



## **SMR International**

10 Park Avenue (Suite 4-F)  
New York NY 10016 USA  
212.683.6285

***Building the Knowledge Culture***

**SMR SPECIAL REPORT**  
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# **FROM SPECIALIZED LIBRARIANSHIP TO KNOWLEDGE STRATEGY: OBSERVATIONS ON A NEW DIRECTION FOR INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS**

**Guy St. Clair**

### **QUICK TAKES:**

- Since 2003, the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation of Berlin has sponsored the John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science to recognize “German or American persons who have made a special contribution to transatlantic knowledge transfer.”
- The Foundation has asked award winners to describe developments in their particular area of library and information science since receiving the award.
- The author was the John Jacob Astor Award recipient in 2004. In Berlin, librarians, information specialists, and knowledge professionals from throughout the German educational and research fields joined him for a workshop (“From Librarianship to Knowledge Services: Marketing the Specialized Library in the Knowledge-Centric Workplace”).
- This paper describes the author’s observations about three developments in specialized librarianship since 2004:
  - (1) The connection between specialized librarianship and knowledge management (KM) is strong. Specialist librarians (many of whom refer to themselves as “information professionals”) are recognized for their unique understanding of organizational needs in the knowledge domain.
  - (2) Management expectations have moved beyond discrete disciplines dealing with information- and knowledge-related matters. Enterprise-wide knowledge strategy is now required, to ensure successful knowledge development and knowledge sharing (KD/KS).
  - (3) Specialist librarians are particularly qualified to take on leadership roles in developing and implementing knowledge strategy. With knowledge services recognized by management as critical for organizational effectiveness, the prospects for specialist librarians to move to new leadership positions are high.
- Professional growth and development opportunities are available for specialist librarians who choose to move in a new direction, and additional such opportunities can be expected to become available in the near future.

**KEY WORDS:** information professionals, knowledge professionals, knowledge workers, knowledge executives, knowledge thought leaders, knowledge management, KM, knowledge services, knowledge strategy, knowledge strategists, management, leadership, organizational development, organizational effectiveness, librarianship (specialized), Special Libraries Association, Checkpoint Charlie Foundation, John Jacob Astor Award, Initiative Fortbildung für Wissenschaftliche Spezialbibliotheken und verwandte Einrichtungen e.V. (Continuing Education Initiative for Special Research Libraries and Related Institutions)

This paper is a response to the request of The Checkpoint Charlie Foundation of Berlin, the sponsor of the John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science. Since 2003, the awards have recognized “German or American persons who have made a special contribution to transatlantic knowledge transfer.” As the awards enter a new decade, past award winners have been asked to prepare a document about developments “in your own special area of librarianship since you received the award,” including “observations about training needs which should form part of a ‘continuing education’ offering.” The author – long affiliated with specialized librarianship either as a practitioner or as a consultant and teacher to specialist librarians – was the recipient of the John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science in 2004.

## The John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science (The Checkpoint Charlie Foundation Award)

Founded in 1994 by the Berlin State Legislature, the [Checkpoint Charlie Foundation](#) is a Berlin-based legal foundation. Its purpose is to foster German-American relations with special consideration for the role that the U.S. played in Berlin between the years of 1945 and 1994. A non-partisan and non-profit institution, the Foundation since its establishment has planned, supported and implemented over 400 German-American projects.

As noted in Caroline Fetcher's article in 2009, "no tourist coming to Berlin misses a visit to 'Checkpoint Charlie,' having their pictures taken next to a small watchmen's booth that marks the former border crossing in the middle of the city."<sup>1</sup>

Fetcher paints a dramatic picture of the history of the site:

The gaiety that surrounds Checkpoint Charlie today stands in stark contrast to its recent history. Not even one generation ago, this was a place where cameras were forbidden and laughter was rarely heard. The former U.S. Army checkpoint is located where the East-West divide used to cut the vibrant city of Berlin in half. Checkpoint Charlie symbolized not only the separation of the city and the country but also the divide between the warring Cold War factions. By 1962, Charlie was the only place where foreigners visiting Berlin could cross from West to East and vice versa. It also became a loophole for escapees from the East. Today, only a small strip of bricks in the ground traces the former Berlin Wall. A souvenir shop and a museum also flank the site.

