

# INFORMATION AUDITING: A LIBRARIAN PERSPECTIVE

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## **Abstract**

The article attempts to give thesauric terms and phrases that explain what information is. It also defines auditing from the perspective of accounting specialists, and goes on to define auditing from the concept of librarianship and why it is important for librarians to audit information materials. It went on to discuss conventional and non-conventional means of information auditing in librarianship. It concludes that while information is power, its gathering, processing, storage, retrieval and presentation have to be done considering basic factors like level of education, cultural, political and religious beliefs and ideas and how dangerous the information would be to its user (s).

## **Introduction**

Information as defined by Illoyd, (1984), is a fact, data, figure, knowledge, intelligence, news, tidings, words, acquaintance, order, briefing, instruction, advice aimed at imparting knowledge, passing message or gives an insight to how certain things are done or carried out. While auditing is defined as an examination of records and report of an enterprise by an accounting specialist other than those responsible for their preparation. For the purpose of this write up, information auditing can be defined as the examination of facts, data, figures, knowledge, intelligence, news, tidings, words, acquaintance, order, briefing, instruction, advice, books, journals, audio-visual materials and all forms of electronic sources aimed at imparting knowledge, passing message or providing an insight into how certain things are done or carried out other than those responsible for their preparations.

However, auditing from the concept of librarianship refers to identification, costing, development and rationalization of information sources and services and the result of such can make clear contribution for information service. This activity requires a high professional standard and encourages high certified societies or individuals to carry it out.

Internal auditing in librarianship is designed to evaluate the effectiveness of any system employed by librarians to provide needed information for its clients; while pre-auditing is designed to see the accuracy of a system, document or information material to overall usefulness of the client. To be precise, information auditing from the librarian perspective refers to community analysis and what form and format of information is best required by a client or the person in search of such information to satisfy his or her needs. This as far as librarianship is concerned, has no standardized guidelines and methodologies for such a procedure, what is required is the satisfaction of the clients in search of the informational materials or service; this is otherwise referred to as the non-conventional services rendered by librarians.

### **Why do Librarians Audit Information?**

Information auditing can make enormous contribution to good management of information resources and services and corporate awareness of an organization. Newspapers, journals, radios and on-line services are seen as the most valued sources of providing information to good number of people. However, even these sources of information need to be audited to make clear meaning to their consumers.

Information auditing allows information to be mapped out, analysed, costed and rationalized. Formal and informal communication flows may be revealed which contribute to the development of optimal management structures. Duboise (1995) identified why information is audited as;

- a. It helps in identifying resources services and information flows.
- b. Helps in the verification of the existence of appropriate services to be employed.
- c. Rationalizes resources.
- d. Control cost
- e. Improves the marketability of services by increased visibility. Exploits the resulting improvements. For the above to be achieved. Waltersa (1994) identified the underlisted as the procedure for a successful information auditing.

- a. Planning phase.
- b. Survey of resources and services flows and needs based on organizational charts.
- c. Blueprint of situation.
- d. Reports with recommendations for actions.
- e. Establishment of regular monitoring mechanism otherwise known as evaluation.

Looking at the above observations by scholars on information auditing, one would not be wrong to state that information auditing requires more than just document or documentary assessment. From the perspective of this write up, it is known that certain factors are looked into while handling any kind of information, due to its proliferation and various concepts and ideologies covered in the presentation of such information. Information which comes in various formats, packaged and repackaged for use come from different cultural background, educational background, political inclination otherwise known as political ideologies, need to be audited to meet its desired objectives and the targeted audience.

In the presentation of information, certain important points are altered sometimes too detailed for the targeted audience to comprehend sometimes too shallow and lacks professional standards for use or in most cases undelivered to the audience because of its political ideology. All these therefore form the basis for librarians to audit information to ascertain its usefulness to the targeted population.

## **How do Librarians Audit Information**

Librarians who are the custodians of most informational materials in the cause of their studies are taught various ways of information presentation to their clients. These covered both conventional and non conventional ways of information presentation.

### **Conventional Means of Information Presentation**

The presentation of information in some format makes it impossible for the user of the information to get lost. This is no because Aguolo (2002) identified the following steps as important factors to the information delivery to its users. These factors are indicated below as;

- a. Conceptual inaccessibility of information.
- b. Linguistic inaccessibility.
- c. Critical inaccessibility
- d. Bibliographic inaccessibility.
- e. Physical inaccessibility

The conceptual inaccessibility deals with the concept/terms expressed by the presenter of such information. In such situation, it is the duty of a professional librarian presenting such information to analyse its clients and simplify the terms expressed by either abstracting or indexing information in order to provide simple summary to the salient point (s) expressed.

