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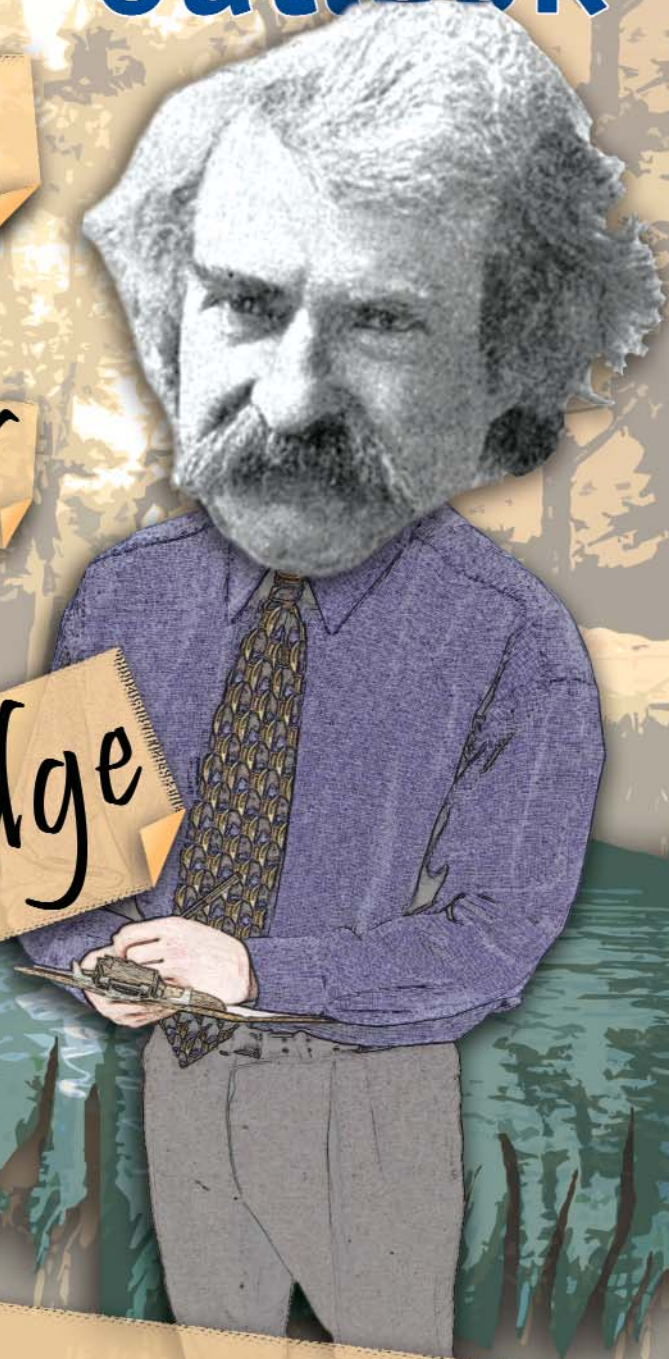
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Mark Twain

and

Knowledge

Management



For Career Growth, Forget the Label and Recognize the Opportunities



By Forrest Glenn Spencer

Jill Hurst-Wahl's profession began in the fifth grade—that was the year she began working in at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School library in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. That was the year she knew that accessing, collecting, preserving, and distributing information would become the core of her career.

Hurst-Wahl loves information. She has sought it out wherever it resides and she has provided it effectively for her end-users, whether at a school library, in the corporate world, or in her own firm.

Now in its eighth year in business, Hurst Associates Ltd. is a successful information consultancy that serves clients primarily in competitive intelligence and digitization planning. The journey Hurst-Wahl has taken since her elementary school days to the present was one of opportunities offered and taken, lessons learned and skills honed, services developed and rendered professionally.

"I started my company in 1998," Hurst-Wahl says, "because I wanted to be out on my own. I didn't want to work for corpora-

tions anymore. Running out of the gate I had a good first year. I like to be able to take on clients and projects that I enjoy and be able to take my business in different directions. It has allowed me to do things I wouldn't have done otherwise. It's been fun."

Her firm is the sum of her 15-year experience as a corporate librarian and information technology professional in New York State. "In my corporate life I performed competitive intelligence, so I started my business to do CI for businesses that needed that type of work done," Hurst-Wahl said. "Along the way I got into digitization planning projects. Today, about 50 percent of my business is about CI or business research and the other 50 is digitization."