Since the 240th birthday of John Jacob Astor in 2003, the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation has annually awarded the John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science, in cooperation with the [Initiative Fortbildung für Wissenschaftliche Spezialbibliotheken und verwandte Einrichtungen e.V.](#) (Continuing Education Initiative for Special Research Libraries and Related Institutions e.V.).

The award's name honors John Jacob Astor, born in 1763 in Walldorf near Heidelberg. Astor immigrated to the United States in 1784, and at his death in 1848 left an enormous fortune, the basis of which was used to create the Astor Library in New York. In 1895, in a bold plan, the resources of the Astor Library were combined with the Lenox Library (founded by James Lenox) and the Tilden Trust (bequeathed by Samuel J. Tilden) to form a new entity, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. The plan was immediately recognized as an unprecedented example of private philanthropy for the public good.

The John Jacob Astor Award enables German or American persons who have made a special contribution to transatlantic knowledge transfer to come to Berlin for a special professional conference. At this bilateral workshop, librarians, information specialists, and knowledge professionals from throughout the German educational and research field are given the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the latest developments in the field and to pass these on within their institutions.

### John Jacob Astor Award in Library and Information Science (The Checkpoint Charlie Foundation Award)

2003: [Kristin McDonough](#), NYPL/SIBL: **Making Research Collections Accessible and Relevant to the General Public: the Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL) Experiment**

2004: [Guy St. Clair](#), SMR International: **From Librarianship to Knowledge Services: Marketing the Specialized Library in the Knowledge-Centric Workplace**

2005: [Mary Ellen Bates](#), Bates Information Services: **From Librarianship to Information Mobilization**

2006: [Alice Schreyer](#), Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago / [Dr. Alice Prohaska](#), Somerville College (from 1 Sept. 2010): **Moving Special Collections into the Center: A Workshop for Special Collections Curators and Administrators**

2007: [Kathryn J. Deiss](#), Content Strategist Association of College and Research Libraries: **Designing the Power Library**

2008: Prof. h.c. Dr. Gabriele Beger, Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Hamburg: **Was ist wirklich drin in den Urheberrechtskörben? Die Neuregelung im deutschen Urheberrecht**

2009: [Cindy Hill](#), Research Library at the Federal Reserve Bank of San Francisco: **Not a Time to Blink: Leading in Changing Times**

2010: [Donna Scheeder](#), Congressional Research Services, Library of Congress: **Planning for the Library of the Future**

2011: [Sebastian Nix](#), Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung: **Wandel gestalten! Aktuelle Herausforderungen beim Management von Spezialbibliotheken. Baustein 1: Nutzerbedürfnisse entschlüsseln ...**

2012: [Steven A. Lastres, J.D.](#), Director of Library & Knowledge Resources, Debevoise & Plimpton LLP: **Knowledge Management as an Evolution of Traditional Librarianship**

<sup>1</sup> Fetcher, Caroline. "A Symbol of German Gratitude: Berlin's Checkpoint Charlie Foundation Strengthens Transatlantic Relations." *The Atlantic Times: A Monthly Newsletter from Germany*. August 2009.

Through this prize and the associated workshop, the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation seeks to provide German information and knowledge workers the opportunity to learn from the considerable methodological and technological advances of their American colleagues in the field, while narrowing the transatlantic divide. All of the award recipients – this author included – are greatly indebted to the leaders of Checkpoint Charlie Stiftung, and especially to Dr. Andrea Mehrländer, Executive Director, and to Evelin Morgenstern, Director, Initiative Fortbildung für wissenschaftliche Spezialbibliotheken und verwandte Einrichtungen e. V., for their confidence and enthusiasm in creating and implementing this important exchange of intellectual and professional riches.

## Specialized Librarianship in the Knowledge-Centric Organization

In 2004, when I was honored with the great opportunity to share my enthusiasm and professional perspective with German colleagues, the topic of my presentation was “From Librarianship to Knowledge Services: Marketing the Specialized Library in the Knowledge-Centric Workplace.” In my work as a consultant and student of specialized librarianship, I had identified knowledge services as an appropriate management methodology for supporting the knowledge-development and knowledge-sharing (KD/KS) requirements of the knowledge-focused organization.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the very definition of *knowledge services* (“the convergence of information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning into a single, over-arching management function”) spells out how managers expect information- and knowledge-related activities to function. When knowledge services – as a management methodology – is successful, the company benefits with strengthened research, improved contextual decision-making, accelerated innovation, and a renewed excellence in knowledge asset management.