Linguistic inaccessibility:- This deals with the language in which a document or piece of information is presented. In this case, a librarian may not be knowledgeable in all the global language, what he/she does is to look for an expert in such language who interprets in the original language of the user of the information and a guide is provided by the librarian to the key words expressed either as a content list or a bibliography which directs the reader to the important information he/she is looking for:

Critical inaccessibility of information refers to the fact that the user of such information may understand the language in which a document is presented very well, but would lack the ability to analyse and evaluate the content of such information for its accuracy.

Bibliography inaccessibility of information indicates that an information may be provided without current bibliographic content with which it could be located. These include author or rather the originator of the information, title, place of publication ISSN and ISBN and other bibliographic means through which information can be obtained.

Wimmer and Dominick (1987) see information auditing from a perspective of content analysis. They opined that content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. Three basic concepts were explained here.

a). It stated that the content must be systematic, which implied that the content to be analysed must be selected according to the explicit and consistently applied rules. The samples selected must follow proper procedures and each item stands an equal chance of being included in the analysis based on its relevance.

b.) Secondly the content analysis must be objective, this also means that personal idiosyncrasies and biases of the investigator must be suppressed or avoided. The analyses must be explicit and concrete that any investigator or researcher handling the research result outside the originator would arrive at the same result.

The object of quantitative analysis is to aid research in the quest for precision quantification also aids researcher to summarise results and reports them with greater parsimony. Content analysis helps the aspect of content that is unique to the medium under consideration to get acceptance e.g cartoons can be used to portray an image of what is good or bad in the society. The use of cultivation analysis is critical in information auditing this is whereby a dominant message in the content is documented through a systematic procedures and separate study of the audience is conducted to see whether these messages are fostering similar attitudes among heavy media users e.g the use of crime films, pornography would tend to have negative effects on its audience, hence the need for proper auditing of these types of informational resources before are brought forward for consumption. Content analysis alone cannot serve as a basis for relating statements about the effect of content on its audience. However, it would be noted that the same tool measurement would be used in conducting content analysis or else the research would account to different results.

### **Non Conventional Means of Information Auditing**

The existence of information is as old as the existence of man himself hence its proliferation at an uncontrolled rates. Also the globalization of information or the networking of computers otherwise known as internet has led to the internationalization of information acquisition processing, retrieval, access and dissemination without restriction to various communities. These therefore leads to access to any type and kind of information either relevant or irrelevant from any part of the globe can be acquired liberally without borders even from a patrons bedroom without visiting the traditional libraries Nda Idris (2004).

The trend therefore calls for sensitization from librarians and those that are with the profession of information dissemination. In such case therefore one discovers that indecent materials like pornographies are released to the public without limitation. It is pertinent therefore for librarians to organize conferences, seminars and workshops to highlight to the parents and their surrogates the danger of allowing their children to consume such kind of deadly information. The public libraries have a responsibility of organizing campaigns against the use of such informational materials.

### *Information Auditing: A Librarian Perspective*

Censorship is seen by some information seekers as a means of hindering them from having access to information of their choice these therefore led to different debates as to why librarians censor some materials. The campaign against censorship even stated that cutting a film because of the character portrayed is as dangerous as mutilation of books and other reading materials. However, censorship is carried out to stop materials and cultures that are detrimental to the moral being of our children and youth. Also some ideologies if allowed to be freely consumed can lead to political crises and anarchy in our societies, this calls for censorship which allows the presenter of the informational materials to go through it first, see the points and the benefits to be derive from such materials before presenting it for public consumption.

### **Conclusion**

Information is said to be power, its gathering, processing, storage retrievals, presentation too is very important based on its critical assessment and presentation to the right persons at the right time considering the users level of education, cultural background, political ideologies, religious beliefs and the vulnerability of the user of the kind of information presented. While librarians and those in the profession of information dissemination have a responsibility of providing adequate and up to-date information to their users, it is pertinent to screen out any information that seems to be detrimental to the well being and growth of a healthy society. Information auditing is therefore very critical and a necessary tool in the presentation of information to its client and hence all librarians should see this assignments as important as the profession itself

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