<i>Business Day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The company section publishes information about new appointments on the front left-hand side of the page • Board appointment information is also a prominent feature in this column
<i>Sunday Times and Business Times</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These papers contain a column 'People on the move', which is announcements of all new appointments with photographs • 'Trading places' is a more in-depth column • about new appointments and executive movements. Board appointment information is also a prominent feature in this column • 'Newsmaker' is a profiled interview with a prominent executive
<i>Rapport</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes a type of on-the-move column, featuring new appointments with photographs, some of which are relevant
<i>Star workplace</i> (supplement found in the <i>The Star</i> every Wednesday, featuring information about employment)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes new appointments with photos
<i>Engineering News</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes a column of new appointments in the industrial sector

Career interviews

This refers to profiles of prominent executives who usually divulge personal details such as age and qualifications, as well as career details. The information is typically used to update databases and to produce candidate profiles especially for board appointments. Table 3 contains examples of publications that contain these interviews.

Table 3 Examples of publications that contain interview information

<i>Engineering News</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes a profile of a leader on the back page every week
<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes an interview with a prominent executive every week • Annually publishes the <i>Little black book</i>, which is a directory of prominent black leaders in South Africa. This is particularly useful to executive search organizations. This annual is free to all print subscribers
<i>Sunday Times Business Times</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The newsmaker column is a

	profiled interview with a prominent executive
<i>Leadership</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes interviews with prominent executives
<i>Enterprise</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes interviews with prominent black business executives • Annually published <i>Enterprise 200 directory of black professionals</i>, which is very useful. This is only available to subscribers

Remuneration information

This is information about executive remuneration packages and general industry remuneration trends. There is generally more information published about remuneration in the financial services practice and information technology (IT) practice than any other practice group. Table 4 contains examples of publications that contains remuneration information

Table 4 Examples of publications that contain remuneration information

<i>ITWeb</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publishes an annual IT salary survey that is distributed with the computing periodical <i>Computing SA</i>
<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often publishes useful articles regarding executive remuneration packages as well as useful information about remuneration packages of non-executive directors on B-boards

2.1.2 Company information

Executive search organizations scan the environment for information about both listed and unlisted companies for business development purposes and current awareness about existing and potential clients. Types of information that are considered useful include details of new listings, de-listings, name changes, ratings and rankings, company results and surveys. Table 5 contains examples of publications that contain company information.

Table 5 Examples of publications that contain company information

<i>Business Day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information
<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information • Publishes an annual <i>Financial Mail top 100 companies</i>. This is only available to print subscribers
<i>Business Report</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information

<i>Sunday Times Business Times</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information
<i>Finance Week</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish an annual <i>F and T Top 200 companies</i>. This is only available to print subscribers

2.1.3 Practice group information

This type of information is more general and includes all the business sectors. Types of information included are details of events, trends, surveys, organizations representing different industrial sectors (these can be used as sources of information) and useful Web sites. All of the abovementioned publications are good sources of practice group information. Table 6 contains examples of publications that contain practice group information.

Table 6 Examples of publications that contain practice group information

<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annually publishes <i>Adfocus</i>, which focuses on the advertising industry. This is a useful publication for the consumer practice group who may have assignments in the advertising sector
-----------------------	---

2.1.4 General information

Executive search organizations also have a need for general information regarding government, executive trends, corporate governance and competitor intelligence. Table 7 lists publications that contain general information.

Table 7 Examples of publications that contain general information

<i>Business Day</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information especially corporate governance
<i>Financial Mail</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information • Advertisements for executive positions are good sources of competitor intelligence
<i>Sunday Times Business Times</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good source of all the above types of information • Advertisements for executive positions are good sources of competitor intelligence

[top](#)

3 Evaluation of digital news services

When print media businesses take their businesses to the Web, they take along the mindset

of a medium that delivers content to a passive audience. They do the sifting and choosing and they give the customer what they hope is of interest to him or her. But the Web requires a different mindset. It is an interactive medium and everything else is secondary to that fundamental principle (Lasica 2001).

The above evaluation establishes that print media is successful in servicing the information needs of executive search organizations. However, the pattern of new and electronic media supplanting older print-based media means that in the future, digital news may become a value added resource like print media.

The following evaluation focuses on two existing digital news services that an executive search organization currently uses. The evaluation criteria are divided into three areas, namely,

- digital media characteristics
- Web user interface
- essential information provided by print media.

3.1 *Financial Mail* on-line (www.fm.co.za)

3.1.1 Summary of the compliance of the *Financial Mail* on-line to three evaluation criteria areas

Table 8 summarizes to what extent the first digital news service (*Financial Mail*: www.fm.co.za) complies with the three evaluation criteria areas.

