

**FROM RAW MATERIALS TO END PRODUCT: DEVELOPING
AN ONLINE INFORMATION RESOURCE FOR THE
INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION**

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ABSTRACT

The paper is centered on the concept of information repackaging (IR) as an information service – the key structure behind the development of an online information resource on labour inspection. The significance of IR is discussed. The process of construction of the resource guide is explained in detail. Ultimately, it is foreseen that the demand for specialized information products of credible information are what managers of today will seek out in a library.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of today's library users is geared towards anything that is fast-tracked, dependable and unproblematic. The Internet has become the chief source of information to many, simply because it is quick, it has overwhelming references, it is always available and it requires least physical effort. This has encouraged users to work on their tasks independently. Only when they become unsuccessful in obtaining the answers they are looking for from this source will they reach out to their last resort – the library.

Although it has changed the way researchers deal with their information needs, the World Wide Web is not a rival of the library. In fact, Neal (2001) pointed out that "the combined impact of digital and network technologies, the globalization of education and scholarship, and increased competition for resources will produce a very different library in the academy over the next decade". Libraries of today do not stagnate nor compete with technology. Libraries blend and adopt innovations to revolutionize the information services they render.

Library users at the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva are managers on the go. These people need information delivered to them promptly, as fast and as efficient as possible. This client characteristic has challenged the ILO Library to beef up their frontline reference and information

services over the years. Among the popular information service that their library users enjoy are: (a) research assistance by telephone, e-mail, and fax or in person in the Library's Reading Room; (b) personalized bibliographies of specific subject searches which are sent through email or fax, apart from personal delivery, and; (c) online resource guides.

This author was commissioned by the Office to construct an online resource guide focusing on labour inspection. The discipline was identified by the ILO Library's information specialists as one of the emerging labour issues of the organization. Labour inspectors and other practitioners from around the world were expected to greatly benefit from this information service product.

Organizational background

The International Labour Organization (ILO)

Founded in 1919, the International Labour Organization seeks the promotion of social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. The only surviving creation of the Treaty of Versailles – which gave birth to the League of Nations, the ILO became the first specialized agency of the UN in 1946. Its main aims are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection and strengthen dialogue in handling work-related issues (“About the ILO,” 1996-2009).

The Bureau of Library and Information Services (INFORM)

Established in 1920, the ILO Library Geneva headquarters is the world's leading library on the world of work. It serves as a knowledge base of key information on work issues, sustainable livelihoods, and the work-related aspects of economic and social development, technological change and human rights. It is the core repository of ILO publications produced in Geneva and in the ILO's offices around the world. The Library provides access to this knowledge base through its database, Labordoc. In addition, the Library provides research assistance and information services (“About the ILO Library,” 1996-2009).

GIFT-WRAPPED ANEW: REPACKAGING INFORMATION DOES THE TRICK

In his book, Bunch (1984) describes information repackaging (IR) as a form of information service which emphasizes on the following steps:

selecting the appropriate materials, re-processing the information in a form that can be readily understood by the user, packaging information, and then arranging all these materials in a way that is appropriate to the user. Come to think of it, the concept of IR is not entirely new, as this type of information service is being rendered universally by information professionals even before the Internet boom. The process involved to make this service work adheres to the same objective of helping library users identify sources of information in response to a particular question, interest, assignment or problem (Cassell and Hiremath, 2006). The needs-based approach remains the same. Hence, the term **IR service**.

However, what makes IR service a novelty is the transformation that happens to it once it gels with the present day technology. In light of the recent developments in the Web, information services must adapt, evolve and go with the ebb and flow of things. With information and communication technologies now acting as means to get to everywhere, customizing knowledge to cater to the specific needs of the target users has now become an advocacy of every information professional. Furthermore, employing Web 2.0 applications – the second generation/shareable content Internet – opened the floodgates in making information dissemination borderless, therefore reaching out to more and more users. Repackaging information adds value to classic information service, as we know it (Agada, 1995).

Why repackage?