The May 2004 workshop in Berlin had three parts. The first ([The Knowledge Services Advantage](#)) had as its subtitle “Shaping Your Organization for Performance Excellence.” Designed to introduce the concept of knowledge services to professional colleagues, the discussion between the participants and myself centered on how the well-managed organization requires a knowledge services functional unit (we called it the company’s “knowledge nexus,” a phrase that come into many conversations over the next few years). Not surprisingly, we focused on the idea of the specialized library as the company’s knowledge nexus and spent considerable time talking about the viability of a *library* having that role, particularly with respect to how the word *library* is defined by most managers.

The second section of the workshop ([Re-Inventing Knowledge Management](#)) helped us get down to business, for the question being asked – almost from the beginning of the workshop – was “How do we do knowledge services?” Or, more to the point, “What do we do first?” To answer those questions, the structure for this discussion had to do with “Conducting the Knowledge Audit and Developing the Strategy Plan for Knowledge Services.” These basic management tools were given much attention, and at the end of the session, we had shared many concepts and practical examples, especially with respect to individual variations in different types of specialized libraries.

The final part of the workshop ([Taking Knowledge Services into the Organization](#)) took us back to the purpose of our coming together, to speak about how we could move knowledge services (the concept which defines the professional role of most specialist librarians) into an enterprise-wide focus. Our framework for this concluding section was “Marketing and Raising Awareness – Customer Service/CRM – Identifying Advocates and Champions.” With my professional colleagues in Berlin, we were able to share a great variety of wide-ranging experiences from which – returning to the workplace – we could consider and, in some cases, put into practice.

## Connecting Specialized Librarianship and Knowledge Services

Since the 2004 conference in Berlin, there have been many developments in specialized librarianship. There are issues relating to identity (are specialist librarians “librarians”? information professionals? knowledge strategists?), to competition (what is the distinction between “research librarian” and “specialist librarian”? is a “research” department the same as a “specialized library”?), and to organizational function (is the specialist librarian an internal information/knowledge consultant? a manager of a business unit? a database developer or other technology specialist?).

All of these challenges contribute to a certain amount of concern within specialized librarianship, the branch of librarianship that has long been established as “different” from public, academic, and school librarians. As can be established in almost any conversation when specialist librarians are speaking with one another, the very language they use to describe their work appears to be moving more and more *away* from the language usually associated with librarianship.

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<sup>2</sup> St. Clair, Guy. “Knowledge Services: Your Company’s Key to Performance Excellence.” *Information Outlook*, June 2001, and *Beyond Degrees: Professional Learning for Knowledge Services* (Munich: K.G. Saur, 2003).

Equally important (or perhaps more important), the language of the people with whom specialist librarians work – their managers, their information- and knowledge-focused colleagues within the organization, and their research clients – also veers strongly away from language usually associated with libraries. The focus in the modern specialized library is on connections, on establishing collaboration relationship among a wide variety of people who, with the specialist librarian, can identify resources for corporate and organizational requirements.

Cutting across the concerns within specialized librarianship is the fact that the specialist librarian – as noted above – has been functioning as a knowledge services professional throughout most of the history of this branch of librarianship. If knowledge services converges information management, KM, and strategic learning (as it does), for those companies and organizations with specialized libraries the knowledge services function is a “natural.” What is important to note, in this context, is that management expectations have caught up with this performance functionality. When a company manager has the company’s specialist librarian as one of his or her direct reports, and that specialist librarian puts himself or herself into a leadership role by devising knowledge initiatives that benefit not only the immediate business unit or department but the larger organization as well, everyone wins. And it is particularly important to recognize that management isn’t necessarily surprised that it is the specialist librarian who comes forward with the suggestion for the knowledge initiative. In the modern, well-managed organization, it’s what the specialist librarian is expected to do.

## Reading the Runes

The connection between specialized librarianship and knowledge services has been a running theme at SMR International, particularly with the company’s published materials and consulting assignments. Numerous articles have been published, either in *Information Outlook* (the magazine of the Special Libraries Association), or as white papers, briefings, and *SMR International Special Reports*, published by SMR International for clients and colleagues. A selected list of these materials is included in the sidebar (linked documents were published by SMR International), and additional SMR materials are listed at [SMRShare](#), the company’s knowledge capture site.