Table 8 Summary of the compliance of the *Financial Mail* on-line to three evaluation criteria areas

Digital media characteristics	
On-line access (i.e. is access paid, subscription based or free?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The <i>Financial Mail</i> (FM) on-line is almost a carbon copy of the print edition. Restricted access is available to all visitors. Print subscribers are given full access to the entire contents of the site. Subscribers are asked to register with the site, citing the subscriber number. Subscribers then log-in using the log-in name and password that they set up. Thereafter, the site recognizes the user if he or she has logged into the site from that computer
Personalization or push	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FM offers readers the opportunity to subscribe to the FM weekly mailing list, although no further personalization options are available
Diversified services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The author can find no mention of any diversified services on this site
Advertising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertising on this site is extremely discreet. There are

	<p>banner ads on some of the pages and the home page carries logos of several South African business partners, which take you directly to these partners' Web sites.</p>
<p>Web user interface</p>	
How often is the site updated?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weekly. While the print copy is delivered to subscribers on a Thursday of every week, the on-line version becomes available on-line the day before
Speed of access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The site uploads very quickly and navigation through the sections is also fast
Ease of navigation around the site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This site is a pleasure to use. Navigation is excellent as the site is organized in the same manner as the print edition. Users familiar with the print edition can find their way around the site with no problems. Sections are very clearly marked. Search and archive facilities are also very easy to use
Help available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • FM has a section called 'resources' that features 'Help' and 'New Web User', which assists new users to register and use the FM on-line. Although basic, 'Help' covers all the main issues and there is a further option to e-mail Internet staff if users experience technical problems
<p>Essential print media information</p>	
Executive career information and interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interview from the print article can be accessed on-line. There are also two further value-added options to either print or e-mail the article to a friend
Surveys	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full list of surveys is available. The latest surveys are listed together; all other surveys are indexed alphabetically
Annuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A full list of annuals is available. Some of the annuals go back to 1997. An additional feature is the <i>Little black book</i>, which is a directory of black professionals. This publication has been updated on a regular basis since November 2002, thereby offering an added value service

Executive positions advertised	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The advertisements that appear in the print edition do not appear on-line
Value-added features	
Search options and archives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The search engine on this site uses Boolean logic and users are given advanced features to search either current issues or the archives. The archives date back to 1995 and users can access specific months to peruse. The search facility is very accurate

3.1.2 Overall rating of the *Financial Mail* on-line as an added value information source

The author was employed as an information manager or consultant at two executive search firms for a period of three years, during which time the *Financial Mail* became an invaluable source of information. Having used both the print and the on-line version for a long period of time, the author saw the on-line source evolve. Today it is one of the best South African sites available.

Financial Mail on-line is definitely an added value information resource for executive search organizations because of its 'just in time' capabilities. The surveys and annuals are a particularly important resource and having access to them on-line provides several benefits, for example one subscription buys all employees access to the site, meaning that everyone can access the annuals – no squabbling about who is keeping the annual on his or her desk.

Access to on-line resources also takes the pressure off specialized resource centres to provide space, time and labour to administer these resources. Instead, the on-line version can be catalogued on the computerized library catalogue and employees can access the resource at will.

The *Financial Mail's* latest value-added service, namely the annual *Little black book*, which is available on-line and which will be regularly updated, is of enormous importance to executive search organizations as this is a typical resource that these organizations will use.

In addition, the archives and search function offer high value to executive search organizations and FM has well designed and structured search capabilities.

While the cost of the print subscription is a negligible concern (the site offers high value), the *Financial Mail* subscriber services are shocking, and this is a concern for the future. The author would rather not receive the print copy and only have on-line access because of the labour and time that it takes to merely have a print copy delivered to a subscriber. Perhaps this issue should be addressed.

3.2 *Sunday Times Business Times* on-line (www.sundaytimes.co.za)

3.2.1 Summary of the compliance of the *Sunday Times Business Times* on-line to three evaluation criteria areas

Table 9 summarizes to what extent the second digital news service (*Sunday Times Business Times* on-line: www.sundaytimes.co.za) complies with the three evaluation criteria areas.