Of the five axioms identified by Sturen (1986) about the information revolution, the most obvious truths in the present information scenario happen to be that: (a) specific information is still often unavailable; and that (b) much of the information explosion has resulted from information repackaging, not new discoveries.

The first truth tells a story that seems to have no ending. Specific information is needed, but it does not always come in one package to be grabbed away in one go. As time goes by, a growing number of users clamour for organized information, and the need for information in a format made handy is a lifesaver to many people, especially to the managers. This is where information professionals come to their rescue. According to Gulati and Raina (2000), information professionals reduce the burden faced by managers who are often on the go and could not afford to spare time to sit down and gather the documents (electronic and paper) that they need. Information professionals

then quickly slip into their *super suits* and become consolidators of information. They develop specialized information products that would benefit not only those users belonging to their organizations, but also their external clients. One such product is a subject resource guide. Developing these products in order to make specific information readily available to users shifts the spotlight to the **content** of the document rather than the document per se, and the **users** of the collections rather than the collections per se (Agada, 1995).

The second truth takes us back to the basic point that IR service is not a new school of thought. New inventions are sometimes eclipsed by old, rickety contraptions made better by improvements in the screws. Enhancing an existing process brings out tremendous outcomes that may not have surfaced before its transformation. The World Wide Web contributed much to the advancement of IR service as it progresses over time. Upgraded IR service gives birth to new potential strategies to better serve the users of information.

Simply put, information repackaging saves time, labour, and costs to the user (Iwhiwhu, 2008). Again, more focus is now given to the user, and not so much to the collection. Delivering the right information in the most usable format, at the right time to the right user is the bottom line.

GETTING DOWN THE REPACKAGING BUSINESS

Building finding tools is a classic reference strategy that has been tried, tested and established in terms of usability and effectiveness for the longest time. The presence of a pathfinder as an index finger for all users of information is still very much applicable these days, only made even better as it transitions toward electronic/digitized media. Today, the pathfinder has evolved to become what the field now calls a *Webliography* – a web -based finding tool of carefully evaluated links organized by topics, made available to all users 24/7, anytime, anywhere (Cassell and Hiremath, 2006).

Subject resource guide is a type of webliography. Users of this specialized information product at the International Labour Organization have proven its value to their work and functions in the Office. Consequently, the ILO Library has been proactive in their role in information dissemination by coming up with resources that their users can access anytime they need it. The idea is to always deliver the information needs,

first to the ILO officials and members, and then extends to its worldwide clientele. This long-term goal challenges the information professional to develop information resources that will be essentially helpful to her/his users.

The ILO Library started producing online subject resource guides in 2006, and continues to provide this information service through and through. The need for an online resource guide on labour inspection, one of the major areas of concentration of the ILO, was identified this time around. Given that, the author was tasked as resource guide developer to construct an online information resource (webliography) on this particular topic – in English, French and Spanish.

Conceptual Framework

The structure applied to the development of this particular webliography was hinged upon the concept that information repackaging is an information service, hence, needs-based. As previously discussed, the process of IR service described by Bunch (1984) served as the backbone of this endeavour. Similarly employed in the development of this subject resource guide is Agada’s (1995) systematic IR process involving the following components: (1) information analysis; (2) synthesis; (3) editing; (4) translating and transforming its symbolic and media formats.

