



SpringEvent Conference in Rome

(Organized by the US Embassy to Italy, Roma 3 University and the American University of Rome)
11th April, 2008



It was an excellent experience and a great opportunity for me to be one of the main speakers in this International Conference for librarians. The conference theme was: The 21st Century Information Professionals.

I have been invited to give a presentation on: Information Literacy – a theme which is very current in library scenario. The Title of my presentation was: “From one to many: Information Literacy is Key with a SOA Concept”.

A word about the Title

In the above mentioned Title, I wanted to link the ‘book’, which is still part of the information paradigm to the other many different sources of information which have been given birth through the Internet and the Web. Therefore, the need to become Information Literate is *sine qua non*. The SOA concept (Service Oriented Architecture) has to do with the professional approach with which information professionals are to serve the users. This is further explained in this article.

The Conference



First of all I would like to point out that this conference was ‘first’ in a couple of ways. It was organized for information professionals for the first time in Italy and it was also live-streamed on the Internet in real time. This meant that delegates who could not be present, still they could follow what was happening throughout the day. Participants were from the US, Greece, Italy and Malta.

My Presentation

I had to speak in Italian...even this was new for me I still enjoyed it. However, since I received positive feedback both for the delivery and the content of my presentation, it means that what I wanted to deliver did come across to the participants. I will not go into details about information literacy but it will be worthy to note the following statements: (1) being computer literate does not mean being information literate; but (2) being information literate means being computer literate.



What is the SOA Concept

Regarding the SOA concept which, formed the second part of my presentation, is attributed to working at MITTS Ltd. MITTS Ltd. is the IT arm of the Government of Malta. All the IT projects in their entire entirety have to be researched, analyzed, tested and deployed through MITTS before the government departments can actually use them. I am the person who assists all the employees and management in all the required research.

In these two years, with a vision to lead the IRC (Information Resource Center) to new pastures and spending most of the time reading, researching and alerting colleagues with new information updates on different matters, I came across various acronyms such as SOA, CRM, KPI, etc. On reading different Gartner (Consulting Firm) articles on SOA, I started wondering whether I might extrapolate the SOA concept to the information paradigm – specifically to Information Literacy. As I continued to read and discover various principles, I concluded that SOA can form part of the information professional's scenario since the 'focus' is the 'user'. Without a 'user' there can never be a service.

In the end, I synergized this concept to the information professional (librarian) paradigm. I find that this concept enhances more and more my profession and all the work it vouches for especially when one considers the other important aspect of 'social networking'.

SOA and Social Networking

I consider these two aspects to go hand in hand from an information professional point of view. The SOA concept which focuses on the 'user' – very fundamental for librarians – hones in the architecture of the whole idea to connect the user to other aspects of the information available. For example, the information professional working in a library can connect the user not only to the specific book or article but also to the author. This implies suggesting to the user to locate other pieces of information related to that particular author. Another environment where the SOA concept can be applied to is, in a school especially tertiary level. Most probably, a user/student would not have much knowledge about the author. Therefore, the information professional, through the 'reference interview', would engage in a conversation whereby, he links the user not only to the source but to the author or to other authors on the same subject.

The SOA concept ensures that the user would not find the needed information by chance but by design.

Additionally, the information professional could make various suggestions about other articles on the same theme to aid the student, or even other sources such as web sites which might be of interest to the student. It is worth noting that, suggesting other resources does not imply doing the actual research for the student but the SOA concept ensures that the student/user is being aided enough to remain focused and ensures that authoritative, reliable and accurate information is acquired.

Furthermore, the SOA concept can easily be applied in public or national libraries in the way librarians assist and handle queries from users. Thus, the SOA concept does provide an edge for librarians in the information paradigm.

Personal Learning Curve

First of all it was a 'breath of fresh air'. All professionals need to keep on developing themselves professionally. Conferences are really important events for continuing professional development.

There were three speakers whom I would like to mention in relation to what they said. Giacomo and Rosella of the Bocconi University in Milan are librarians who also teach Information Literacy to students. Both their presentation and mine were in synch on various accounts and therefore, it emphasized the need for an Information literacy Program to be implemented. Another speaker was Fabio from the US Embassy in Rome who heads the IRC and from whom I learned the importance of 'mashups' – an area which I would like to explore more. Luisa, who is an academic lecturing at Roma 3 University emphasized the importance of an Information Literacy Program in schools. In her presentation she mentioned various sources which I was aware of and therefore, I concluded that I was on the right track. Furthermore, Luisa highlighted the different approaches, models and standards for Information Literacy.



Finally, James, who heads the American University of Rome (AUR) showed us how he applied different mashups to create a unique interface for the collection housed at AUR. His argument was to create new ways to interact with the library's collection which attracts the 'Google generation', - a term also used by myself in my presentation to signify those people who were born post-1993.



It is worth saying that Jim and I had a very long and interesting conversation and explored what can be termed as new ways of how the OPAC may change in the future especially through mashups.

Conclusion

This conference has been an excellent experience and making contacts is also important in such events. The expertise and experience of the different librarians present at the conference adds to the importance of these meetings and receiving their encouragement gives you the necessary impetus to go forward. Lastly, I believe that in the future, we will hear more about the need to become Information Literate and the eventual Program implemented in schools. Adopting a SOA concept will help focus on the most important aspect that is the student/user and therefore, devising the necessary architecture in a way that we will truly have lifelong learners and informed citizens.



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