If you ask a group of librarians to define value-added research, you will receive as many different responses as there are databases in cyberspace. I overheard one professional say that her definition of value-added research consists of including an extra year's worth of news stories with her database searches, and another says she reads through the articles and tracks down any pertinent cited studies on the topic at hand. Others consider their approach value-added because they download full-text articles (as opposed to giving the patron citations), or they read industry newsletters and send articles of interest to their favorite end-users.

Most of the list above serves as an example of how librarians add unquantifiable value to their organizations. We are constantly reading, scanning documents, downloading studies, and often send what we come upon serendipitously to end-users. We discuss research topics with our patrons and brainstorm ideas with them. If we did not add discernable value to our organizations, we would not still be employed. (And remember how all the discussion in the 1980s of end-users doing their own searching led to fears among some that we would be obsolete by now?)

QUANTIFIABLE VALUE
The next step is to begin adding quantifiable value. When I started working in the investment banking and
brokerage industry 15 years ago, the first "gift" I received was a LEXIS-NEXIS password. Back then, full-text delivery of information was not yet the norm. I downloaded citations from LEXIS-NEXIS, provided printouts to end-users, and then waited for them to select articles to be printed in full. With investment bankers being nocturnal creatures, usually the list came back at the end of the day and I was stuck late in the office pulling full-text articles from LEXIS-NEXIS or magazines on the shelf. (Investment bankers often want more rather than less, and I was left grumbling, "Is this what I earned a graduate degree for?")

A few years later, a revelation struck me: why not just read through the articles and download the ones that were on target? This was against policy where I was working at the time, but I shortly moved on to a major brokerage firm where it was the norm, and changed forever the way I did research. Over time, not only did I learn to read quickly (every time the baud rate of modems was ramped up, I increased my speed-reading ability!) but started understanding the business of banking in greater and greater depth.

SUMMARIZING RESULTS

If you are at this point, the next step should be inevitable: start downloading the relevant articles and summarizing results. The more you do this, the better and quicker you will become. I like to compare the research learning curve to my regular workout on a treadmill. When I first joined my local gym, I could barely complete 20 minutes at a speed of 2 with no incline. Now the level of pain I am willing to endure has increased to a speed of 4.5 and incline of 5. Information professionals should be similarly raising the stakes on themselves on an ongoing basis.

You may well find that, over time, clients no longer need the backup articles—the summary is enough. Once your summary reports of the literature are accepted as substitutes for the literature itself, raise the stakes again. Work out a strategy to deliver finished products. I have written speeches, summaries, and industry surveys that have been lifted directly into presentations. The farther along the state of the deliverable, and the less work that is required on the part of our clients, the greater the degree of value we can claim.

COUNTRY REPORT PROJECT

One example of a deliverable is a quarterly country report we produce. The first step in mapping out a project is establishing a staggered schedule for updates and making sure that everyone concerned agrees to it. This helps avoid last-minute fire drills in order to meet deadlines. The country report project grew from the initial request for "any information on" an ongoing project and the request "to keep me informed." This meant collecting materials on an ad hoc basis and having several country outlines in progress at any given time. In the eleventh hour, all we have to do is check Bloomberg for any late-breaking news, like unexpected currency devaluations, company mergers, or political upheavals.

When you start summarizing results of research for clients, and completing writing projects, you may be asked, "But how do you know what the end-user wants? Aren't you nervous about taking such liberties?" My answer is, "If not us, then whom?" Many of us have been immersed in our industries for longer than most of the young analysts and associates who customarily are on the receiving end of our research.

Can you envision spending the next two decades of your career downloading LEXIS-NEXIS articles without fully utilizing your analytical skills and knowledge base? The bottom line in taking a value-added approach is that there should be no boundaries for us, and no borders through which we cannot pass. We should take advantage of our talents and push with them. So many librarians are afraid to step over the line of what they perceive is an acceptable role within our organizations—but when you think about it, what organization is going to penalize you for delivering better results? Isn't it time we all started fully utilizing our talents and capabilities? In my case, it is writing; I will not refuse any opportunity to complete a writing project for anyone within my company. In your case, it might be something else. A co-worker of mine has created awesome models for one of our research analysts. He is pushing the boundaries in his own way and utilizing his own unique talents.