Not surprisingly, much information and knowledge is collected in client projects, and SMR International’s work with clients is no exception. Information gathered by SMR project teams in meetings, conversations, and private studies conducted for clients is particularly useful in identifying trends in the knowledge-related functions of any client study. Indeed, one of the most powerful influences in determining the change in management expectations about specialized librarianship and the desire of organizational leaders for knowledge strategy has been SMR’s observations and findings in client projects. In working with executives, SMR’s consulting specialists (and those of other consultancy practices as well, of course), the message has been clear: corporate and organizational executives are no longer interested in a group of stand-alone research functions, and specialized librarians and other research managers and research staff must be connected and linked to organizational goals through the company’s knowledge strategy.

Yet there is more to this connection between specialized librarianship and knowledge strategy than identifying trends among client contacts or the writing and publication of professional articles. At SMR, the company’s primary purpose is to work with clients in the development of knowledge strategy. When this purpose connects with the SMR team’s experience

### Specialized Librarianship and Knowledge Services: Making the Connection

Several published resources demonstrate that the professional management and leadership responsibilities of the specialist librarian match those of the knowledge strategist:

From Special Library to Organizational Knowledge Nexus, in *Information Outlook* 10 (1) 2006

[Software-as-a-Service \(SaaS\): Put the Focus on the KM/Knowledge Services Core Function](#) (2007)

[The Knowledge Audit: Building the Foundation for Knowledge Services](#) (2008)

The KM/Knowledge Services Continuum: From the Theoretical to the Practical, in *Information Outlook* 12 (1) 2008

Knowledge Services: The Practical Side of Knowledge Management: How KD/KS Creates Value, in *Information Outlook* 12 (6-7) 2008

[Prospects for Specialized Libraries: Comments from Colleagues](#) (2008)

[Building the Knowledge Culture: The Knowledge Services Effect](#) (2009)

[The KM/Knowledge Services Continuum: Building the Knowledge Services Strategic Framework](#) (2009)

[Critical Success Factors: Management Metrics, Return-on-Investment, and Effectiveness Measures for Knowledge Services](#) (2009)

[Enterprise Content Management \(ECM\) for Knowledge Services: A Strategic Approach to Knowledge Asset Management](#) (2009)

[The New Knowledge Services: The Next Decade](#) (2011)

[Information and Knowledge Strategy for Specialized Librarianship: Kim Dority Interviews Guy St. Clair about Columbia University’s M.S. in Information and Knowledge Strategy](#) (2011)

[Starting KM in Your Organization: Here’s Your Strategic Road Map](#) (2012)

[Knowledge Strategy: Take Charge – Move Forward as the Knowledge Thought Leader in Your Organization](#) (2012)

[The New Knowledge Services: Next Steps for Career Professionals – Specialist Librarians as Knowledge Strategists](#) (2012)

[Manager and Leader: Defining the Knowledge Strategist](#) (2012)

and expertise, much of which connects with their management backgrounds in specialized librarianship or similar research functions, the link between the work of the knowledge strategist and the specialist librarian becomes even more obvious. Of particular note is the 2008 SMR Special Report [Prospects for Specialized Libraries: Comments from Colleagues \(2008\)](#), an exercise that might appropriately be referred to as a “self-study.”

The study’s findings are a collection of perceptions about specialized librarianship, observed in a variety of situations and over a period of two decades and, as it turns out, related to the growth of interest in knowledge management and the establishment of knowledge as an organizational asset. Among these findings, several had to do with management expectations about specialized libraries (matching observations made with client projects), with study participants concluding that specialized libraries are well thought of by users and clients who know about the services provided and who avail themselves of those services. At the same time, for management leaders the specialized library appears often to be nothing more than simply another operational function, a means to an end.

