

# **The Federal Government's Information Sphere**

*and the Myth of Federal Information Policy*

# A Beginning Thought...

"I speak my mind freely on all things, even on those which perhaps exceed my capacity and which I by no means hold to be within my jurisdiction. And so the opinion I give of them is to declare the measure of my sight, not the measure of things."

Michel de Montaigne, 1533-1592

...and I'm not representing the Library of Congress in this presentation!

# **This Evening's Discussion...**

Presenting an idea or maybe even a hypothesis

Needing further refinement

Additional inquiry is needed

Participation is invited

# The Federal Government and Information

The Federal Government is the world's largest consumer, creator, manager, and disseminator of information in all formats.

The Government's Information Sphere encompasses the entire globe and space.

How do we even begin to define this concept?

# The Federal Government's Information Ecosystem

Characteristics:

All branches of Government

All formats/All security levels

All periods

Acquired, created, synthesized,  
and disseminated internally and externally

# Branches of Government

Executive

Legislative

Judicial

Quasi-governmental

Government contractors

# Formats/Security Levels/All Languages/Codes

Primary Sources, Secondary Sources,  
Temporary and Permanent Records

Print (incl. maps), Microform, Audio-visual,  
Digital, Human Intelligence, Data Sets,  
Metadata

Open Source to Top Secret  
(Unclassified/Classified

Government Created (Non-  
copyrighted)/Government Acquired

# Time Periods

All Time Periods :

Not everything is electronic and much of what is electronic is not easily accessible.

Much of what is print and other media is not easily accessible either.



# Acquisition from External Sources and Inter-Agency Processes

Active (data and information)

Law/Regulation/Directive/Policy

Purchase

Exchange

Passive (data and information)

Law/Regulation/Directive/Policy

Gift

# Original Creation

By Government Employees or Contract  
(generally not copyrighted)

Textual/Non-textual/Data/Metadata/Abstracting  
and Indexing

Intra-agency/Inter-agency Use Only/Open  
Access/Classified

Internal Dissemination/External Dissemination

# **Secondary Synthesis/Analysis**

By Government Employees or Contract

Textual/Non-textual/Data/Metadata/Abstracting  
and Indexing

Intra-agency/Inter-agency Use Only/Open  
Access/Classified

Internal Dissemination/External Dissemination

# Dissemination

Oral, Print, Electronic

To Government agencies only, to the public, to the private sector (including the information/publishing sector)

By Agencies (directly or via contract), by established channels (FDLP), or private sector

Free or Free

# The Circle Closed

Much Government information is acquired by the private sector, altered, and sold back to the Federal Government.

No research has been conducted on how much originally created Federal information the Government buys from the private sector.

# The Myth of Federal Information Policy

What Is a Policy?

--Principle or Intention (Thoughtful, not just reactive)

--Guides Future Actions

--Is Implemented as a Law,  
Regulation, Directive, etc.

# The Myth of Federal Information Policy

Myth #1: There is no single information policy nor will there ever be one.

Myth #2: What is often grouped under the "policy" term are statutes, regulations, case law, directives, etc. in reaction to circumstances.

Myth #3: It's impossible to determine any sort of coherent Federal principle or intent across the variety of information related issues.

# The Myth of Federal Information Policy

Many of the information policy issues have something other than "information" as their intention--

national security

intellectual property

child protection

Information is involved, but is not the underlying issue at stake.



# The Alternative to Federal Information Policy

Policy, as a term, obfuscates the discussion when the area of study is actually law, regulations, directives, etc.

Specify what we mean when we talk about information in the public sector--what is our profession's area of concern about information in this context? What is our area of information and intention?

Identify those vehicles that have information (as we understand it) as their primary topic.

# The Alternative to Federal Information Policy

Rather than start with the broad net of information, focus on issues such as free access to Government information, the declassification of Government information, etc.

# Research

There is little to no research on the Federal Government's Information Sphere.

Most study has been given to the Government's dissemination practices.

LIS schools are the most appropriate locus for this type of research.

**Your thoughts...**

# For further discussion...

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