On Her Own

Hurst-Wahl is one of those high-energy individuals who never let the clock rest, so it's no wonder she earned a profit in the first year as an independent consultant.

In business intelligence, she works with companies in a variety of industries, from financial services to manufacturing. In dig-

itization, she has been employed by not-for-profit organizations in project planning in both hardware and software applications and training. She is a frequent speaker, conducts workshops, and has written more than two dozen articles in industry journals. On top of that, she has conducted college classes (online and on-site) and maintains her own blog, Digitization 101.

Born in Harrisburg, Hurst-Wahl has spent most of her life in upstate New York. Out of high school and with her determination to become a librarian, she entered Elmira College where she earned a BA, Cum Laude. "In the late 1970s it didn't seem to matter what you majored in as an undergrad as long as you got the MLS, so I majored in philosophy/religion and English, and worked in my college library." After Elmira, she earned her MLS at the University of Maryland College Park.

It was an off-chance meeting at a funeral that led her to a job opportunity with Corning Inc. in 1983.

"I came to Corning, not as a librarian, but as an IT professional—even though I didn't have an IT degree," Hurst-Wahl recalled. "What I had done in library school

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as a graduate assistant was supporting the library's computer classes. I learned how to troubleshoot computer problems—and this is 1983. We're not talking computer problems you have now. I worked with the students, troubleshoot, and did the things the faculty wanted me to do. Corning had an end-user support group and I joined the company to be part of that department."

She served as a training coordinator for information services for four years before her promotion to business systems analyst. A few years later, Corning created a business support library and made Hurst-Wahl its supervisor. At that time, the business library was part of the Technical Information Center, but management wanted the library to be a separate unit. Her job was to revitalize the library, move it into its own space, develop services that the company could market, and hire and train staff. Part of her new job included competitive intelligence.

"I was introduced to CI at Corning," Hurst-Wahl said. "That's what the library did. In 1989, the business library at Corning existed but had no staff, no budget, and amazingly, it had one client. Someone in Corning knew I had my MLS and hired me to supervise. The new job revitalized my library skills and I learned new skills on the job about how to deliver information to business people in a way that was useable to them, meeting their turn-around time, their information needs in both content and format. And what we did was on-demand."

It was at Corning that Hurst-Wahl came to learn and appreciate the concept of running a library as a business. "We charged for our services and kept an eye on the bottom line," she said. "We had to estimate project cost; we had to bill everything back—all those things that business people think about."

Hurst-Wahl remained at Corning for four additional years before moving the Rochester, N.Y., firm of Manning & Napier Advisors as a research librarian. Her job at this financial advisory firm included working as a project manager, a database product manager and, eventually, director of intelligence.

"I went to Manning to be their first librarian," said Hurst-Wahl. "They never had one before. After my first month, there were two people who came to talk to the principal owner about investing in a business idea, which was to develop a special-

ized search engine. I soon got involved in this area to develop search technology."

Over the next four years, she continued performing CI for Manning, supported the financial analysts with research, and worked with the programmers in developing new search products. As at Corning, Hurst-Wahl's skills overlapped in different ways, combining library science and information technology—and learning the practice of developing resources that generate revenue.

By 1998, it was time for her to pull it all together in her own business. One of her first clients was Manning & Napier, the very company she was leaving. "I didn't count on that," Hurst-Wahl noted, "but it was nice to have." She made many cold calls during that first year, but it wasn't cold calling that built her client base. It was networking. She decided that her company was to be built upon her business intelligence skills, and what eventually became an intricate element of her new venture, digitization planning.

"I was hired by the Rochester Regional Library Council on a digitization demonstration project called Winning the Vote (<http://www.winningthevote.org>)," Hurst-Wahl recalled. "It was a very cool project to work on for a couple of years. And then in 2001 I had another library council approach me on digitization that they were planning. To date, I have done digitization planning for four library councils in New York State."

Digitization planning projects are usually funded by grants. Hurst-Wahl works with her clients to determine exactly what they want to accomplish and what it will take in terms of money and resources to do it.