A related and very important finding of the study had to do with the working environment in which specialist librarians are or might later be employed. With the study having been conducted in 2008, it is interesting to note that the study argues that a different workplace – what we might term the “knowledge services workplace” – was coming into being. The study predicted that the new working environment would be managed by information professionals who see themselves as knowledge thought leaders providing information, knowledge, and strategic learning support for non-library affiliated knowledge-centric organizations, businesses, or other types of research-focused environments. This is exactly what has happened in many specialized libraries, with the role of the specialist librarian transitioning – for those who choose to accept this role – into knowledge leadership as the parent enterprise embraces the knowledge culture demanded in today’s workplace.

Equally important, and perhaps more so, has been the valuable [SLA Alignment Project](#), first started in 2007. According to one description of the project, it was created to focus on “identifying tactics we can use to strategically align ourselves with our organizations...”<sup>3</sup> Three tactics – as Amy Affelt termed them in her paper about the project – would be used to drive the SLA Alignment project:

- Developing language to explain what we do and the variety of services we can offer;
- Quantifying the deliverables, value and intelligence we provide; and
- Cultivating the unique skill set and specialized knowledge that are hallmarks of our profession.

In her report, Affelt noted that project research identified three findings that, as we think about the role of the specialist librarian as connecting with the knowledge strategist, “three mission-critical contributions” are expected of that professional employee:

- Unique knowledge regarding the information sources available and how they can best be used in your organization’s unique setting;
- Assurance that you are aware of the “newest and truest” sources of information and are making that information available to the organization; and
- Best practices in the most efficient use of information resources.

In concluding that list, Affelt noted that with another finding – she called it “notable,” which it is – “executives interviewed for the project were not interested in process and methodology. Frankly, how you [the specialist librarian/knowledge strategist] access information is not important to them – they just want to know that it is highly reliable and accurate.”

To codify her recommendations to specialist librarians, Affelt produced a list she calls “A Practitioner’s Toolkit,” a list that could, it seems clear, define the role of the specialist librarian as the organizational knowledge strategist, knowledge thought leader:

1. Identify who and what you are. “The word ‘knowledge’ resonated again during the interviews with executives,” Affelt reports, “because it implies a deep understanding of information.” There, in a nutshell, is the call to action for specialist librarians. Their managers and their clients will understand what they do and respect their professional expertise if they are knowledge strategists or knowledge thought leaders for the organization. They do not necessarily understand what librarians do, even specialist librarians.

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<sup>3</sup> Affelt, Amy. “Aligning the Information Center to Create Your Future.” *Information Outlook*, April 2009

2. Define your mission and goals. “Your stakeholders look to you to turn information into knowledge quickly and efficiently and give them an edge over the competition. Your mission statement must reflect that expectation.”
3. Put words into action (“Once you have goals that resonate with the key players in your organization ... think of ways to translate those goals into a tangible, pragmatic information product that benefits management’s bottom line”).
4. Seek out champions. An underlying and critical message in all SMR International consulting projects – created by and the special management expertise of SMR’s Special Consultant Dale Stanley – is the company’s emphasis on sponsorship. For any knowledge initiative to succeed (and hopefully to exceed expectations), a top-down commitment to the support of the initiative and even – when possible – senior management enthusiasm will ease the way and conjure up support from other organizational leaders.
5. Promote and sell. Affelt reports that executives are seeking “relevance, timeliness, and accuracy” from specialist librarians and knowledge strategists (“when formulating an ‘elevator speech’ or presentation ... emphasize the product that is delivered rather than the research process that produced it”).
6. Demonstrate your value. Simply put, “contextualizing” your measurement “in a way that is meaningful to your firm’s management” tells a powerful story.
7. Ongoing value. Affelt’s report on the findings of the SLA Alignment Project makes it clear that there is confirmed data to describe and support the value of specialist librarians as knowledge strategists. That the one can confidently transition to the other is appropriate in today’s workplace, a move that – for those willing to make the move – can lead to a position of strength in the parent organization and one in which the specialist librarian *cum* knowledge strategist can position himself or herself at that proverbial “seat at the table,” if not – indeed – “at the head of the table.”

From these studies and observations comes a larger picture of management’s need in dealing with the so-called “knowledge domain,” those functions in the company that require attention to ensure highest levels of success with KD/KS. In our studies of the information- and knowledge-focused workplace, we’ve come to understand that the “idea” of information and knowledge strategy is market driven. Enterprise leaders make it clear that they now require an enterprise-wide knowledge strategy for the successful management of their businesses and organizations. While respectful of and reliant on the many discreet functional disciplines connected with the individual elements of the KD/KS process, each company requires a single, overarching knowledge strategy in order to achieve organizational effectiveness.

