

Mini-profile:

a day in the life of a scholarly information consultant



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I am writing this from my home office here in the heaving conurbation that is Benhall. Those unfamiliar with this seething metropolis – and I accept there may be a few – need only visualize the seamier locations in *Bladerunner* to conjure up a tolerably accurate image. I jest. Benhall is in fact a very small, very rural village close to the east Suffolk coast, not far from the seaside towns of Aldeburgh and Southwold, and a stone's throw from the wondrous Snape Maltings Concert Hall. Having lived most of my adult life in cities, to say that living in Benhall provides sharp contrast is like saying the late lamented TV chef Keith Floyd enjoyed the occasional sherry. What in the name of all that is rational am I doing out here, I hear you cry.

Well, I'll tell you...

Having worked in the scholarly information sector for the best part of 20 years, just over two years ago I started my own consultancy, Red Sage Consulting. This explains why this article doesn't quite follow the standard 'day in the life' brief since client confidentiality means I can't dwell too much on the specifics of what keeps me busy each day. Also, if you'll forgive the cliché, as a consultant I don't really have such a thing as 'a typical day' – indeed this is part of the appeal – but hopefully what follows gives at least a flavour of my professional (and personal) life.

I struggle with early mornings and the fact that my partner, Michael, gets up at around 6:15 and takes the dog out every day never fails to impress me. Indeed, many mornings, I am forced back to bed to contemplate the sheer selflessness of...z z z Z Z Z Z...

I try to start most days with some yoga. I'm interested in the thinking behind the practice as well as the stretches and general contortion. It's a wonderful thing to start the day with silence and calm. Michael and I usually have time to have breakfast together whilst contemplating the BBC Radio 4 news as served by the bemused yet curmudgeonly John Humphrys.

Another cliché, perhaps, but since starting Red Sage, there hasn't been a dull moment. Take this morning for instance: I was just getting the better of a determinedly sealed bag of muesli when the phone rang. The caller was an Australian investment analyst asking my opinion on, as far as I could tell, EVERYthing-to-do-with-scholarly-communication-and-more-besides. Given the unsociable hour, I briefly considered cutting him short but, impressed by his optimism, decided instead to grab a fortifying cup of green tea and go with the flow. I can consequently testify that it is in fact surprisingly bracing to debate the ramifications of green open access with something approaching cogency and rigour, before eight in the morning, wearing no more than a bath towel and a slightly bewildered expression.*

With the day off to a more than usually taxing start, I head upstairs to grapple with my e-mail inbox. Can someone please tell me, how is it possible for so much mail to accumulate overnight? Who is writing this stuff? When do they stop to eat and sleep like the rest of us?

My office is a converted spare bedroom which overlooks a field (lovely) and our garden (presently rather unlovely). Despite the rural location, mod cons include surprisingly zippy broadband and, because of the rural location, high quality quiet interrupted only by birdsong. It's a good environment for thought, reflection and getting things done.

I usually spend the first hour or so of each day corresponding with clients, colleagues and contacts, as well as following and occasionally contributing to industry blogs and discussion lists. I then either focus on current projects or new proposals. Through Red Sage I work with publishers, information intermediaries, librarians, professional associations, research groups and others in the scholarly information sector, in the broad areas of business development, strategic marketing, product and service enhancement, research, and training.

It's rewarding work, particularly since so much of what I do entails collaborating with a wide range of interesting, engaged and thoughtful people.

Just now I am revising the content of a training course I will be facilitating in December on behalf of UKSG entitled *Licensing & Negotiations Skills for Librarians*¹. The seeds for this course were sown in my previous role (at INASP²) where I worked with librarians in countries as diverse as Pakistan, Uganda and Vietnam to secure equitable and sustainable outcomes from publisher negotiations. In my experience, the concerns of librarians in developing countries are surprisingly consistent with those of librarians in the west, and training becomes both a forum for sharing these concerns and a means for exploring possible solutions.

In July last year I took on the part-time role of Secretary General of the Association of Subscription Agents & Intermediaries (ASA), the international trade association for subscription agents, sales agents and others providing services to the professional and scholarly information sector. This means for two days a week I put my Red Sage hat to one side and concern myself with the complex links of the information supply chain.

The work I do with the ASA is again very varied and, since I have a publishing rather than an agency background, keeps me on my toes. My ongoing activities include working with publishers to ensure workable gracing periods for electronic journals, and ensuring the provision of timely and accurate pricing information to libraries and agents. Elsewhere, in collaboration with other industry groups, the ASA is involved in the creation of standards, working to counteract subscription fraud and lobbying European governments to eliminate VAT on e-journals.

I have recently launched the new ASA website which, for someone with a strong interest in brand, has been an engaging project. The aim was to better reflect the purpose, integrity and professionalism of the ASA and its member organizations. When you have a minute, do take a look³ and see what you think. Earlier in September we launched the programme for next year's ASA Conference. It's a bit of a balancing act as we aim to appeal to the scholarly information sector as a whole, not just to agents and intermediaries, which means crafting a programme relevant to librarians, publishers, professional bodies, research groups and other information professionals. Again, if you have time, do take a look⁴.

* Sceptics may wish to test this for themselves.

Inspired by the local environment, I temporarily dipped out of gainful employment in 2006 to study ecology for a year at the UEA. Since then, when I have time, I work with local environmental groups and have also been involved in a project managed by Natural England and the RSPB to reintroduce the white-tailed eagle (sea eagle) to England. Michael and I have been adapting to a 'rehabilitation' of our own, albeit on a considerably less dramatic scale. Earlier this year we adopted a retired racing greyhound called Gerry. We were told in his racing heyday he was capable of speeds of around 40 mph. Some of this energy and dynamism is captured in the accompanying photos. Gerry, it seems, has read and understood the 'retired' clause in his contract: these days essentially if he's not eating or (grudgingly) going for a walk, he's asleep.

My opening remarks aside, life in Suffolk is pretty good. It's a pleasure to live in the countryside and be so close to the coast. Although we don't have much in the way of topography – like Noel Coward's Norfolk, Suffolk is *very flat* –

we do have fantastic skies. This, and the quality of the light, means the area is home to a number of artists, and Michael and I spend quite a bit of our spare time browsing in local galleries (and dreaming about things we can't afford). We also grow veggies (me), paint (him), walk (us), and wonder at the abundant local wildlife and its propensity, particularly at this time of year, to get into the house. On which note I'd better end: not only do I have important Red Sage business to attend to, one of the badgers wants to use the computer and I promised the otters I'd take them swimming ...

References

1. <http://www.uksg.org.uk/event/Licensing091209>
2. www.inasp.info
3. www.subscription-agents.org
4. <http://www.subscription-agents.org/conferences/asa-conference-2010>



Benhall in the rush-hour

Gerry the 'racing' greyhound ...