MODELING INDUSTRIES

The aforementioned co-worker's project was threefold: his first assignment was to create a list of beverage sources for one of our equity analysts. This led to phase two—an overview of the global soft drink market using data from annual reports and the Beverage Marketing Handbook. This involved going through five years of Coke's annual reports and recreating tables and charts in historical order. He then moved on and created the same files for Cadbury and Pepsi. The last phase of the project involved
Value-Added Research

creating a spreadsheet with macro drink and consumption data for 15 countries. His final deliverable included a worldwide analysis of the soft drink industry.

It usually comes down to an attitude of "I can do that." One client was recently asked to give a speech on the history of pension funds worldwide. He immediately came to me, and as much as I wanted to tell him that his request was too vague, I helped him to narrow down the request to specific regions of the world and specific topics. These topics included the origin of pension funds, the rise of defined contribution plans and current pension developments in Asia, Latin America, North America, and Europe. I spent about a week outlining the major topics for him from articles that I downloaded from ProQuest Direct and studies from the OECD database on the Web. (The OECD's pension analyst, Hans Blommenstein, publishes particularly insightful studies with lots of statistics and graphs.)

I presented the project as a two-step process: First, I would give him an outline covering his major topics. Second, if he wanted me to proceed, I would write the speech for him. He personalized the speech, and over time I have provided research that is tailored for specific occasions. He continues to work from my draft, so that my department gains an extremely supportive and high profile end-user.

What is especially fun about working with this client is that he gives me a lot of latitude to come up with my own ideas and contribute my own suggestions. This is a trust I initially gained after the pension fund project and continue to foster. When he gives me topics like a recent one I completed on the money management industry, I include a section labeled "Penny's Observations" with my deliverable. Many colleagues have said to me that this is not what we do: we do not write speeches, we do not create models, but my question for all of us is, why have we constructed self-limiting boundaries?

Researchers should start thinking carefully about their own deliverables. For example, in answer to a question about the total population for a number of Metropolitan Statistical Areas, my colleague delivered the results in a neat spreadsheet instead of turning over a lot of paper to the end-user from the Department of Commerce's Web site. I think it is all a matter of attitude, even for simple projects.

Of course, the type of projects outlined above take time, and there is no denying that in the long run it will take more of your time to complete. The soft drink project, for example, required several weeks to complete. But the rewards are vast: more recognition and respect within your company, and a greater sense of accomplishment. And once you establish that you are capable of delivering a more complete product, clients will often allow for more lead time, since they will need less time to synthesize and outline the information.

One hurdle we all face is the expectation from our clients that the results are immediate, and all we have to do is push a few buttons and dump the relevant results. The more analysis we do, the more our clients will think of us as knowledge workers. And yes, there are some environments where this will not work. In my own environment, I am able to mix a more analysis-driven approach for the patrons who are willing to give me time with the more immediate demands for information now. (Even in the latter case, I try to quickly highlight and synthesize my results.)

ENTHUSIASM RULES

When all is said and done about "value-added", I believe it ultimately comes down to enthusiasm for our work. My first library position was with an academic library, where I was trained by one of the most enthusiastic librarians I have ever met—the late Stan Nash. We were often asked the same questions at the reference desk over and over again by the students and faculty, but he gave each and every one his full attention and respect. (The joke among the staff was that he was often more interested in his clients' projects than they were!) Stan had a graduate degree in history in addition to the MLS, and worked closely with the History department. He was responsible for one of the best historical Web sites out there (http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rolib/socsci/ambist/ambhist.html), and managed to convince the faculty to allow him to teach history classes. It was all a question of his vision: there were no boundaries to impede his view!

What I ultimately learned is that it all comes down to heart: you either have it for your work and your clients, or you don't.

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