### **My New Career (or Not – as I Choose)**

Any review of trends and developments in specialized librarianship between 2003 and 2012 – as requested by the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation – will necessarily include reference to the Special Libraries Association (SLA). For over a hundred years, specialist librarians have functioned as a distinct “branch” of librarianship and information science and SLA, long the preeminent professional organization for information professionals employed in specialized environments and conducting and managing specialized research for those organizations, has represented these information and knowledge professionals well. They are defined by SLA as “information resource experts who collect, analyze, evaluate, package, and disseminate information to facilitate accurate decision-making in corporate, academic, and government settings,”<sup>4</sup> and their managements – in whatever company or organization employs them – have high performance expectations about their contribution to the success of the larger enterprise.

Since 2003, specialist librarians (and other information and knowledge professionals, whether members of SLA or not) have seen great changes in those management expectations, and in many of their employing organizations, these information and knowledge professionals have witnessed and been impacted by the need – expressed by their employing organizations – for them to take on a strategic role in organizational success. The impact has not been subtle, and its approach was described in this author’s centennial history of SLA, published in 2009.<sup>5</sup> The book concluded with a description of a new role for specialist librarians, that of performing as knowledge thought leaders in their employing organizations. In this new role, each specialist librarian/knowledge thought leader would have – it was predicted – the opportunity to use the principles and functional methodologies of specialized librarianship to re-shape their employing organization. They would use their skills and their expertise to structure the company as a knowledge culture, an environment in which shared beliefs about the value of knowledge and the function of

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<sup>4</sup> Special Libraries Association (SLA) [Association Profile](#). Accessed December 7, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> St. Clair, Guy. *SLA at 100: From “Putting Knowledge to Work” to Building the Knowledge Culture*. (Alexandria VA USA: Special Libraries Association, 2009). The author is indebted to the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation for its request for this paper, as it provides the opportunity for further documentation of the association’s history, covering some of the SLA “story” taking place after the association’s centenary.

knowledge services (the combined strengths of information management, knowledge management, and strategic learning) would position the larger enterprise for on-going KD/KS success.

Yet despite the advocacy of leaders within specialized librarianship, the move toward a new direction for specialized librarianship did not proceed smoothly. For many years there had been a certain tension – or “distance,” it might be called – between those who worked as specialist librarians and others in the library profession, and that difference was much discussed between 2003 and 2012. Information and knowledge professionals educated in the usual graduate study programs in information and library science were required to adapt some of what they had learned, if they expected to succeed in specialized librarianship. Their graduate education had embraced a broader, more generalized approach to librarianship, as their studies had been designed to educate future practitioners in all types of libraries (usually referred to as public, academic, specialized, and school libraries). And while there are some exceptions (some library and information science programs offer elective courses or special “institutes” or study programs in specialized librarianship), most professional librarians moving into specialized librarianship learn management and service-delivery principles for this particular type of librarianship through experience. Similarly, the non-library research specialist or research manager finds himself or herself in a similar situation, learning the principles of specialized research management on the job or in workshops and other non-academic learning activities available through various associations and organizations (including SLA, which does not require graduate library and information science qualification for membership in the association and thus attracts members who are working in research functions and specialized libraries but who are not “degreed” librarians – they join the association for its networking, advocacy, and educational focus and thus benefit from SLA’s wide-ranging knowledge-sharing environment).

In a curious coincidence, it was SLA’s very valuable and useful Alignment Project, described above, which brought the subject forward, opening a new wave of discussion about the professional identity of specialist librarians and information professionals. The Alignment Project did not focus particularly on studying the similarities and differences between specialist librarians and other library and information science practitioners, but it did expect to give attention to management expectations about the role and function of the specialist librarian. There had been much discussion over the years about “librarian” as a descriptor for these information professionals, since in most organizations those who supervised or had SLA members as direct reports did not connect their professional work with their own understanding of the work of “librarians.” Indeed, many SLA members – whether credentialed librarians or not – performed job functions that had little to do with librarianship, and in their work they performed under a wide range of job titles (one celebrated informal study – reported anecdotally – found just short of 200 the number of different job titles used by SLA members).