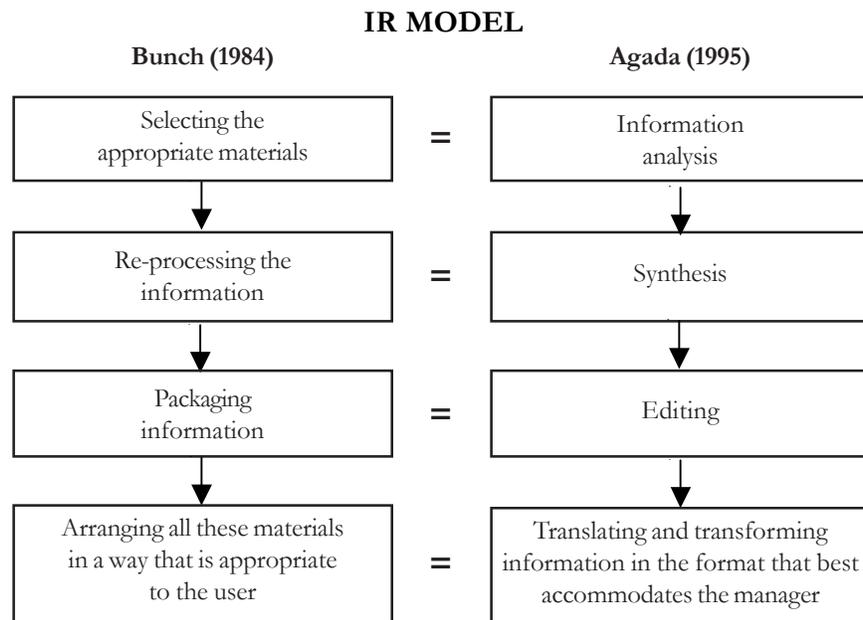


Figure 1. Comparing Bunch’s and Agada’s Information Repackaging Service Model
From Raw Materials to End Product

To begin with, a webliography is a knowledge retrieval tool, i.e. a finding aid. An already processed relevant information about the chosen topic (in this case, labour inspection) found on in-house and subscription-based databases and other secondary web sources are culled out, “re-processed” or examined for accuracy and currency, packaged or tailored to fit accordingly into the organizational system, and then ultimately, the final product comes out in a format that suits best the users of information.

Gulati and Raina (2000) laid some pointers that an information professional must take into account when consolidating sources of information, in varying formats, from the global information environment. When developing an information product, the consolidator should: (a) understand the organization of materials in libraries and use locally-produced location guides; (b) understand how to use classification systems and rationale for their existence; (c) use location information in the bibliographic record to retrieve locally-owned resources; (d) use local resources to locate information sources in the global information environment; (e) understand that libraries have developed methods for locating and sharing resources not owned locally and use the appropriate resource sharing system, such as interlibrary loan or document delivery, to retrieve information; (f) understand that the Internet may be a useful resource for locating, retrieving and transferring information electronically.

The Construction Process

The production of this online information resource guide, as it progressively materialized, was coherent to the conceptual structure demonstrated previously.

Preliminarily, a run-through of all the databases available at the ILO was performed. A review of the ILO website was also carried out in order to get acquainted with the departments and functions of the Office that could be vital in the course of construction. This was the initial and crucial step before collecting pertinent information to be incorporated into the resource guide. The LABORDOC, ILO Library’s comprehensive database on the world of work, became the springboard to all possible sources of information on the topic. Search and retrieval exercises were executed using the LABORDOC to familiarize the consolidator with the reference sources that make up the collection of the organization. Samples of other online resource guides accomplished previously by colleagues were

also explored and re-examined. Subsequent to literature scanning, an outline of a proposed structure of the would-be resource guide on labour inspection was drawn. Relevant themes, sectors and regions (with subject searches), international labour standards, plus internal and external links were then pre-identified.

Now with a concrete blueprint of the resource guide, relevant information accessible from both the in-house and subscription databases of the ILO and other secondary online resources were provisionally collected. As this developer is not an expert in the field of labour inspection, Mr. Malcolm Gifford, a technical specialist and labour inspector from the ILO's Safe Work department, was tapped as consultant for this project. Mr. Gifford's collaboration all throughout the process contributed much in assembling the resource guide. The preliminary outline was presented to him, and with the inputs gleaned from his expertise, revisions, eliminations and enhancements in the components of the guide were set up.

With the components that would make up the resource guide now set in place, the information package gradually took shape. The collection of information gathered at the outset from varying candidate sources was scrutinized to warrant currency and accuracy. At this stage of information analysis, a significant number of reference sources deemed most appropriate to the target users were meticulously selected to be included in the final product. The terminologies used to pertain to labour inspection were likewise integrated into the resource guide.

