information outlook®

www.sla.org

the monthly magazine of the
special libraries association
vol. 7, no. 11
November 2003

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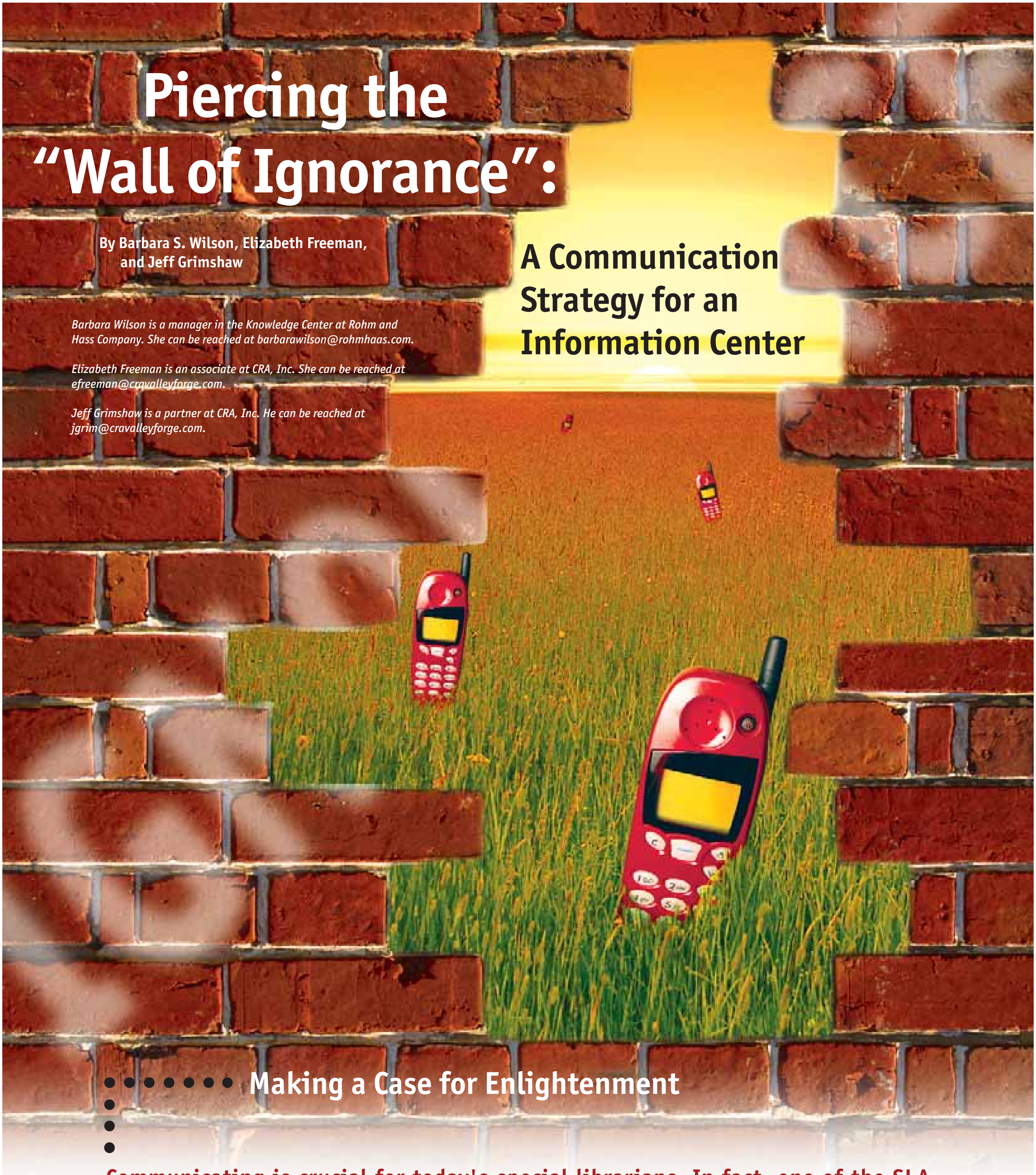

Piercing the "Wall of Ignorance":

A Communication Strategy for an Information Center

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Making a Case for Enlightenment

Communicating is crucial for today's special librarians. In fact, one of the SLA competencies for special librarians of the 21st century is "uses appropriate business and management approaches to communicate the importance of information services..." The dilemma facing librarians is how to identify and implement the appropriate communication strategies. At the Rohm and Haas Knowledge Center we recently sought help marketing our services, and, as a result, we now have a strategic approach to communicating with our customers and other stakeholders.

The Rohm and Haas Knowledge Center supports the company globally. Our services include content offerings (such as electronic and print journals and books), records management, document management, and online search services. Although there is a physical library, the Knowledge Center provides most services electronically via an intranet site.

