



Demonstrating value in a competitive environment

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Cost cutting is a reality for any business. For many it is a high priority and a recognised company goal. This provides quite a challenge for libraries and information centres. The Qantas IT Information and Research Centre (IRC) meets this challenge by providing information that helps Qantas maintain its 'information edge', re-inventing services and targeting primary clients, making good use of technology and setting aside time for planning.

The Qantas IT IRC's primary goal is to help Qantas maintain an 'information edge'. Research has found that where there is no library, the cost to the organisation to acquire library-provided information absolutely required would be 2.9 times greater than it would cost if there were a library. The most important role for the IRC is assisting staff locate the information that helps them make a decision, either by providing easy access to databases so that staff can locate information themselves, or by providing an expert research service to uncover information that is difficult to locate.

A major challenge for the IRC is to continue to align information content with enterprise and business unit objectives. The IRC attempts to understand Qantas' business objectives, in order to develop IRC's objectives to support the organisation. It does this by talking to clients about their objectives and tailoring content and services to meet these objectives. The IRC aims to be regarded as a 'trusted advisor' when it comes to the selection of information content for the organisation. To help ensure future viability, the IRC also uses knowledge management practices in its day-to-day operations, and is involved in both research and education.

The stated purpose of the IRC is to assist staff become more productive and effective by providing needed information in a timely and efficient manner. The primary goals for the IRC centre around providing access to information, for example:

- provide staff with access to information;
- provide staff with access to expert research assistance;
- provide staff with training in effective information gathering techniques; and
- ensure that Qantas Corporate Services take advantage of subscriptions, company memberships and research consultancy services.

The IRC has 'primary' and 'secondary' clients. The IRC's primary clients are Qantas Corporate Services staff and senior staff from

other divisions. These customers receive a greater number of value-added services, for example searching commercial databases, analysis and synthesis of information. The IRC's secondary clients are general staff from all other divisions of Qantas who receive more limited services. While servicing a large number of customers, the IRC attempts to provide all staff with an individualised service.

Some areas where the IRC has been able to contribute to cost saving include:

- careful evaluation of resources;
- negotiation of corporate usage agreements;
- broadening the scope of the IRC to assist in 'non-traditional' areas;
- centralised subscriptions, memberships and events co-ordination;
- centralised software and training resources distribution; and
- heavy use of intranet and Lotus Notes technology to deploy information around the organisation.

Balancing the strategic with the operational aspects of managing the IRC can be tricky at times. Prioritising work is of utmost importance. It is vital to set aside some time each week to plan.

There are currently two sizable library collections at Qantas — Qantas IT and Qantas College. There are plans to merge the two separate library systems maintained by these separate entities to provide one integrated catalogue of information resources available at Qantas. There is also a great deal of activity happening at present to build a comprehensive information and research intranet site which will also demonstrate the value of the IRC.

The IRC ensures that it remains a valuable asset to Qantas by constantly re-inventing information services to fit the changing needs of the company. It provides a collection of 'fresh' information, much of which is accessible from the desktop. Other activities that help demonstrate value include taking on less traditional roles, such as becoming involved with various intranet projects, and promoting a culture of open communication and learning.

The Qantas IT IRC delivers a high-value service helping Qantas maintain an information edge, and therefore helping ensure that the company is well placed in today's competitive business environment. ■