As the decade continued, the differences between the librarianship “side” of SLA’s members and those who practiced research and library management from a less “credentialed” background (meaning that the research delivery and management principles they used were established through other experiences and sources, rather than through accredited library educational programs) continued to be spoken about, often quite openly. Now, with the conclusions established through the research findings of the Alignment Project being presented at conferences and described among the association’s membership, it began to be clear that a new direction was needed for SLA. Not only should SLA move in a new and less library-focused direction, providing strategic support for organizational management’s strategic goals (as described in Affelt’s “Practitioner’s Toolkit,” above), the association’s Board of Directors recommended a new name for the Special Libraries Association: the Association for Strategic Knowledge Professionals:

We are convinced [the Board of Directors wrote] that our association will be stronger and will provide better service to our members with a new name that indicates the knowledge and value that our members provide to their organizations. In addition, the new name will help the association build a bigger tent, becoming more inclusive of professionals who are in the business of providing information but who may not see themselves in the “special libraries” association.<sup>6</sup>

The name change was put to the members of SLA, who chose, by a vote of 3,225 to 2,071 to keep the name Special Libraries Association.<sup>7</sup> At the very least, there would not be a nominal move in a new direction.

Thus the message became clear: there are information professionals working in the knowledge domain who identify themselves as specialist librarians, proud of their historical connections with librarianship. As the larger profession of library and information science advances and its practitioners take on demanding new responsibilities, they want

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<sup>6</sup> Special Libraries Association (SLA) [Alignment Project Timeline](#) Accessed December 9, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> “Members Reject Name Change; Alignment Initiatives to Continue.” *Information Outlook* 14 (1) January 2010.

to be part of it. At the same time, other information and knowledge workers, including many specialist librarians but also including many others working in the knowledge domain who do not identify with librarianship (and who have managers who also do not identify them as librarians) see themselves as knowledge strategists. They are choosing to work as knowledge thought leaders for the organizations and companies that employ them.

What has happened, in effect, is that despite much effort that has been made – and will continue to be made – to ensure that these separate “versions” of knowledge work move forward with the level of collaboration that has characterized specialized librarianship (and SLA) for more than 100 years, there are now two “types” of knowledge workers performing this work. As people move into this field, they can choose the direction they wish to follow, with knowledge-related professional jobs going to job seekers who are able to match their own interests with the identified needs of the people who are hiring them. When it comes to choosing whether one will work as a specialist librarian or as a knowledge strategist (or, indeed, as some combination of the two), information and knowledge professionals will migrate to those jobs where they – and their employers – feel they belong, based on their skills, their expertise, their shared values about the role and value of knowledge in the company, and their education and training.

## Strategic Learning for Future Success

In requesting this review, the Checkpoint Charlie Foundation also asked for “observations about training needs which should form part of a ‘continuing education’ offering.” Evident from the commentary above should be a connection between what is being sought by information practitioners (whether they intend to practice as specialist librarians or as knowledge strategists) and the identified requirements of corporate and organizational leaders. Specialized librarianship and similar research-focused information and knowledge management will continue to be required in all organizations, and whether this service-delivery function is provided through the efforts of credentialed librarians or employees whose expertise comes from on-the-job training and other learning activities, this work is not going away. Obviously many of these information professionals will come to their careers in specialized librarianship through established graduate programs in library and information science or, in some cases, might go in a different direction altogether. Of particular note in this connection is the newly established [Master of Management in Library and Information Management Science](#) (M.M.L.I.S.) program at the Marshall School of Business at the University of Southern California. This graduate program specifically targets library managers with its two-part mission, to enable graduates “to (1) become part of a global community of professionals able to access, evaluate, select, acquire, create, preserve, and organize information in all its formats and (2) assume leadership positions in a variety of academic, corporate, government, and not-for-profit library settings.”<sup>8</sup>

Other information and knowledge professionals – perhaps the majority of these employees in the future, depending on the level of need established by their managers – will not undertake a graduate degree but will attend workshops sponsored by the many units and sub-units of a large group of professional associations, including SLA but also including organizations at the state and local levels and, beyond the borders of the United States, the professional development offerings of regional and national authorities. Commercial learning providers are also at work in this area and include such learning activities as those offered through the [Knowledge Management Institute](#) or through SMR International (with which the author is affiliated), providing KM and knowledge services training through in-house workshops for clients and organizations.

