

Thomas Glad at the National Press Club: Providing Knowledge Services for a Knowledge Services Profession

The connection isn't hard to make. At the National Journalism Library, located in Washington, DC at the National Press Club (<http://press.org/library06/>), Thomas Glad manages the library with a knowledge services focus. And why not? This "world-renowned news information center" offering journalists "a source for information and learning" (as the library was described in a news article in 1996) epitomizes the convergence that defines knowledge services.

In fact, Glad himself provides the link when he describes the library's user base. The library exists to provide research support to journalists and, as he puts it, "Journalism *is* knowledge services."

Quite so. If the fundamental construct of knowledge services is the oft-quoted KD/KS, that "knowledge development/knowledge sharing" we speak so much about, there are few other professions so specifically defined by that framework. It is the role of the journalist to do the research, to develop the knowledge, and then to share that knowledge with the reader. It couldn't be more direct and to the point, and with the services of the National Journalism Library to back them up, journalists are on the right track to succeed in their work.

The story of the library and its role in the evolving history of the National Press Club reflects the changes in the club's history, as is the case with all libraries that are part of a club or similar membership organization. The National Press Club was first formed in March, 1908 at Washington's legendary Willard Hotel when 32 newspapermen came up with \$300 and used it to organize the club. Its purpose was clearly spelled out. The club would be an organization created "to promote social enjoyment among the members, to cultivate literary taste, to encourage friendly intercourse among newspapermen and those with whom they were thrown in contact in the pursuit of their vocation, to aid members in distress, and to foster the ethical standards of the profession."

And if that description seems to stress the club's social function, that might be a fair characterization, at least for the first half of the club's history. Of course the National Press Club provided an important forum for discussing the issues of the day, and many important speeches and presentations were – and still are – delivered at the Press Club (including speeches from every U.S. president since Theodore Roosevelt). Still, the club was also known as the place where Washington newsmen could socialize, a place where journalists could talk and drink through the night, after their evening's work had "gone to press."

Focusing on the social doesn't provide a complete picture, though, for the club's constitution also calls for the National Press Club to be a place where the "people who gather and disseminate news" would have "a center the advancement for of their professional standards and skills, the promotion of free expression, mutual support and social fellowship." It's that role in advancing professional standards and skills – and serving as a resource for the journalism profession – that brings the National Journalism Library into the picture. By the 1970s, the need for supporting journalists in their professional research became more and more apparent (perhaps, Glad suggests, as a result of opening the club's membership to women reporters, as was done in 1971), and in 1990, Eric Friedheim provided the funding for enabling the level of knowledge services delivery the library's users required.

Friedheim – after whom the library has since been named and who is well remembered by Glad and others at the club – had a special affinity for the club’s library, which he used extensively throughout his career as a journalist. In 1990 he donated \$1 million to the library, to be used for the expansion of the library’s capabilities, especially in the area of business research. It was just the financial support that was needed, at the exact time it was needed, to meet the research requirements of the library’s users. With the library now established as an important resource for journalists, other efforts were undertaken and by the mid-1990s, the library was well on its way to being a major research center for the club’s members and others – journalists and authors – who wanted to subscribe to the library and make use of its services. In November, 1997 the library’s Bloomberg Center opened, with additional support from the McGraw-Hill Companies (which donated \$100,000) and Compaq Computer Corporation, which donated advanced PCs, monitors and server technology to equip a new 14-seat (now 15-seat) computer lab. By the beginning of the new decade (and the new century), knowledge services at the National Journalism Library was definitely in place and, not surprisingly (given the leadership and interest of the club in these matters), the effort continues to move forward today.

At the library, the focus is on “continuing to do well what we already do,” Tom Glad says, and on seeking out and finding innovations for making the research process “easier and faster for our users.” So it’s not surprising that Glad and his staff are always looking for opportunities to enhance the already high levels of service they provide. Ever since he came to the library in 1993 (with a brief hiatus from 1995-1997 to be the librarian at *Newsday*’s Washington bureau), Glad has been on the look-out for ways to improve the library’s services, to make things better. When he became Director in 1997, one of his first goals was to look beyond the library itself, to see what else in the club could be exploited (in the positive sense of that term) for the benefit of the library’s customers.

The club’s big opportunity came in late 2004, and the timing could not have been better. There had quite naturally been a number of important service delivery improvements during the intervening years, most notably the development of the very fine Reporters’ Resources portal (<http://press.org/library06/resources.cfm>), brought online in 1994. That date is important, because the World Wide Web as a free tool only came online in 1993, so the roll-out of Reporters’ Resources is something of a point of pride with the folks at the National Press Club. As Glad puts it, “we were out of the gate very early.”

No matter how good your products and services are, of course, it’s never enough. Research customers always want more, so Glad continued to look around for ways to make the research experience easier for the library’s customers. By 2004, managers with knowledge services responsibility were coming to understand that the added value of enterprise content management (ECM) was beginning to be expected, even required in some cases. ECM had become the industry’s hot new topic, right up there with large-scale digitization (and obviously connected to that important development); access to organizational content *beyond* that usually found in libraries was now being touted as the next big thing. Smart knowledge services managers recognized that they could strengthen the role of the corporate library if it could embed access – usually electronic – to other types of materials and resources in with their usual service offerings. They knew because their clients had been asking for ECM all along, even if they had not been referring to it by that name. For Tom Glad and leadership at the National Press Club, the enterprise-wide content management need had been there all along, and they were ready to move.

“It was the archives,” Glad says, with obvious pride in his voice. “Our approach to ECM has moved naturally from the library to the club’s archives, and our new archives program is

definitely a step in the right direction. The overall project is small, part of a larger club project, the development of an all-digital broadcast studio. But from concept to opening was less than a year for the whole thing, and it's provided us with a whole new approach to knowledge services delivery."

Maintained by the Friends of the National Journalism Library, the National Press Club Archives (<http://www.press.org/library/archives/>) opened in its custom-designed space in January, with a mission to collect, preserve, describe, exhibit, and make available to researchers "materials related to the history and activities of the National Press Club and the history of journalism, specifically in the Washington DC area." Already successful, just in terms of visitors (a "steady stream," according to one report), the new facility is now staffed. Crates and boxes of files moved up from the vast basement storerooms are being sorted and organized. Recent materials already exist in digital format, but most of the collection is still in hard copy, and the immediate goal is to organize a fund development effort to ensure that all materials in the archives can be digitized as soon as possible, thus making them available to a wider market.

Glad has no doubt but that the archives will evolve into, as he puts it, "a business center (in non-profit terms, of course)." Indeed, there is interest in broadening the content of the club's archives to go beyond materials restricted to the club itself, and to include the personal papers of members and other prominent journalists, with the goal of re-structuring the National Journalism Library into a professional journalism archives to serve all comers. If this can be done, surely the business model can be developed to include some level of self-support, a good business model for any knowledge services operation. When knowledge services, as a business function, can move from operational overhead to revenue enhancement, it's a win-win situation for the function, for the parent organization, and certainly for the knowledge services customers. That could well be the case at the National Press Club.