



Custom Content Delivery: Taking the Next Step

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This paper looks at two specific projects that utilize the cutting-edge publishing capabilities available from external, HP-licensed business content aggregators (business/industry databases). These projects were undertaken to provide specific HP business groups, corporate organizations, and decision-makers with customized, targeted information services. The first featured project, Critical Systems Weekly, is an in-depth newsletter containing carefully selected news and analysis related to enterprise computing markets. It is designed for high readability & portability (PDF format). The second project involves the creation of an HP intranet service for HP finance professionals. Finance trend articles are selected, and PDF and full-text versions are made accessible to readers via a page on the HP FinanceNet portal. Both projects demonstrate the use of creative options for providing high-value, HP-licensed external content packaged into customized information services that meet specifications set by HP business groups and organizations.

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Introduction

Delivery of the right information to the right people at the right time has become a complex challenge in the fast-paced world of corporate libraries. At Hewlett-Packard Company, the Global Library & Information Services (GLIS) group has incorporated the phrase "Making HP Smarter, Faster" into our logo to highlight this critical mission. GLIS delivers information to HP employees via a number of online databases and publications that are licensed and provided to employees through the HP intranet, or through key information resources that can be searched by any of the GLIS information analysts. Ever since critical online databases, reference materials, e-journal and e-book services have become commercially available to corporate libraries and other customers through Web interfaces, the ability to access information has followed this basic delivery model.

Within the past two years, though, we have been able to broaden our abilities to provide important content to our customers by several methods that were previously unavailable or highly restrictive through our traditional database providers. These restricting factors included: 1) lack of comprehensive enterprise-wide copyright licensing through database vendors, 2) the inability of database vendors to provide easy-to-use, elegant methods for pushing information to customers or incorporating information into our corporate intranet, 3) restrictive methods for product licensing or prohibitive pricing, and 4) the lack of format choices for digital content.

At the same time, we have a large pool of sophisticated customers who are quite familiar with the Web and modern computer technologies. Our customers have always had many creative ideas about how they would like to have content delivered to them by GLIS and, in the past, we were hampered in meeting their demands due to the lack of tools that could easily allow us to push up-to-date information to customers, or pull them to web sites to access streams of customized content in formats they wanted (PDF, HTML, etc.). Combine all of the factors mentioned above with a very real state of information overload, and the demands of working in a competitive, high-tech company, and you get customers who are really looking for highly-focused, customized content solutions.

Luckily, several of the top business content aggregators such as Factiva, ProQuest and LexisNexis have recognized the need to provide a variety of information delivery methods through tools such as Factiva Publisher and ProQuest's SiteBuilder. These tools provide information professionals with more sophisticated methods for publishing selected content to intranet web sites, or the ability to push copyright-licensed, up-to-date content to groups of customers. As these types of tools have become available, GLIS has been able to, in many cases, satisfy pent-up demand by customers to receive or access content in a more focused and customized manner. Additionally, just as any company employs strategic planning to chart a business course, GLIS has been able to create focused solutions for targeted customer groups where access to the right information is critical to HP business needs.

I will describe two content delivery projects that have employed these types of tools as well as other resources to repurpose content into focused, high-profile information services to meet the strategic needs of several groups of HP employees. These projects are 1) a PDF newsletter titled "Critical Systems Weekly", and 2) a web site that features major and/or trend articles for financial professionals on HP's FinanceNet. Both of these projects have been well received by their target audiences and have enabled GLIS to use some of the tools described above to create very specialized information products.

Project 1: Critical Systems Weekly

One of the advantages of having new delivery tools in the information world is that you have a much better chance of meeting a customer's high expectations related to an ideal content delivery solution. On an ongoing basis, GLIS managers meet with senior executives, division managers, project leaders and other HP leaders to find out how GLIS can strategically provide critical information to them and their employees. Recently, my manager and I met with a highly-placed HP decision-maker about his particular information needs. This executive is a very sophisticated information gatherer and needs to stay on top of key technologies, competitors, markets, products and trends across much of HP's enterprise computing landscape. He already had a very organized approach for gathering critical content so we concentrated on helping him fill gaps he saw in his information gathering strategy. When we asked him if there was an optimal type of service that we could provide he was able to articulate some very specific needs:

- Provide carefully selected coverage of critical news in all of the major markets of concern to his business group.
- Package this news into a service he could get once a week, download and easily review on his laptop regardless of where he was (airplane, airport, hotel, etc.)
- Provide this content in an easy-to-read Adobe PDF format.