The Knowledge Center has always marketed its services. Specifically we have relied on seminars, training, and presentations–and have made a special effort to meet face-to-face to determine customers' information needs. The Knowledge Center has also used traditional intra-organizational media, including brochures, e-mail newsletters, and giveaways. Despite our continual outreach efforts, many employees still do not know what the Knowledge Center does or what it has to offer. Although usage grew dramatically after the release of the Knowledge Center website in September of 2000, after two years we were no longer growing our user base at the rate we desired.

In early 2002, we solicited proposals for consulting services to develop an outreach strategy for the Knowledge Center. After creating a Request for Proposal (RFP) for "marketing" expertise, we realized that our actual main objective was help with the promotion piece of the four Ps of marketing (product, price, placement, and promotion). We assumed we already knew our customers' information needs and knew we had the right product offerings. These were big assumptions, but we felt they were justified. We continually acquire customer feedback, and we benchmark our products and services against peer companies.

We sent the RFP to three information industry consultants and one organizational communication consultant known to us through a communications firm who had previously worked with Rohm and Haas. We selected CRA, Inc., the communication consultant, for several reasons: **(1)** CRA recognized that we had a communication problem not necessarily related to our information services function; **(2)** CRA had designed internal communications strategies for other major companies; and **(3)** CRA was local (Valley Forge, PA), which we believed would facilitate the interview process.

CRA worked with the Knowledge Center to analyze our audience across key target markets. CRA also audited our existing outreach vehicles and activities and interviewed Knowledge Center leaders, customers, non-customers, and other key stakeholders. This information-gathering stage provided CRA with three helpful insights:

1. People like us better than they like our technology. While this may be intuitive, CRA's research validated it as "fact." The company's employees prefer Knowledge Center employees over Knowledge Center technology. Consistent with Marshall McLuhan's oft-quoted maxim–"the medium is the message"–we recognized the need to more effectively leverage Knowledge Center employees as our users' preferred information source.

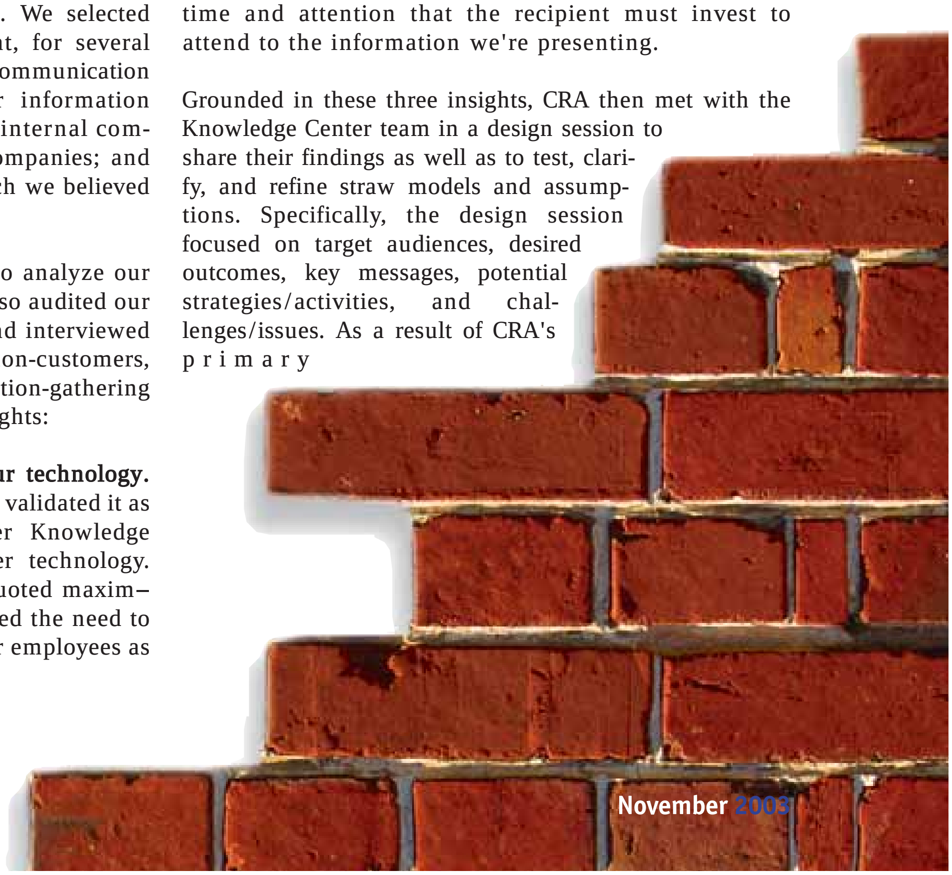
2. The Knowledge Center is seen more as a vendor than a strategic partner. The Knowledge Center is viewed as a tactical "problem solver" (as opposed to a strategic business partner and solution provider). Obviously, being known as a problem-solver (even a tactical one) is usually a good thing–but it can imply a very transactional relationship with the users you serve: They toss you a problem, you address it based on the specs they've provided, and then you toss it back to them. End of transaction. This orientation in some ways commoditized us–and clearly detracted from our efforts to elevate the Knowledge Center as a genuine business partner and resource.

