

Are Information Services
Worth the Money?

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Sometimes I fancy that George Harrison's latest pop lament, "I'm a dark horse, running on a dark race course," was written with commercial information services in mind. Many people who almost automatically pay lawyers and doctors for information are considerably less hospitable to charges for other commercial information services.

This is partly the fault of the producers of information services. In my view, we are not doing nearly as much as we should to demonstrate the value of our products. For, quite clearly, information services that continue to be produced and sold in a competitive commercial environment must have real value to the purchaser. Otherwise they would fall by the wayside.

The principal disadvantage of information services in the marketplace is their relatively intangible character. Their value is often difficult to quantify or measure and, thus, to demonstrate. As a consequence, in lean times, information services are apt to be among the first reduced and with them their supporting professionals -- librarians, information officers, and the like.

Happily for ISI® and other purveyors of information services, this is not generally characteristic of American enter-

prises, particularly the "growth" companies. There is persuasive evidence that they spend considerably more on such intangibles than their less successful brethren.¹

There are numerous instances of the dollars-and-cents value of information services. One simple cause-and-effect example was experienced in producing the Lightning fighter when an information search about leading-edge devices revealed an effective notch design that made expensive basic research unnecessary.²

ISI's Director of Research and Development, Tony Cawkell, and I have contributed a chapter, "The Cost-Effectiveness and Cost-Benefits of Commercial Information Services," to a new book, *Chemical Information Systems 3*. Our chapter is reproduced on pages 6-12 of this issue.

In our paper we suggest that more attention should be paid to proving that information of the right kind at the right time in the right place is highly productive -- and we advance some ideas on how this can be done.

In the past, the purchase of information services has been largely an act of faith. The time may be approaching when we can substitute cost accounting for religion.

1. Nicolson E L. The new approach to information management. In: *Proceedings of the conference on management decision* (Brintex, London, 1969), p. 10.
2. Page F W. R&D and production. In: *Proc. conf. man. dec.* (Brintex, London, 1969), p. 23.
3. Cawkell A E & Garfield E. The cost effectiveness and cost-benefits of commercial information services. In: *Chemical information systems*, ed. by J.E. Ash & E. Hyde (New York: Wiley/Halsted, 1975), p. 73-85.

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