She also conducts workshops on digitization. "What happens a lot of times with people—even with a plan—is they support the idea, they're gung-ho, and then suddenly there's this wall that appears before them. For me, it's been interesting to watch an organization get involved in digitization. A light will turn on and they say, 'Yes, we can do this, let's go forward and do this' or they go, 'Oh, we cannot do this yet. We have other priorities demanding our attention.'"

Active in SLA

Hurst-Wahl joined SLA while at the University of Maryland College Park. When she didn't enter the academic field as a



SLA Member Profile Jill Hurst-Wahl

Joined SLA: 1990

Job: Information Consultant and President

Employer: Hurst Associates, Ltd.

Experience: 23 years professional experience

Education: BA, Elmira College; MLS, University of Maryland

First job: Real first paying job, park/playground supervisor; first professional library job, supervisor, business support library, Corning Inc.

Biggest Challenge:

- Continually marketing my services to those groups and individuals who could benefit from what I have to offer.
- Keeping up to date with the changes that are happening in "my section" of the information industry.

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Click University Live! program on digitization project management.

In 2001, Hurst-Wahl moved from her home in Rochester to Syracuse to be a visiting senior instructor in the Syracuse University School of Information Studies. Her approach in the classes has been to introduce a business aspect to librarianship and to think of the possibilities available to pursue for an information specialist.

“When I talk to students,” Hurst-Wahl said, “one of the things I will bring into a discussion is: You cannot do everything, you can’t give away everything. I tell them that it’s okay to think about charging a fee for a service. That’s very different from the classic librarian mentality. But the reality is that there’s a cost to what libraries do. We should try to give away as much as free as possible, but there are certain services to which fees will need to be applied. Working in the corporate world taught me important lessons when I started my own business in how I look at what I do, knowing that you cannot always give away service.”

For a while, Hurst-Wahl was teaching full-time at Syracuse and serving her clients full-time. But today she teaches only one class per year, online. “Teaching is a lot more work than people think, and I didn’t realize it until I started doing it. I will continue teaching. I enjoy it. I am able to bring what I learned in my business to my students, and I also learn things from them in how they see things differently.” It’s that difference that Hurst-Wahl stresses to her students.

Seeing things differently has benefited her. When she was earning her MLS, she thought she would be employed at an academic library. She had no idea she would be working as a librarian for a large international company like Corning or eventually running her own consultancy firm.

“MLS students are asking me if the jobs are really there,” Hurst-Wahl said. “One of the ways to find an answer is to look creatively. As librarians, we tend to think about libraries as the place we are going to work. I say, ‘Why not work for a vendor that is creating products and services for libraries?’ They need librarians in their organizations because we know how to

talk to our fellow librarians; we know what information service professionals want because we are information service professionals, too. A lot of students don’t think about working for a vendor, or working for a corporate or a news library, something other than a not-for-profit organization. That’s a new thought for them. They don’t automatically think of that. They don’t think of using their information skills differently in a company and not being in library. Businesses need information research; search engines need development. There are many opportunities for students. I say, ‘Look at all the opportunities that are out there.’”

This year, Hurst-Wahl has been exploring a new opportunity and expanding her outreach with it: social networking.

“Social networking tools were not an area of my business, but I have learned about it and examined the trends that are unfolding. I can see how those tools can be used by various groups, like libraries. So, I started talking about these tools even though I may talk about digitization. I show them these other tools and how to be interactive with users. I find myself talking more about that area.” In the past, her presentations have been about business intelligence or on libraries in general, but she has expanded her audiences to the business community, which Hurst-Wahl sees as a way of marketing and networking her business.

And she continues to tell people to look for opportunities, as she has done. “I don’t describe myself as a librarian, in my business,” Hurst-Wahl concluded. “I tell the client what I can do for them. I tell them how I can deliver back the information so they can make better decisions. These are the skills I have, these are the resources I can tap into, and if I need other information, then these are the associates I can contact. I found it very helpful not to describe myself as a librarian because I want them to see me as a businessperson. I try to instill that into my students: Think about what you can do and not necessarily what the label is.”



Forrest Glenn Spencer is a Virginia-based independent development researcher and freelance writer. He specializes in developing potential donor prospects for non-profit organizations, such as America’s Promise – The Alliance for Youth, the National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship, and American Red Cross. Forrest was a 14-year broadcast news associate and has written for numerous print and Internet publications over the last several years. He can be reached fspencer@chemsoft.net.