Currently, GLIS is using Factiva's Publisher product to set up "folders" with search strategies covering many major topics of interest to HP as well as news on major competitors. These search strategies result in automatic streams of articles that we can email to HP employees who have registered for our distribution lists, or we can provide links to our news feeds from HP intranet web sites. The executive we were interviewing was aware of these services but needed a much more focused approach where an information professional could sort through this content and add value by selecting the best stories and packaging them for weekly delivery in the highly-portable format he preferred. This seemed like a goal that was a bit of a stretch for GLIS as we had ongoing concerns about maximizing our resources, keeping our costs down, and dealing with staff overload. We also had not attempted this type of project previously.

I realized that there were several existing factors that could help support this type of content delivery. Of the many Factiva Publisher topics GLIS monitors, I was the editor for a number of the topics of interest to HP managers and researchers working on enterprise products, services and solutions. I was in a unique position to actually see most of the news as I posted articles in my folders to send to distribution lists. I could also select and copy articles from other Factiva Publisher folders that I didn't edit but could review. I also realized that an information product of this type might

just appeal to a larger circle of HP decision makers so that we could leverage the request of one executive into a service that might benefit many other HP managers. I decided to propose a new, customized information product.

Is This Project Feasible?

One aspect of creating customized content services that I feel is critical to success is to look honestly at the cost vs. benefits. You must also carefully determine if a particular customized solution is best for your specific group of customers as you will be making an investment in the development of a new information product.

Customizing and repurposing content into a unique in-house product may have a high cost in time and use resources that are already allocated elsewhere. For this particular project, I was aware that a certain number of hours were already being spent to distribute information through our Factiva Publisher tool and these news feeds were already benefiting thousands of HP recipients. I had to make sure that I could leverage the time I already spent in Factiva Publisher to easily gather good content and distribute the new product, a newsletter, across HP to a new audience.

Another major factor was considering if I had the time and inclination to master a new skill – desktop publishing. Currently our Factiva Publisher content was being delivered as HTML or plain text news feeds. To meet my customer's specific requirements I had to repurpose selected content and create a PDF newsletter. This would require new software and an accurate assessment on my part that I could master these skills as quickly as possible. To counterbalance this factor, I already had a passing familiarity with Adobe Photoshop and I reasoned that if I used Adobe's desktop publishing tool, InDesign, to create a newsletter I would at least be familiar with some features of the software. I also have strong design & web publishing skills and I was motivated by a chance to do something new and exciting.

Additionally, I contacted our Factiva representative to make sure that this type of content repurposing was covered by our copyright licensing, and to find out if I needed to meet other contractual requirements. It turned out that branding on behalf of both GLIS and Factiva would be incorporated into the newsletter along with copyright statements for article source publications and information related to Factiva's licensing with HP.

In a proposal I presented the potential benefits and costs of the custom newsletter. I made a number of estimates about how much time it would take me to learn InDesign, create a prototype, get feedback, refine the prototype, and find a larger audience for the newsletter. Also, how much time did I think I could reasonably spend on this per week if the newsletter attracted a large readership? My manager and I decided that I could only afford to spend one working day per week once I was in full production mode or I wouldn't be able to complete my other work. I would also have to depend on the cooperation of my professional teammates to cover Information Desk hours and rush research requests when I was publishing the newsletter. Beyond producing an information product that met my original customer's needs, I had to make sure that I could get final buy-in from GLIS management, my teammates, and work within my resource constraints.

After reviewing my proposal, GLIS management decided that I had made a case for creating a prototype and approved the purchase of the InDesign software. I was able to let my customer know that I had a green light for his newsletter and would

be working on a prototype. Throughout the project, he supported my efforts with ongoing feedback, the purchase of additional software (Acrobat Distiller), and solicited feedback from his peers and colleagues during initial development. I decided to title his newsletter "Critical Systems Weekly" to reflect the coverage of key enterprise computing news.

