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Establish Your Own Trends-Radar

Every association has been through extensive change in the last few years. As the pace of change quickens, it becomes increasingly difficult for executives to anticipate and plan for the trends that will have the most significant impact on their members. In such times, it can be a challenge to properly strategize and plan for the future.

That's why now is a good time to establish tools to properly anticipate change before it happens. You can do this by establishing your own sophisticated trends-tracking or electronic news-clipping system to anticipate and plan for the future. Consider implementing such a system to track the emerging issues that might impact your members, profession or industry.

In my case, I'm monitoring dozens of topics and trends relevant to my clients, my business, articles, and speaking activities. I'm often asked how I became a "futurist, trends & innovation expert." Easy – I spend time observing and thinking about what's going on in the world around me – and I enhance those observations with real data.

On a regular basis, I'm tracking issues, statistics, polls and surveys regarding corporate culture, change management, new business models, competitive challenges, knowledge trends, and work life balance, to name but a few. A variety of electronic monitoring tools help me watch for new innovations in a variety of sectors, as well as watching what's happening with emerging trends.

I constantly assess and scour this information base and file away little nuggets. At this point, I probably spend a good half-hour or hour each day scanning the headlines of my news-clipping universe, picking out the few gems that provide me with concrete information on a particular topic, and feed this into a sophisticated electronic knowledge base that is at the heart of my trends analysis capability.

You can do the same thing, since there are many tools that let you specify particular words and phrases to track within the global media. When matching articles are found, you are notified via e-mail, or through a custom Web page. Spend ten minutes a day reading through the headlines, and perhaps access a relevant article or two, and you'll discover that you've got an extremely powerful method of keeping on top of news stories concerning particular companies, executives, industry issues or trends that might affect you or your members.

One of the best such services is free, rather new, and comes from Google. The [Google NewsAlerts](#) service is so straightforward and easy to use that you can be going in a matter of minutes. Simply enter the word or phrase you want to track (which could be a corporate name, topic of industry), enter your e-mail address, and you're set up to receive regular messages pointing to recent news articles of relevance. (Of course, if you find the search results aren't precise enough, spend some time studying the advanced search syntax used within Google, and make that part of the search topic you're tracking.) Yahoo offers a similar service; Yahoo News Alerts.

If this service wets your whistle, try the 14-day trial of [Nexcerpt](#), which has an innovative news tracking feature that lets you build your daily news-clipped stories into an e-mail newsletter. Stories are collected for you throughout the day in one of many different topic categories. You can preview these stories at any time (say, first thing in the morning) and delete any that aren't of interest. Then, at a set time each day (say, noon) your newsletter is "built" and distributed to everyone on your e-mail list, with excerpts and links to that day's news stories. This tool could be an extremely powerful method of keeping your team informed of important issues related to a project. A similar service can be found at Net2One. Both services operate on a monthly fee-for-service basis; you can try it out for free and then contact them for a quote.

These sites barely scratch the surface; there are other news-clipping services available for a fee from [Factiva](#), [Infomart](#), [NewsScan](#) and [Lexis / Nexis](#). Through each service, you can establish extremely

focused and specific news-clipping services that let you hone in on exactly the issues and articles of relevance to your members. It's worth a visit to each of these sites simply to understand the power they can provide.

In addition to doing it on your own, many professional news-clipping companies make their services available on the Internet – they'll have their experts set up and monitor your clipping topics, greatly increasing the relevance of what is sent to you. There is a powerful capability emerging here; one that is certainly worth exploring.

Another way to keep on top of trends is by watching for the many surveys and studies released on the Internet. Corporate PR professionals have learned about the "power of the poll" and the significance of the survey. The result is a treasure trove of facts and information that can indicate how companies or associations are coping with change, and insight into the trends they might have to deal with in the future.

Where does such information come from? Almost daily, organizations release a variety of press releases that contain studies and surveys in the hope of generating a news report. Track them by periodically searching major newswire sites ([Canadian Corporate News](#), [Canada Newswire](#), [PRNewswire](#), [Community Content](#) and [BusinessWire](#)), for surveys and polls related to accounting, finance and related topics. In addition, some newswires will alert you via e-mail when particular companies – perhaps those within your membership – issue press releases.

In addition, use the Google News site to do a periodic search for the phrase" (association OR industry) (trends OR survey OR poll)" (using your association or industry name) and you'll get a useful list of results, some of which will be useful to your trends radar.

As you venture into this world, keep your wits about you, and don't become overwhelmed with the potential capabilities. While reading a novel the other night, I came across a line that struck me as brilliant: "The curse of the information age is information." Such an observation probably holds true for many people.

And no wonder -- the last few years have seen a remarkable spike in the volume of published data made available. One recent study indicates there will be more data created in the next two years than created in the previous 40,000.

Yet, if you can master systems such as those above so that you have the right information at the right time to help us deal with the right issues, you've expanded your professional capabilities dramatically.

Jim Carroll, FCA, a noted futurist, trends and innovation expert, provides highly focused keynotes and workshops for associations, companies, and senior management teams. He recently provided a full day workshop for the Board of Directors of a major US credit union, outlining the knowledge, demographic, social, cultural, political and technology trends that will affect financial service firms well into the future. You can learn more about Jim at www.jimcarroll.com. He welcomes your feedback at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com



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