

The SMR Knowledge Services e-Profile
August, 2006

Marlene Vogelsang at PG&E's Energy Resource Center: Providing Knowledge Services through a One-Person Library



While there is much talk among knowledge workers about how to characterize their various work environments, one trend that seems to have accelerated in the past few years is the changing concept of a library. Certainly the so-called “traditional” library is still going strong in the public and academic markets, but even in those environments, changing times and client expectations have severely altered the range of service provision and librarian/user relationships.

In the specialized library field, where the most dramatic changes have taken place, the knowledge professionals who lead their clients to the information, knowledge, and learning they require focus now on a totally new paradigm. Marlene Vogelsang’s work in the Energy Resource Center of the Pacific Energy Center is a prime example.

The Energy Resource Center (http://www.pge.com/pec/info_resource/index.shtml), a service of the Pacific Energy Center (<http://www.pge.com/pec/>), provides information and research in support of the energy efficiency training programs provided by the PEC staff, the incentive and rebate programs designed by the internal Customer Energy Efficiency, and to building design professionals seeking to create energy efficient and environmentally sensitive buildings.

Vogelsang, employed at the Center since 1992, is responsible for managing and delivering knowledge services to a wide variety of clients. Funded by California’s utility customers and administered through the Pacific Gas and Electric Company, under the auspices of the California Public Utilities Commission, the center’s focus is necessarily on capturing and providing information (the information management piece of knowledge services), developing and sharing knowledge so that it is put to work (knowledge management), and ensuring that once the KD/KS process takes place, the client knows what to do with the knowledge that has been developed and shared (strategic learning). The Energy Resource Center provides information research and support both for the staff of the Center and to its building design professional customers. Not an easy assignment for a person working alone, and certainly a challenge for Vogelsang, who manages the Energy Resource Center as a solo.

Yet Vogelsang doesn’t seem the slightest bit concerned, and “challenge” is certainly not a word that someone like her sees as daunting. She loves what she’s doing, and she’s doing a good job with it. The idea of seeking an easy assignment just does not match what she brings to the center. The fact that she is doing this work in a solo or one-person library is not a cause for concern either, nor is the fact that it is done through a facility that, in others times, would have been referred to as a “library.” In fact, her OPAC is called the “e-Library,” and the resource center is part of the larger specialized library community, an affiliation that Vogelsang finds particularly helpful.

“It’s the networking that enables me to do what I do,” she says, happily listing some of her network groups. “Of course I’m a member of SLA, and it’s in the PER Division [the association’s Petroleum and Energy Resources Division] that I find a great deal of support and a collegial group to share ideas with.”

Vogelsang also takes a great interest in the EOS.WIN (the EOS International Worldwide Information Network), a formal user group organized by EOS International’s EOS.Web clients. It’s a natural connection and certainly a productive vehicle for

building relationships, since EOS.Web is the integrated library system (ILS) supporting the Energy Resource Center. EOS.WIN provides a networking opportunity she can take seriously (so seriously, in fact, that Vogelsang ended up running the group – she is currently in her second year as the group’s president). Through these connections, this level of partnering, and networking, Vogelsang finds she is exposed to and learns to utilize a variety of techniques and tools that she in turn delights in sharing with her own clients.

It’s all part of a bigger picture that characterizes Vogelsang’s role as a resource specialist for this particular subject, and there are probably several reasons why she is able to do this work, and to do it so well. First of all, of course, is her commitment to the subject specialty of her employer, and her enthusiasm about energy efficiency.

“There is a lot that is exciting about this work,” Vogelsang says, “starting with building the library when I first came. Selecting materials and building the collection, and in the process, of course, learning the subject was a tremendously valuable experience for me. The whole concept of energy efficiency, resource conservation and renewable energy, and looking for sustainable designs to help move society to a ‘green’ energy focus is an enormous issue for us today. It’s exciting to be part of the effort addressing this, thinking about how our world is going to be made better. And of course the subject influences who our clients are, who we provide resources to. Green is the hot topic today, so we’re working with people who design energy systems for buildings, building-design professionals, and, of course to our own market within PG&E, internal program managers, the customer energy management department, consultants, and so forth. We work with all these people, supplying technical information and research assistance.” In addition, as Vogelsang says, “we have the responsibility, also, to educate and inform the general public, our residential customers.”