Birth of a Custom Newsletter

There were several key factors, outside of copyright compliance, that I faced in designing and implementing a newsletter using articles from a business content aggregator such as Factiva. Once it was clear that we had permission to reuse Factiva Publisher content in this manner, I had to determine if I could easily select, organize and move articles out of Factiva Publisher. One of the benefits of this particular product was that we were able to redistribute articles from folders in either HTML or plain text format. After working with InDesign I realized that I would need to stream articles out of Factiva Publisher in plain text. Ultimately, I had some problems that required converting the captured plain text articles into MS Word .doc format where I could easily set a default font and "place" them into an InDesign document. Currently, the major business content aggregators have a variety of choices regarding output formats and our ability to use Factiva Publisher in this manner was critical to this particular project.

Additionally, I quickly realized that comprehensive coverage of important articles in the enterprise computing market would result in dealing with a lot of content and being able to ruthlessly select those articles that, when combined as a weekly newsletter, gave an important and accurate view of this market during the previous week. There are often several articles and press releases discussing a particular event, product, or strategy and I select the one article that I feel would be most informative. I try to select articles that contain analysis, interviews with industry leaders, or other insights rather than a press release or quick product announcement. The weekly task of studying and selecting the best articles for inclusion in the newsletter became the major value proposition component for this project. Early in the project, I had also considered adding some original analysis, helpful commentary, or summaries of market research reports but it quickly became apparent that coverage of just the key news was resulting in a lengthy newsletter. This might be an option in a smaller, more focused newsletter.

InDesign is a powerful, sophisticated desktop publishing product that can combine text and graphics to create very professional looking documents. Once I had mastered the basic learning curve I was able to easily use graphics to create a GLIS branded masthead and to include Factiva logos and licensing information. After setting up fonts, styles, chapter headings, and table of contents features, I was ready to place the articles I had selected into the first prototype newsletter. From this point forward, I could use the InDesign book and documents as a master template set so that each week's newsletter had the same look and feel.

During this initial process I was always cognizant of the fact that I needed to be extremely efficient once I was in full production or I would not be able to meet my goal of producing each newsletter in one workday. I also needed to be able to select articles throughout the week as I was editing my Factiva Publisher folders for our existing email distributions. To have to go back and find important articles would be extremely inefficient. To streamline this process, I divided my newsletter content

into six major topic categories. Each category is a “chapter” in the weekly newsletter and is represented by an InDesign document. I also created six new internal Factiva Publisher folders corresponding to these categories. Throughout the week, as I see articles with potential for inclusion in the newsletter, I copy them to the appropriate folder where they are stored for consideration at the end of each weekly cycle.

Another challenge I faced was the length of the newsletter. As mentioned previously, coverage of all the areas of potential interest results in a lot of content even after I make my final article selections. Currently, Critical Systems Weekly averages 35-45 pages per week and I often include a supplement to focus on a particular company, technology or market. This length can be daunting even to the most hard-core information user and I needed to make sure that I was not just compounding existing information overload for my customers. During testing of the initial iterations of the newsletter, the length was of concern and the file size had to be optimized to accommodate HP managers who were traveling and needed to download email in remote locations.

Luckily, InDesign allows the creation of a Table of Contents. Additionally, you can convert your Table of Contents into “bookmarks” that contain hyperlinked article titles. This allows readers to scan down the bookmark listing, select articles of interest, and click on selected titles to read the associated text. This feature has become a selling point to get customers to look beyond the total amount of content included in the newsletter and realize that they can use this feature to browse titles and select just those articles of primary interest.

Currently, I am producing Critical Systems Weekly in a day. I can efficiently select and store articles for inclusion throughout the week, reformat them and “place” them in InDesign documents that serve as templates. I convert the final InDesign book into a PDF document that contains hyperlinked bookmarks that display when the newsletter is downloaded and opened. I have a wide range of worldwide HP employees on my distribution list and I have created a web site where I post newsletter issues, and provide a subscription mechanism for readers. Webmasters for other HP intranet web sites have also linked to Critical Systems Weekly. Ultimately, this project has resulted in a customized content service with a high profile and is serving as a model for more GLIS newsletters aimed at strategic HP groups.