3. The barrier against greater awareness is the "wall of rational ignorance." Since the 1950s, economists have used Anthony Downs' Theory of Rational Ignorance to explain, for example, why most voters seem to know so little about the issues at stake in any given election. "When the expected benefits of information are small relative to the costs (as they almost always will be in an election), people [attend to] little information" (Caplan, 1999).

In our case, CRA found plenty of evidence of rational ignorance. Users and potential users were making a choice to not attend to Knowledge Center messages, because (1) they were too busy, and (2) they could not clearly anticipate a compelling return on their investment of time and attention.

The implication: We cannot achieve our objectives merely by making our messages louder, simpler, or more persuasive. Instead, we must find ways to deliver our message so that it is self-evident to the recipient that the benefits of attending to Knowledge Center information outweigh the "costs"-the costs being the time and attention that the recipient must invest to attend to the information we're presenting.

Grounded in these three insights, CRA then met with the Knowledge Center team in a design session to share their findings as well as to test, clarify, and refine straw models and assumptions. Specifically, the design session focused on target audiences, desired outcomes, key messages, potential strategies/activities, and challenges/issues. As a result of CRA's primary



findings, they generated seven ideas:

1. Structured Relationship Management. This campaign element has several goals: (1) build relationships with key stakeholders across the organizations, (2) use these relationships to push our messages and manage meaning, and (3) seek input and guidance from these relationships. In general, to accomplish these objectives, it would first be necessary to identify stakeholders and assign "relationship managers," as well as create protocols and processes to ensure that: (1) relationship managers remain accountable, (2) relationship managers are managing relationships with specific goals in mind, and (3) that information from all stakeholders is aggregated and synthesized in a useful manner.

2. Outcomes-Based Messaging. This campaign element focuses on (1) pushing messages about how to solve user or user-to-be problems and (2) positioning the Knowledge Center as a strategic partner, rather than a solutions- or product-oriented vendor. To do this, CRA suggested an audit of existing messages. As a result of the audit, we would work to adjust current messages as well as to produce new ones.

3. Consultative Orientation. This campaign element has similar objectives to that of the Outcomes-Based Messaging: positioning the Knowledge Center as a strategic partner. The Knowledge Center could meet its objectives if it refined its processes to identify Rohm and Haas employee needs and then adapt training/orientation information to these specific individual/group needs.

4. "Blogging." A growing, popular trend on the Internet–typically known as web-logging or "blogging"–provides a format that allows the "writer" to summarize information, provide commentary, and also provide the "reader" with the link to the summarized materials. The goals of this campaign element include (1) elevating knowledge as a strategic resource, (2) increasing exposure to Knowledge Center information among users and users-to-be, and (3) leveraging Knowledge Center personalities. To accomplish these objectives, CRA suggested that the Knowledge Center leadership team identify what "blogging" topics should be covered and who should be the primary "blogger/author" for each topic.

5. Leveraging Network "Stars." As Malcolm Gladwell described in The Tipping Point (Little Brown & Company, 2000), one way to create widespread awareness and understanding of a message is to leverage the "Law of the Few" by putting the message in the hands of a small number of people who have extensive informal networks and significant influence within those networks. This campaign element, then, is about identifying our organization's "network stars" and equipping them to "coach" others on Knowledge Center value and use. Through these "coaches," the Knowledge Center would be able to (1) leverage formal and informal employee networks and (2) push information via trusted and preferred information sources. The next step for the Knowledge Center would be to provide information and messages to them that they would share with other users and users-to-be.

6. User Advisory Panel. In an effort to gather input and feedback as well as push information and tools, CRA suggested that the Knowledge Center identify 8 to 10 users and non-users to participate in a "user advisory panel." The Knowledge Center could invite other key groups to participate on additional advisory panels. The next step for the Knowledge Center would be to define how the Advisory Panels would work.

7. Knowledge Networks. CRA recommended that the Knowledge Center engage in a Knowledge Network, or Knowledge Maps. While CRA did not provide a specific approach, CRA and the Knowledge Center agreed that any effort should strive to accomplish the following goals: (1) leverage internal information sources, (2) associate the Knowledge Center with knowledge management–not just external sources of information, and (3) work within significant constraints, including resources and budget.