Thorough content-building was then put together. Internal and external links needing supplementary full-text documents, those that were yet to be digitized at that time, were facilitated through the help of the ILO Library colleagues in charge of digitization. All other components of the resource guide, including multimedia plug-ins, were incorporated in accordance with the IT guidelines of the ILO. Packaging this online resource guide was fit consistently with the requirements of the organization.

Further improvements and modifications were made to shape up the guide, until its English version was ready for evaluation. A *beta site* of the resource guide was built, and the link was sent out to colleagues at the ILO Library and to the technical specialist for commenting. Corollary to this, the guide was also demonstrated before them. Additional observations, feedbacks and suggestions emanating from the evaluation were taken into account to boost the efficacy of the information package.

After considering all factors that needed to be taken in, the final product became available to its worldwide clientele, in English, French and Spanish – ILO’s official languages. The Resource Guide on Labour Inspection was put up online in November 2008.

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/support/lib/resource/subject/labourinsp.htm>

The screenshot shows the ILO website interface. At the top, there is the ILO logo and the text 'International Labour Organization'. Below this is the 'INFORM Bureau of Library and Information Services' header, with the subtext 'Department of Communication and Public Information'. A search bar is visible on the right. The main content area is titled 'Resource guide on labour inspection' and features a navigation menu on the left with categories like 'Online information Resources', 'Tools for information specialists', and 'Knowledge sharing in the ILO'. The central text describes the role of labour inspectors and mentions the 'ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization, IA (iii), 4th bullet'. A 'Labordoc' logo is also present with the tagline 'More than just a catalogue'. On the right, there is a 'See also' section listing various documents and sessions with their respective dates and file sizes.

Figure 2. Resource guide on labour inspection (English)

http://www.ilo.org/public/french/support/lib/resource/subject/labourinsp.htm

The screenshot shows the French version of the ILO website's resource guide for labor inspection. At the top, there is a search bar and the ILO logo. Below that, the page is titled 'INFORM Bureau de la Bibliothèque et des services d'information'. The main heading is 'Guide des ressources sur l'inspection du travail'. The page features a navigation menu on the left with categories like 'Ressources d'information en ligne' and 'Outils pour les spécialistes de l'information'. The main content area includes a sub-heading 'Labordoc Bien plus qu'un catalogue', a list of documents, and a section for 'Voir aussi' with links to various ILO publications and reports. There are also several small images showing workers and inspectors in various settings.

Figure 3. Guide des ressources sur l'inspection du travail (Français)

http://www.ilo.org/public/spanish/support/lib/resource/subject/labourinsp.htm

The screenshot shows the Spanish version of the ILO website's resource guide for labor inspection. At the top, there is a search bar and the ILO logo. Below that, the page is titled 'INFORM Oficina de Biblioteca y Servicios de Información'. The main heading is 'Guía de recursos sobre la Inspección del Trabajo'. The page features a navigation menu on the left with categories like 'Recursos de Información en Línea' and 'Herramientas para especialistas de la información'. The main content area includes a sub-heading 'Labordoc Más que un Catálogo', a list of documents, and a section for 'Ver además' with links to various ILO publications and reports. There are also several small images showing workers and inspectors in various settings.

Figure 4. Guía de recursos sobre la Inspección del Trabajo (Español)

From Raw Materials to End Product

LOOKING UP AHEAD

With the ever increasing demand for credible information right at one's fingertips, specialized information products are what today's managers will look for in a library. At this time of electronic revolution, information professionals must take advantage of the opportunities laid by these recent developments in technology to improve the quality of library service they can offer to users of information. Information repackaging as a form of information service has gone a long way. From simple pathfinders to webliographies, the information reach is expected to expand as the information milieu heightens. To perk up the IR service, the repackager needs to assess the pre and anticipated post states of the client's need and problem situations (Agada, 1995). The gains of this service guarantees satisfaction for both the user and the information professional.

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