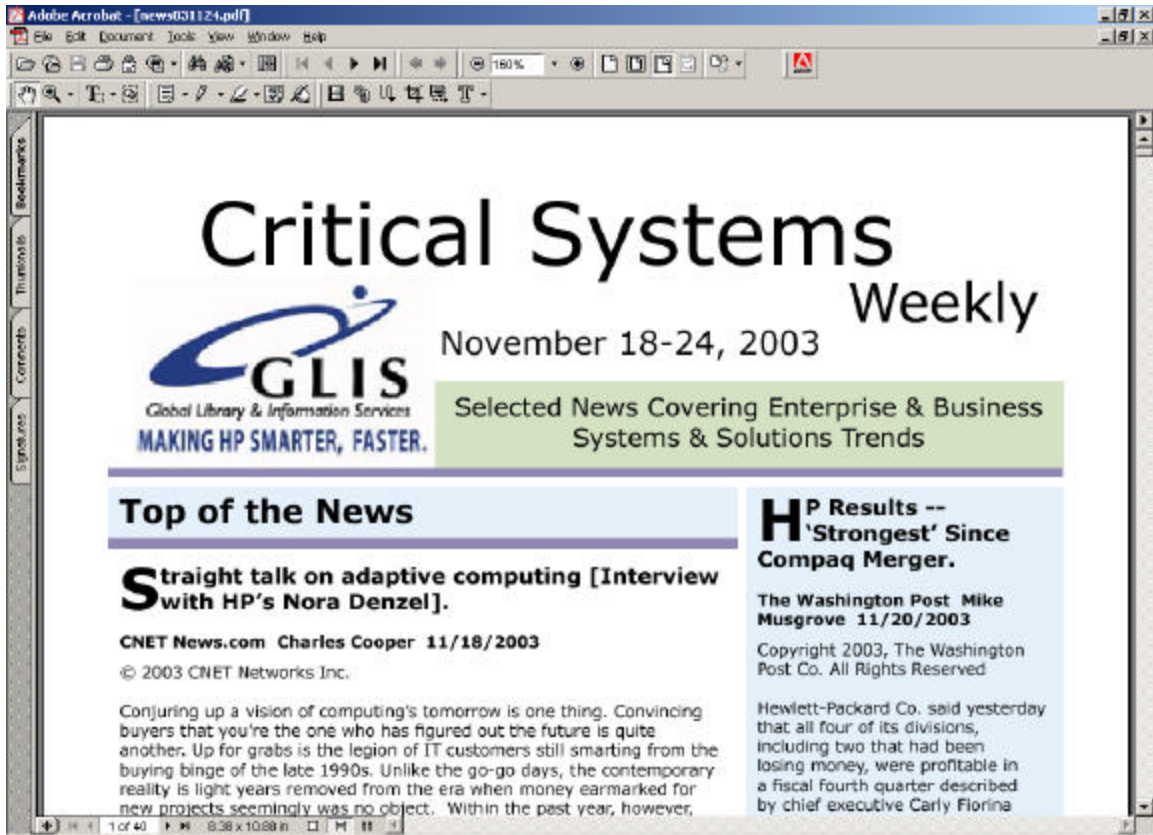


Figure 1 – Critical Systems Weekly newsletter on HP GLIS portal.

Project 2: Finance Trend Articles on FinanceNet

As with Critical Systems Weekly, this project was the result of a request for a custom information service from a specific group of HP employees. In this case, we fielded a request from an HP Corporate Finance communications professional looking for a way to provide an ongoing overview of finance industry trends and best practices to the HP corporate finance community. I had been providing one individual customer from this group with a monthly ABI/Inform alert (in Dialog) which was providing him with information that he felt was pertinent to others in his group. He had suggested that his group approach me to find out if there was a way they could share this content with their colleagues. Additionally, the HP Finance group has a very organized, professional web site, HP FinanceNet, on our company intranet. HP Finance was hoping to share content from pertinent articles across their organization via their web site.