Table 9 Summary of the compliance of the *Sunday Times Business Times* on-line to three evaluation criteria areas

Digital media characteristics	
On-line access (i.e. is access paid, subscription based or free?)	Access to the Web site is free, with no restricted areas. However, print subscribers receive a free subscriber magazine called <i>Sport</i>
Personalization or push	Readers can subscribe to e-newsletters
Diversified services	<p>The newspaper library staff offers a research service where they research articles that have been printed in their publications, so users do not have to search the Web site themselves</p> <p><i>Sunday Times</i> has partnered with Career Junction, an on-line career portal. The partnership is known as <i>Sunday Times CareerJunction</i>. This allows users to search for the top jobs that are advertised in the <i>Sunday Times</i> as well as other positions already on-line at CareerJunction</p> <p>There are many other diversified services available on the site, which will not be discussed, as they do not pertain to executive search needs</p>
Advertising	Many banner advertisements
Web user interface	
How often is the site updated?	<p>Obviously since the print edition is available every Sunday, it appears as though 90% of the newspaper appears on-line. The site is divided into the same sections as the print edition, but with additional access to local news. Whereas the print edition would only carry news for Gauteng, the Web site gives users access to news from the Cape and KwaZulu Natal</p> <p>The home page, however, carries a daily menu as well, with links to information such as news, business, books, careers, columnists, drink, eat, fashion, health, legal, lottery, movies, motoring, music, sport, special reports, technology, trade, travel and TV. In addition, the home page has the following daily push categories: daily business updates, daily sport updates, daily columns</p>
Speed of access	The site uploads very quickly and navigation through the sections is also fast
Ease of navigation around the site	The site is organized in exactly the same

	<p>manner as the print newspaper with the corresponding sections. <i>The Business Times</i> is in its own section</p> <p>The only criticism is that the page does not fit on the screen and one has to use the scroll bar on the bottom to see the whole page. This is a bit annoying</p>
Help available	Yes, there is a section called 'Services' and 'Help'
Print media information	
People information	<p>The newsmaker article is fully accessible on-line along with the accompanying photograph</p> <p>Trading places and People on the move are both available on-line. These are archived and can be accessed by using the search facility</p>
Surveys	The print surveys are accessible on-line every week and then archived. Readers can access them through the archives
Executive positions advertised	<p>All the top jobs advertised in the print edition can be found on-line at Sunday Times CareerJunction, as well as other jobs available on CareerJunction. Executive search organizations can search the jobs according to 'recruiters', which makes the environmental scanning task for competitor advertisements much easier. One need only enter the name of competitors into the search box to receive a host of results. Often these results will include all advertisements placed by recruiters and not only those advertised in the Sunday Times</p>
Value-added features	
Search options and archives	Both search and archive facilities are available. Archives for <i>Business Times</i> date back to November 1996, while archives for the <i>Sunday Times</i> date back to May 1998
Geographical areas covered (i.e. local and global content)	The site offers national content including specific news sections for Gauteng, Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. There is also coverage of Africa and the world

3.2.2 Overall rating as an added value information source

The *Sunday Times Business Times* newspaper is a valuable resource for executive search organizations especially for specific needs such as 'people on the move'. However, the on-

line news site is very busy and the print edition is in fact easier to read. The on-line edition is used only to access articles that have been marked in the print copy.

This is a different approach from using *Financial Mail* on-line and it has a lot to do with the navigability of the site. However, the archives and search capabilities offer the same value as the Financial Mail and can be considered extremely useful.

On-line access is free although it may be preferable to pay for access and forego the flashing and blinking banners.

[top](#)

4 Conclusion

This research set out to evaluate whether digital news services could be regarded as value added information resources for executive search organizations. Given the nature and business of these organizations and the way in which information is gathered and subsequently used, digital information services definitely have a large value component.

Whereas digital news services cannot immediately replace the print media, there is huge potential for them, especially in diversified services. Perhaps digital news services should look at executive search organizations to see how information is used and where it is found, and then model their offerings according to these needs. This would significantly enhance the value of their business to their potential clients.

[top](#)

5 References

Lasica, J.D. 2001. The promise of daily me. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.well.com/user/jd/personalization.html>.

McLeod, D. 2000. The future of print media. [Online]. Available WWW: <http://www.futurecompany.co.za/2000/11/03/covstory.htm>.

Disclaimer

Articles published in SAJIM are the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editor, Board, Publisher, Webmaster or the Rand Afrikaans University. The user hereby waives any claim he/she/they may have or acquire against the publisher, its suppliers, licensees and sub licensees and indemnifies all said persons from any claims, lawsuits, proceedings, costs, special, incidental, consequential or indirect damages, including damages for loss of profits, loss of business or downtime arising out of or relating to the user's use of the Website.



ISSN 1560-683X

Published by [InterWord Communications](#) for the Centre for Research in Web-based Applications,
Rand Afrikaans University