

Realising the Value of PSI: An Overview

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The inception & subsequent transposition of the European Directive on the Re-Use of Public Sector Information was (and remains) a keystone in promoting an open information resource where both public and private sector players within European economies can release and promote the often unrealised commercial value of Public Sector information.

European Commission studies have long estimated that the public sector is the largest creator & producer of information within the wider European economy and that there is great opportunity for effective exploitation of content within the vibrant information markets that have been created on the growth of the internet & related e-commerce platforms – a trend which continues to evolve.

There is much in the way of research that has long predicted that an often inert body of Public Sector Information that had realised its primary or public task could in fact be re-energised in its utilization by private sector players to develop value added products and services & act as a stimulus to the promotion & creation of further ‘downstream’ economic activity. There is clear evidence illustrating the fact that usage of the PSI resource will rise rapidly as a result of innovation within the market where barriers to the information resource are reduced and particularly, where charging practices associated with access are based on marginal cost pricing. *(Flow-modelling of the increased economic activities (from studies deriving from the North American markets) provide a clear and unambiguous indication as to the eventual feed through of wider societal benefits).*

Within the UK specifically, there are strong links with other legislative enactments and the active promotion of information itself as a realizable asset. The Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI) who have been tasked with promoting cohesive information policy standards throughout the wider Public Sector have enjoyed a great deal of success particularly with regards to information re-use policies within Central Government.

What is in effect a ‘culture of change’ in promoting the potential of effective information re-use within the UK Central Government sector has been achieved largely as result of the drive, enthusiasm & strong leadership shown by OPSI. The value of similar Governmental agencies within other European economies could well act as a catalyst in changing the ‘culture’ of information management and focusing motivation & leadership in managing the imposition and promotion of proactive information policies.

However, the success of information re-use policies both within the UK and across the wider European marketplace is dependent upon clear unambiguous direction & political drivers and whilst the recent history of the promotion of re-use within the UK has shown itself to be well advanced – there remain large areas within the greater Public Sector where effective re-use has yet to be fully realised and where there remains a low awareness of the effective value of intellectual property assets within an open information resource.

Whilst the emphasis on promotion and training within the information markets is quite naturally inclined towards effective management of re-use policies and is directed at the ‘holders’ of the information resource – the public bodies themselves, perhaps we should also be seeking to educate and train the potential ‘seekers’ of information within the Private Sectors of the economy both within the UK and also in the wider Pan European marketplace, as to how to interact positively with the information resource.

Training initiatives could and should seek to educate those requesting the re-use of information as to

the 'sectoral culture' with which they are seeking to engage and of the views, fears and concerns of those who act as 'gatekeepers' to the information resource.

The true potential 'value' of public sector information should be exemplified in order that all participants within the information matrix are aware of the potential downstream benefits of an effective information exchange mechanism. The very fact that there may be a cost associated with the generation of entrepreneurial activities should not necessarily be seen as a disincentive providing that charging policies are fair, transparent and accountable.

The burden of failing to realise the potential opportunity cost inherent of under estimating the true value of the information resource will ultimately fall on both Public and Private sectors and will be evidenced to the detriment on Pan European economies as a whole, if we fail to achieve this aim.