HP GLIS has licensed ProQuest Direct for use HP-wide via our company intranet. HP employees can search ProQuest from their desktops via a web interface but ongoing alerts were not an option with our ProQuest web product. Alternatively, ProQuest did provide a mechanism, via their SiteBuilder product, for content to be posted on web pages and our license for ProQuest included the use of SiteBuilder logins. Using

SiteBuilder, GLIS could post ProQuest content, much of it in PDF or full-text format, on the HP intranet which included the FinanceNet web site.

Again, GLIS analysts had little experience with the SiteBuilder product but it seemed like the ideal solution for this particular request. My HP Finance contact was eager to have access to full PDF articles and the ProQuest database was the obvious choice for the content subject coverage finance professionals needed to monitor. After an initial exploration of the SiteBuilder tool, it became apparent that the canned templates SiteBuilder contained for easily building "instant" web pages would not work for the HP intranet environment. The high level web sites on the HP intranet must meet specific guidelines related to corporate "look and feel" standards and a complex set of stylesheets are in place to create consistency and functionality across the company intranet. One of the requirements for my project was that I needed to use the proscribed stylesheet for the HP FinanceNet web site. I quickly realized that I would be relying on my webmaster skills to execute this particular custom information project.

External Finance Content on the Virtual "Town Square"

Luckily, I have a helpful FinanceNet webmaster contact. He created an initial page which incorporates the FinanceNet stylesheets and all of the functionality required for HP corporate-level web sites. Within this page, I insert my customized content which contains links to articles I select from ProQuest for my finance readership. Essentially, I have an HTML template I can use for "look and feel", which I update with content on a regular basis and post on the GLIS web site. This page is linked from the top-level FinanceNet page and the HP finance community can read, download, or print PDF or full text articles that remain posted for a period of time mandated by our GLIS ProQuest license.

To find articles for inclusion on FinanceNet, I use several methods for identifying content. I use my monthly ABI/Inform alert to obtain a list of potential article titles (with indexing). I select titles of interest, search ProQuest to find the full article, and "mark" the full page image or full text formats. I also have a list of finance publications of interest which I browse via the ProQuest publications search option. I update my content every 3-5 weeks and there are always new publication issues that I can browse online for article selection. As I select articles, I "mark" them in the appropriate format and compile a marked list in SiteBuilder. I then use this list to generate SiteBuilder URLs for each article. I paste these into a simple editor such as Microsoft Notepad and then transfer the list of URLs to my web site file directory. Since SiteBuilder provides raw URLs, I have created a mini-template to build article references based on the fonts and styles required by FinanceNet. I paste each URL into my mini-template, type in the article title, author(s), date and an indication of format (PDF or full-text). After each article reference is created I batch the references and insert them into the main HTML FinanceNet template page. This results in a fresh view of new (and old) active references with hyperlinks on the FinanceNet "Finance Trend Articles" page. The page includes icons indicating which articles are new with each update and customers can navigate through content grouped by publication title within each month.

In this case, ProQuest SiteBuilder allows GLIS to provide the right content to a specific audience in the ideal format for them. HP employees can browse FinanceNet or the GLIS web site for new articles, or they can search the HP intranet for specific content. Additionally, the page is branded to indicate that the content is provided by

a GLIS analyst via ProQuest, an HP-wide licensed business content database. An HP Finance communications professional recently stated “The FinanceNet Website is designed to serve as a virtual ‘town square,’ where HP Finance employees can go to get the news, information and resources they need to do their jobs. The ‘Finance Trend Articles’ [page] has enhanced the value of FinanceNet by providing a single source for external perspective and financial best practices.”