Consistent with CRA's recommendations, Knowledge Center leadership prioritized the campaign elements and decided to move forward most aggressively on the following three areas.

Structured Relationship Management

We decided to begin the Structured Relationship Management (SRM) initiative with the Knowledge Center managers as the pilot group. We developed a list of the businesses and key positions within those

businesses, overlaid that with our general direction and strategy, and assigned two stakeholders to each Knowledge Center manager.
At that point we learned that the Knowledge Center would soon move out of the Research organization and into the newly created eBusiness department, part of Information Technology. We put our SRM effort on hold as we learned more about our new group and how we would rework our message.

All was not lost as we soon passed along the SRM technique to our new eBusiness colleagues and decided to use it for demand generation for all eBusiness tools and services. Because this was a new department bringing together multiple groups, identifying key stakeholders presented a challenge. We began by having each key manager in eBusiness fill out a relationship matrix by business function. Then we consolidated the spreadsheets with all the relationships into an excellent visual map indicating the relationship gaps.

Next, we plan to set our priorities based on the eBusiness department's strategic direction. Each eBusiness manager will be assigned at least one stakeholder within the business. Armed with a list of gaps and priorities to serve as talking points, the manager will begin building the relationship in a face-to-face setting.

Moving forward, we will bear in mind CRA's dictum that "$2 \times 15 > 1 \times 30$." In other words, managing relationships strategically is an incremental process, and 15 two-minute interactions will generate more useful "intelligence," and yield more influence, than a single 30-minute conversation.

Outcomes-Based Messaging

Working with CRA, the Knowledge Center reworked all user-related communication to explain to users "what's in it for me." The effort shifted focus toward familiarizing users with the benefits of using Knowledge Center tools and services–rather than familiarizing them with any particular Knowledge Center tool or service–and emphasized the Knowledge Center as a strategic partner. Reworking our messages meant shifting the Knowledge Center's communications philosophy. We wanted to highlight the Knowledge Center as a problem-solver and a time-saver.

In order to introduce the outcomes-based messaging concepts to the Knowledge Center staff, we put on a skit at a department meeting. In the skit a staff member is preparing a seminar on one of the Knowledge Center

> **Knowledge Center Seminar Series**
> **September 2003**
> *MicroPatent: Web access to patents and patent searching*
> • MicroPatent basics
> • Patent copies
> • Patent searching basics
> • Patent text searching
> -truncation
> -proximity operators

offerings: MicroPatent, a full-text patent search and delivery tool. In the skit, the text of the announcement for this seminar first reads:

Enter the Outcomes-Based Messaging doctor, who comes in to diagnose the problem of "toolitis"–too much

> **Knowledge Center Seminar Series**
> **September 2003**
> ***Patents as an early warning system***
> Do you need to keep up on your competitors' technology?
> Do you need to develop a patent strategy for your business?
> Are you an innovator looking for new ideas?
>
> If you answered yes to any of these questions, come learn how using Micropatent can help you in your work.

attention on the tool and not enough on what's in it for the user. The doctor "operates" on the announcement, and it becomes:
We also reworked the brochures and help sheets for our online tools and revisited and changed each page on the Knowledge Center site. After joining the eBusiness department, we introduced them to outcomes-based messaging, which they used extensively in creating the new eBusiness website. For example, the collaborative tools group page says, "We can help you collaborate with anyone in the world, inside or outside of Rohm and Haas, without leaving your desk." Under our old tool-focused view, we might have written, "We can help you use tools such as Webex and Sametime." The page does go on to explain those tools in more detail, but not in the initial "grabber" line.

"Blogging"

To date, all of our work with blogging has been experimental, with several Knowledge Center people beginning individual blogs on areas of work or personal interest. We used several different technologies as a test to see which one might suit our needs, including straight HTML pages (FrontPage) and weblogging software (Nucleus). CRA has found Movable Type, a popular weblogging software package, to be a suitable solution for many of its clients. In particular, organizations like the price–$130 for an enterprise-wide commercial license–and the fact that weblogging can deliver many (if not all) of the benefits promised by content management software packages that carry five- or six-digit price tags. We have yet to revisit our strategy for using blogs, but we would do so keeping in mind how they showcase personalities and draw "repeat customers."

The Knowledge Center is continuing with its previous outreach activities, while focusing on building a consultative approach for specific areas and exploring using advisory panels and working with the company's communications staff. In general, there is consensus among Knowledge Center team members and leadership that our efforts to date are moving us toward piercing the "wall of rational ignorance," positioning the Knowledge Center as a strategic partner and meeting our objectives relative to our key audiences.

Caplan, Bryan (1999). "Rational Ignorance vs. Rational