For the “other side” of the market – targeting knowledge workers seeking to move into or advance within the KM, knowledge services, and knowledge strategy workplace – strategic learning and training are offered through a variety of providers. These, too, include commercial learning providers, and an impressive array of work is going forward in the academic realm, with some 40-plus institutions worldwide offering degrees in one or another area of knowledge-related learning. Each of these programs has its own particular perspective or point of view, and several are remarkable in their focus on the role of the knowledge worker in the employing organization. The Kent State University [M.S. in Information Architecture and Knowledge Management](#), for example, takes the position that the growth of information-related disciplines and the need for transdisciplinary information and knowledge professionals can best be addressed through the development of educational programs that respond to “current and emerging information skills, technologies, and education.”<sup>9</sup>

At Columbia University, the [Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Strategy Program](#) is designed for professionals looking to move into careers as knowledge leaders and executives. The 16-month program is designed as a hybrid, networked-learning experience, taught primarily online using a specially designed interactive platform,

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<sup>8</sup> University of Southern California Marshall School of Business [Marshall Master Degree Programs](#). Accessed December 9, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Kent State University Information [Architecture and Knowledge Management](#). Accessed December 9, 2012.

with online learning balanced by three five-day residencies on the Columbia University campus.<sup>10</sup> The program (with which this author is also affiliated) recognizes that in the increasingly complex information- and knowledge-focused environment in which most knowledge workers are employed, corporate managers and organizational leaders are struggling with how to address management issues as they apply to information and knowledge work. In the Columbia program – which combines professional learning for the workplace with Columbia University’s recognized academic strength – the focus is on knowledge strategy and on educating professionals to work as knowledge strategists, to harvest and manage their company’s enterprise-wide knowledge effort.

Our conclusion brings together the different threads of the changes experienced in specialized librarianship since 2003. Beyond education there is performance. Whether working as specialist librarians *per se* or as knowledge strategists, wherever the career paths and service-delivery principles of information and knowledge professionals go following this 2003-2012 decade, all that they do fits with what the great Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, meant when he wrote about the company’s knowledge workers. These knowledge workers – represented in our argument by specialist librarians and knowledge strategists – are not a cost to the company. They are an asset:

Knowledge workers own the means of production. It is the knowledge between their ears. And it is a totally portable and enormous capital asset. Because knowledge workers own their means of production, they are mobile. ...

Management’s duty is to preserve the assets of the institution in its care. What does this mean when the knowledge of the individual knowledge worker becomes an asset and, in more and more cases, the main asset of an institution? What does this mean for personnel policy? What is needed to attract and to hold the highest-producing knowledge workers? What is needed to increase their productivity?<sup>11</sup>

The company’s knowledge strategist is well in command of the answers to those questions, and the specialist librarian *cum* knowledge strategist understands management and leadership in the company. As an information and knowledge professional, this knowledge worker has learned to work within the organization’s management and leadership framework to get the work done.

In that role, the specialist librarian as knowledge strategist is positioned to strengthen his or her influence in the organization. This information/knowledge professional leads – in a proactive and participative way – even, sometimes, provocatively – to unlock the ideas, skills, and motivation of employees, of co-workers, and of the people to whom they report. They are leaders, and in the post-2012 world of specialized librarianship, understanding and practicing the principles of leadership built into KM, knowledge services, and knowledge strategy will serve them – and their employing organizations – well.

**The Author.** Guy St. Clair is the President and Consulting Specialist for Knowledge Services at [SMR International](http://smr-international.com), a New York-based consulting practice focused on change and its impact on people, organizational effectiveness, and the management of intellectual capital within the larger enterprise. He is a past-president of the Special Libraries Association. At Columbia University in New York, Guy St. Clair is Lecturer and Subject Matter Expert for Columbia’s [Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Strategy Program](http://www.columbia.edu/~gs1000/masterofscience.html). He can be contacted at [guystclair@smr-knowledge.com](mailto:guystclair@smr-knowledge.com).

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<sup>10</sup> Columbia University Information and Knowledge Strategy Program. Summary Sheet. Accessed December 9, 2012.

<sup>11</sup> Drucker, Peter F. *Management Challenges for the 21st Century*. New York: Harper Business, 1999.