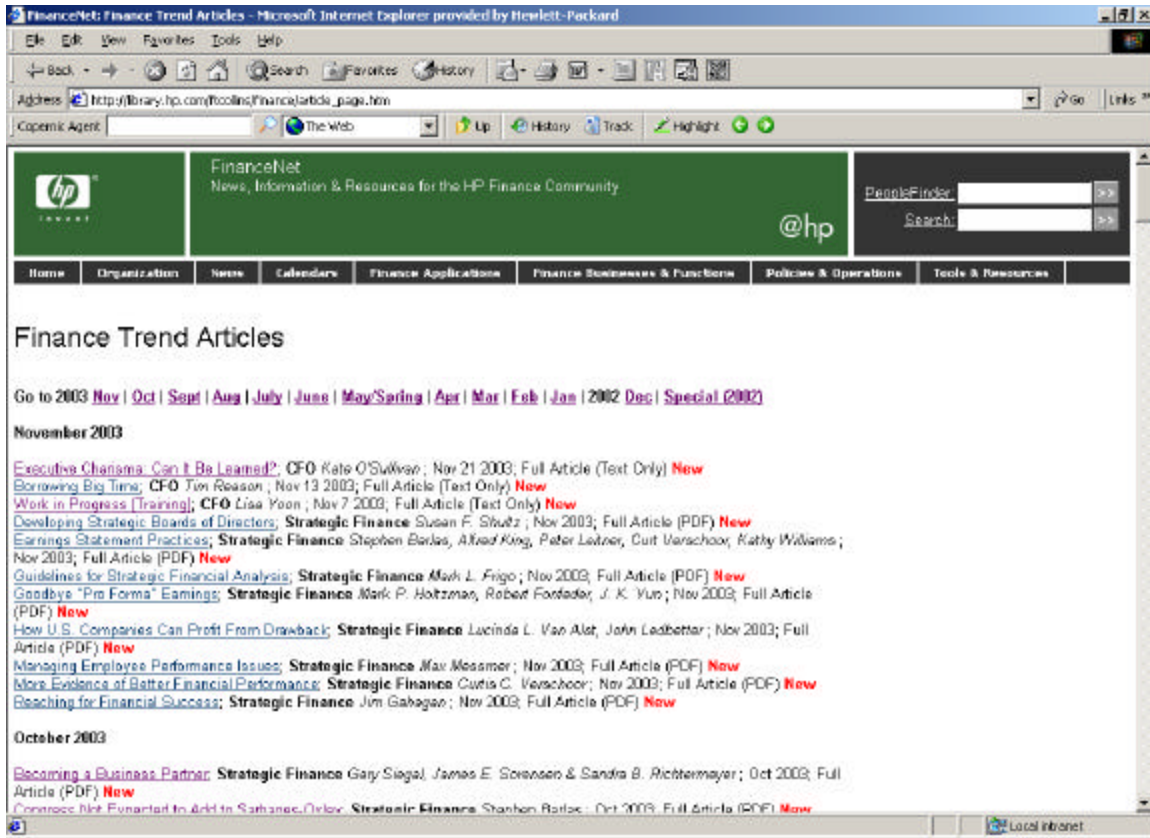


FIGURE 2 – Finance Trend Articles page on HP FinanceNet portal.

Conclusion

Both of these projects illustrate that there are now more tools available to help information professionals deal with unique customer requests for customized content services. Of critical importance is the need to fully understand what a specific customer group really wants and to carefully compare the request requirements with the tools and staff that you have available. For every specialized project that we undertake there are still many projects that are unfeasible when we look at our current technology tools, staffing levels, funding and other resources. As with all projects, each request must be carefully assessed to determine if it will result in a service where the benefits outweigh the costs to your organization or company. Successful projects are often the result of a close partnership with your customer group.

As with other information services, you will need to market a customized content solution that can be leveraged across your organization. With a high-profile content service, targeted marketing conducted on an ongoing basis is very important and may require some creative approaches. We are finding that, with a specialized product such as the Critical Systems Weekly newsletter, managers and team leaders will often tell their colleagues and direct reports to subscribe. If a particular issue might be of interest to a high-level manager or a specific product group we send them an electronic copy along with our registration page URL. To get the best mileage out of your investment in this kind of content solution, you must market frequently to your ideal target audience.

Ideally, if your library organization is interested in focusing on strategic, customized content deployment projects, there needs to be a management infrastructure that can help information professionals mobilize resources, juggle workloads, and employ the tools and training that will allow these projects to succeed without overwhelming the entire organization. It is easy to get swept up in the excitement of developing a new service and our instinct is to help our customers as much as possible. Customized content projects must create high value for your customers and be a high-profile reflection of the range of services your corporate library or information center can provide.

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