Both commercial and residential customers can find the Energy Resource Center and Vogelsang’s assistance as services provided through the Northern California public utility, Pacific Gas and Electric Company. Particularly useful is a page on the PG&E website (http://www.pge.com/003_save_energy/003c_edu_train/pec/info_resource/index.shtml) describing the center’s public services, offering fact sheets, enabling citizen users to link to selected reports and websites and, as the site puts it, “read about what’s new in energy efficiency.”

That public website, of course, is a good example of why this level of knowledge services delivery can be provided through a one-person library. It happens, Vogelsang is quick to note, because living in the much remarked upon “information age” or “knowledge age” gives knowledge workers technologies that simply didn’t exist before.

“There’s no way the services provided through the resource center could have been provided without the technology,” she says. “It’s technology that makes it happen, and with the tools we have today, I can perform a variety of functions that would have required a team of workers in the past.”

True to her word, Vogelsang takes advantage of being able to access and distribute a wide variety of unstructured and non-traditional information (non-traditional, that is, in the sense that this type of information has not usually been available through an organization’s library catalog).

“Being able to provide information about a wide range of documents, complete with full-text search capability, is a definite plus,” she says, “and providing links for customers so they can get to websites, documents residing in other websites (at the Department of Energy, for example), internal reports, project profiles, energy benchmarks, and the like permits me the efficiency and flexibility I need. And, equally important, I’m not tied down to my workstation at the center. I can work from anywhere, doing my work from places other than my desk.”

She finds another advantage with the technology, too, another connection that works.

“We’ve been speaking about networking and partnering, but I think one of the important things that support and enhance the power of networking and relationship building is the technology. It allows me to network with people I don’t even know. It’s a virtual relationship with my customers that I think is just terrific – it’s like online dating! My OPAC is my virtual face.”

Over the last few years, there have been some pretty remarkable accomplishments for the resource center, and even acknowledging the value of networking opportunities and technology, certainly much of the credit goes to Vogelsang for her particular approach to what she can do for her customers. She is always looking for opportunities to give her clients something new, something different that they might not have thought about, and since 1999, she has seen the Energy Resource Center move forward in a number of important areas.

Most obviously, of course, is that “public face,” the web presence that clients have learned to view on a regular basis. Being in a one-person library, Vogelsang has an overview of what’s needed (and what’s being asked for), an “all-over” perspective and service delivery “that couldn’t be done before,” before the center had the technology to support that level of delivery.

At the same time, the superior technology enables the one-person operation to succeed with management, a feature not to be dismissed lightly.

“No way,” Vogelsang laughs. “You have to understand that this is a ratepayer, Public Goods Charge-funded operation, constantly striving to identify the best use of ratepayers’ money, and this service just makes a lot of sense in that environment. There can’t be any ‘excess’ or ‘extra’ – funding is too tight and added value has to be built in. This is why since 1999 we’ve been working with industry, partnering, providing research, looking for ways to disseminate reports and so forth. It’s all part of that bigger picture which requires the Pacific Energy Center – and the Energy Resource Center which is a key part of it – to do what it does as well as it can, and to do it efficiently and economically.”

The inevitable question has to be asked, though: what is the challenge?

“Not an easy question to answer,” Vogelsang replies, “but if it’s really just one thing, I would have to say it has to do with measuring what we do. Our work has a very specific goal: to play a role in helping society capture energy savings through education and training, and we’re doing a lot of that. In fact, you could say that education and training – the formal ‘strategic learning’ part of knowledge services – is an important emphasis in our work at the center, but we’re not quite there yet. We are just now learning how to measure success in this area, looking to devise metrics to measure the impacts of energy efficiency training and information programs. To bring this off, I’m currently working with several teams, both inside and outside PG&E and while we have a way to go, I think we’ll soon figure out some workable ways to measure what we do. Once we’ve accomplished that, I think our whole effort will move forward, simply because we’ll be able to say *why* the information and training services we provide, with respect to energy efficiency, are valuable to society. We’ll be better able to talk about the pay-off, the return to the customer, whether that customer is a business, a homeowner, or simply a citizen who wants to be part of building a better society.”

Contact Information:

Marlene Vogelsang
Resource Specialist
Pacific Energy Center
851 Howard St., San Francisco, CA 94103
415-973-7206
mxv6@pge.com
<http://www.pge.com/pec/resourcecenter>