

Conference report

Online Information 2004

30 November–2 December 2004, London, UK

The Online Information 2004 (the 28th edition) & Content Management Europe (CME) Exhibitions and Conference 2004 stays the largest information industry event in Europe (and the world)¹ and took place again in the Grand Hall of the Olympia in London. Actually CME has now 3 different tracks: Enterprise Document & Records Management, Enterprise Search Solutions and ePublishing Solutions.

More than 11,000 information industry professionals from over 50 countries attended the exhibition (compared with more than 25,000 in 1999 and 2000), of which less than 1,000 attended also the Online Information Conference. Of that number over the years comes about 1/3 from the UK, 15% from the NORDIC countries, about 5% each from the USA, Germany and the Netherlands. All other countries have less or far less than 3% of the number of delegates.

In general all exhibitions/trade shows/conferences have been affected dramatically since 11 September 2001 (see for instance *USA Today*, January 17, 2005, pp. 1A and 3A: Convention centers grow, fewer go).

The word “online” is now an umbrella term for bringing people together from the quickly changing information industry. However, the classical online information industry is still there, although smaller and most of the original players/exhibitors from the seventies and eighties belong now to large groups, such as Elsevier, Thomson and Wolters-Kluwer.

As in other years the Online Information Conference did run in parallel to the exhibition (for the nearly 250 exhibitors, see <http://www.online-information.co.uk/> and Table 1) and the conference proceedings with nearly 90 papers are to find at: http://www.online-information.co.uk/2004proceedings/conf_prog_tue.html.

Other parallel events are the National Forums, such as the Dutch International Forum, which is held on the Monday night preceding the Conference (see box in page 213) and there are also French, German, Italian, Nordic and Spanish Forums, all on the Wednesday.

Online Information 2004, hereinafter to be referred to as OI2004, is moving to more generic products and services, which are no longer the only domain of the information industry in its most widest sense.

At OI2004 we did hear about usability of web designed resources (by usability guru Jakob Nielsen), interoperability, integration in workflows and information solutions as part of “enterprise solutions”² and about tools bringing the information at the users’ desktop without changing/exiting platforms. The integration of internal information and knowledge and of external (online/web-based) information is a

¹The ALA Annual Conference, more a library and information event, is certainly the largest event in the library and information space, but it is NOT or less an information industry event.

²RMG Consultants’ Fifteenth Annual Presidents’ Seminar: the View from the Top was devoted at The new integrated library system: an enterprise solution. See <http://www.rmgconsultants.com/>.

Table 1

Categories of exhibitors	Number of exhibitors
Content management	>80
STM information providers	>80
Portals and Intranets	>60
ePublishing, incl. open-access	>60
Business and financial information providers	>40
Competitive Intelligence/market research	>40
Knowledge management (KM)	>40
Library management solutions	>30
Legal and regulatory information providers	>30
Enterprise searching	>30
Rest: Document/records management, Recruitment & training	<20

major issue now, not only for corporations (notably banks, insurers, high-tech companies and the medical/pharmaceutical branch), but also for (quasi)government institutions, universities and R&D centres.

'Open Access products'³ were visible, but were not so hot as in 2003, and the idea of institutional repositories for free use by university staff of their articles, published by commercial publishers and/or the establishment of more 'university presses' and/or the introduction of author fees, as topics could not be traced at the OI2004. Maybe it is not the right platform for primary publishing issues, but without primary publishing there will be no secondary publishing of reference and/or full-text databases.

With the introduction of Bureau van Dijk's **MINT**, CSA's **Illumina**, Elsevier's **Scopus**, Thomson's **Pharma** and **Gale-Saur**, the access platform⁴ has become again a major issue for users, despite the fact, that all companies are using Open Standards for searching and link resolving. Although fair is fair: **OVID/Silverplatter** has been doing this already for years! All 6 products have bundled a number of databases and the users have been given a simple, usable and an easy-to-learn interface. It's the (accumulated) content, eventually with unique and geographical components, that will let users determine which platform they are going to be using, being either easy of use or search platform/interface clarity and simplicity or both.

New areas of interest at the OI2004 were:

- the "Blogging" activity (see also <http://www.infodayblog.com>),
- Google Scholar,
- Virtual Reference services, and
- aggregated current awareness solutions, as from Moreover and from Just-In-Mind (WebAlerts).

The timing of Google Scholar, showing also the importance of OI2004 for the "non-online" exhibitors⁵, has created admiration, disgust and fear by many players in the information arena, depending at what end of the so-called information chain they're active⁶. For instance the traditional reference service of libraries may lose (more) business to Google, but this will leave libraries and information services at doing well the things they have been doing very well for so long in order to remain relevant:

³Creative Commons (CC) is an attempt to give the rights on intellectual works to authors rather than to the content industry.

⁴EUSIDIC's Annual Conference 2004 had as theme "The platform battle" (see <http://www.eusidic.org>).

⁵Google wasn't an exhibitor, but Google representatives were active at many stages/forums.

⁶User, producer, intermediary, author, user, etc.

- helping users with a more complex and full-fledged searching need, as they know where to find and how to use the more than 90% of the literature/data that is still not (yet?) on the Internet and understanding user needs.

Online Information 2004: Nederlandstalige sessie (Dutch International Forum) – 29 November 2004

The Dutch International Forum (Dutch Language session or Nederlandstalige Sessie) – for Dutch, Flemish and South-African delegates – has been scheduled for the traditional Monday evening (29 November) at 18.00 hours in the NOVOTEL London West (Hammersmith). The topic of the evening is

“Globalisation: implications for national markets, such as the Netherlands”.

Representatives of the following companies, who also sponsor the reception which conclude the evening, will give a 10–15 minutes paper. The sponsors are:

- Bureau van Dijk Electronic Publishing,
- EBSCO,
- Geac Library Solutions,
- OVID Technologies,
- Springer Science,
- VNU Exhibitions (organizers of Online Information 2004) as well as – not to forget – Sint Nikolaas.

Organiser/Moderator: Johan van Halm (johanvanhalm@cs.com).