

# Introducing KIDMM

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KIDMM is a BCS initiative that allows professionals from a wide range of specialities to share their experiences in managing information and to learn from each other. In this report on the KIDMM MetaKnowledge Mash-Up that took place in September 2007 David Farbey gives some background to KIDMM, and explains why technical communicators should be taking an interest in it.

When people talk about information technology the emphasis is usually on the "technology" while the "information" is taken for granted. Computers are no longer used just for "number-crunching" but for an unbelievably wide range of applications involving all sorts of information from all sorts of fields. Electronic systems that can record, store, sort, analyse, manage and distribute information can certainly bring huge benefits to organisations and individuals. Problems can happen when people who are qualified and experienced in creating and managing systems are too often given the responsibility for managing the information itself.

Even much vaunted initiatives such as "knowledge management" in big corporations quickly become just another line item in the Chief Technology Officer's annual budget. The information is poorly indexed and classified, if it is indexed or classified at all, and the digital information is just as inaccessible (and as useless) as the paper-based records it replaced. The system, rather than the content, has become king, and the people who deal in substantive information - the librarians, researchers, museum curators, taxonomists, statisticians, academics and educators, as well as the illustrators and writers - can easily feel that they have been left out of the picture.

There is, however, some hope for the advocates of information in this technology-centric world. Over the last few years a group has started functioning under the aegis of the British Computer Society (the BCS ) which is taking a fresh look at the ways in which information - in the sense of meaningful substantive content - is managed. It's the Knowledge, Information, Data and Metadata Management group (KIDMM to its friends) and it was started by members of a number of Specialist Groups (SGs) of the BCS who realised that problems in information management were common across a wide range of specialisations. The Project Officer for KIDMM is Conrad Taylor, the Secretary of the Electronic Publishing Specialist Group of the BCS, and a recent guest speakers at an STC UK Chapter event.

On 17 September 2007 the KIDMM group organised a Metaknowledge Mash-Up as a forum for sharing ideas about managing knowledge. It was attended by over 90 people from a wide range of backgrounds. A list of some of the topics discussed at the Mash-Up gives an idea of the breadth of subject areas where information and metadata issues are now coming to the fore: problems in information retrieval, a standard language for clinical terms in medicine, the application of geospatial information, integrating diverse catalogue systems at a museum, issues in classification, and enabling online knowledge communities. In all these areas subject matter experts are working together with systems professionals to resolve problems, and to make information more readily available and more useful to users. KIDMM is a worthwhile venture and one that we, as technical communicators, should be aware of and be more involved in.

Read more about KIDMM at <http://www.epsg.org.uk/KIDMM/index.html>