UC Irvine

LAUC-I and Library Staff Research

Title

Open Source Solutions 2001 (OSS01)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5kt960k8>

Journal

Library Hi Tech News, 18(6)

ISSN

7419058

Author

Gelfand, Julia

Publication Date

2001-06-01

DOI

10.1108/lhtn.2001.23918fac.004

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

Open Source Solutions 2001 (OSS01)

Julia Gelfand, (2001) "Open Source Solutions 2001 (OSS01)", Library Hi Tech News, Vol. 18 Issue: 6.

Julia Gelfand

The Open Source Solutions annual conference is not one that is usually attended by librarians, although the 2001 conference had as its theme, "Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Threat Analysis: New Directions in Open Source Intelligence." This theme suggested a number of issues and concerns related to informatics and the role of research and information seeking among the intelligence community. With more and more information available to the average citizen, the defense and intelligence communities are exploring ways to make it more accessible and to provide technology training to their agents and analysts.

This conference, organized by Robert D. Steele, the founder of OSS, is committed to offer the intelligence community both in the USA and abroad a full platform of how to "restore open source intelligence as a fundamental element of the all-source intelligence process." The conference is a blend of training and presentations by leading professionals of current developments that can eventually reinforce Steele's vision of a Web-based "virtual intelligence community," one that shares the cost of doing "global coverage." Steele is the author of the respected volume, *On Intelligence: Spies and Secrecy in an Open World* (AFCEA International Press, Fairfax, VA, 2000, ISBN 0-916159-28-0)

I was asked to address the assembled participants about the role of grey literature. It was good that I followed a previous half-day intensive session on "Internet Tools as Intelligence Tools" and the first speaker, Jenny Zullo, a senior analyst and trainer who set the stage with "The Internet and Premium Online Services: Global Reach from a Local Desktop." With the emphasis on analysts using restricted data for which clearance to levels of password access must be passed, it is clear that federal agencies like the CIA and FBI do not encourage use of subscription databases, full-text news and journals and other materials that are commonly found in academic, large public or research libraries. However, that material helps support basic research, puts into context the reference function and leads the analyst to other appropriate material. Most importantly, this fundamental change in research methodology, where the analyst can become increasingly self-sufficient in their research, is a challenge to the control structure and hierarchy of information channels.

When I was invited to address the theme, "Grey Literature: Sources and Methods Related to Critical Technologies," it was imperative to introduce how viable the Internet is to the work of the intelligence community. I began with some overview about what is on the Web, the growth rates and the distinguishing elements of electronic publishing. The context that was most important for me to convey was how to evaluate information found on the Web and how to distinguish between materials, and define relevancy. Much information that is helpful for this constituency is from commercial subscriptions to A&I databases with links to the full-text. Until the federal agencies provide that for their staffs, it is difficult for them

to develop better information seeking skills. I then compared the standards of grey literature and methods for identifying it and how best to use and cite it. Owing to the proliferation of electronic publishing there is no easy task in this effort, nor a systematic organization, but research work today is a combination of utilizing the proprietary, the open source or mainstream sources and the grey literature.

Other speakers introduced new software options for analysts; and spoke about topical areas that have emerged as social problems and of national and international interest. Among them are the issues of ethnic conflict and genocide; government response to gangs; danger zones; international security and other global topics. There were speakers from academe, the military, the press and media, legislative support and analysts currently actively engaged in assignments. Attendees included analysts from many national and international agencies, representing the USA and foreign countries. They were in subject areas such as regional geography, conflict areas, healthcare, educational and legal spheres. They all were given as part of the conference registration a number of recent books and materials that reinforced different opinions, research methods and writing styles.

The conference organization of this meeting included sponsors and exhibitors from both traditional and new sources of product information for the intelligence community. I was glad to see some commercial and academic publishers, the map, GPS and GIS resources widely promoted. There was lots of informal networking and exchange.

It is true that there are many critical technologies and applied areas where information specialists are among the best to address these timely topics. The OSS01 conference is to be commended for integrating trends in informatics at the crossroads of its discussions. Additional information about OSS can be found at its site <www.oss.net>. The interesting role of librarians, technology and primary resources is what keeps the intelligence work dynamic and globally visible.

Julia Gelfand (jgelfand@uci.edu) is the Applied Sciences & Engineering Librarian at the University of California, Irvine.