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LIVING INNOVATION

By Michele Engdahl and Greg Seitz

Not many people sit down at their desks in the morning and say, "Today I'm going to innovate!" or add "innovate" to their to-do list. While the four employees featured in this story don't do those things either, they can boast strategic marketing, enhanced customer relationships, increased productivity and competitive advantage as results of their innovations.

These employees do very different things in different corners of Thomson, but they all enjoy environments that encourage innovation and creativity. And through their work, they benefit from that innovative environment and contribute to it.

Efficiency Through Innovation

In April 2005, LaToya Naughton, contract negotiator for Thomson Financial, was excited to start her new job in the contract management group. She completed a three-person team responsible for negotiating sales contracts with prospective clients. What Naughton hadn't bargained for was her manager resigning the day after she started and her remaining colleague leaving the next month.

While the team was being rebuilt, Naughton took the opportunity to rethink the negotiations process, focusing mainly on innovating internal processes.

"I work for the sales reps; they are my customers," Naughton says. "I am a communicator by nature, and I thought if we centralized the process and kept our sales force better informed, we could meet their needs faster."

She was right.

First, Naughton created an e-mail mailbox for sales representatives to submit their contracts. It became a one-stop shop that allowed her team to see what contracts were in the queue, what the dollar value was and how heavily "marked up" the contract was (which indicates how many changes the client wants and often is an indicator of how long it will take to negotiate the contract). She also revised a status report to share with sales management. All of these new processes helped avoid delays, which sales representatives frequently cite as a major pain point in the negotiations process.

"I pride myself on being efficient and I want to drive revenue. At first I spent so much of my time on the phone with reps simply giving them an update, I didn't have time to actually negotiate the contracts," Naughton says.

Through this new process, Naughton has built a solid rapport with the sales force, gets fewer questions and is turning contracts over faster. She is carrying a far greater number of contracts than she could six months ago.

"LaToya has helped our contracts negotiations process make strides toward transparency," says Kelly Kazes, sales manager, Thomson Financial. "The updates she provides are an effective way of bypassing much of the frequent status checkups that can bog down both sales and legal. It's an evolving process and will continue to improve, but kudos to LaToya for driving and managing this process."

As Naughton reflects on her experiences so far, she feels good about the contributions she is making. The process is smoother and faster – two outcomes she may not have anticipated 18 months ago.



LaToya Naughton

Photo by: Katharine Andriotis Photography LLC

Strategic Innovation

Sometimes the answer to a big question is right in front of you. You just need to know how to look at it. Product developers and executives at Thomson Gale wanted a better idea of what their end users wanted. **Nader Qaimari**, director of InfoTrac and Powersearch, Thomson Gale, realized the users were telling them just that every day.

“Everything customers do in a database – every click, every search, every action – is logged somewhere,” says Qaimari. “We just had to go in and look.”

Qaimari and his team extracted this user-activity and query data and found a wealth of information that quickly began to drive decisions on new content and products that Thomson Gale should develop.

One of business’s biggest challenges in the past was making a direct connection between the product development process and users, making it difficult to give a good sales pitch for new products. The decision makers buying the products weren’t the main everyday users of the products.

“In the past, when librarians would tell us that their users were not interested in a certain subject area, we had to take their word. With the data we now extract, we help inform librarians what their users are interested in and have the support we need to make the sale,” Qaimari says.

Having uncovered the immense value of this information, Qaimari saw an opportunity to ignite innovation based on that data. He recently visited an Internet search engine company’s headquarters and was impressed by displays in its lobby showing what people were searching for on the Internet that day. Back at the Thomson Gale office, he helped set up similar lobby displays.

“I think those displays are daily reminders that living in the workflow of the user is integral to our success,” Qaimari says. “It forces us to question how much we know about our users.”

For example, many of those users are college students, known for quickly adopting new technologies. As new media technology like podcasting (regularly updated audio files distributed over the Internet) became more popular, Qaimari saw an opportunity to grow Thomson Gale’s databases with content many of its users were quickly coming to expect.

“In the three weeks after loading the first podcast, we had 8,000 visitors check it out. Hundreds of bloggers commented about the addition to our database, and it continues to generate customer attention,” Qaimari says. Today the databases include more than 400 podcasts, and that number will grow as Thomson Gale continues to understand its customers’ workflow and strategically innovate ways to meet their needs.

Qaimari improved InfoTrac because he trusted the data and responded to customers’ research needs. Now he’s watching the number of visitors rise, proving that innovation can simply mean looking at information from a fresh vantage point.

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Nader Qaimari
Photo by: Greenleaf Studio

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Competitive Innovation

The courts don't always get it right. Sometimes it's an incorrect citation, a misstatement of the law or incorrectly identified involved parties. Sometimes it's just forgetting a "not."

Entering headnotes into Thomson West's Westlaw legal database, attorney editors frequently find and work with the courts to correct mistakes in cases received from courts around the country. For example, if the court meant "insured" but used "insurer," that mistake changes the meaning and intent of the law. This mistake can make or break a case for West's customers.

One colleague turned this negative into a positive through customer-driven innovation to give West an advantage over its competitors.

David Probst, principal attorney editor, West, built a database on MyThomson to collect, organize and publish the mistakes, corrections and failure of the competition to make the corrections. The information aggregated by Probst is now used daily in sales and marketing to illustrate the superiority and accuracy of Westlaw information.

"It puts information in the hands of colleagues who are trying to kick out our competition or retain Westlaw customers," Probst says.

Paul Godlewski, manager, Product Marketing, is grateful to have such easy-to-reference information on the latest Westlaw advantages. "It's used to create training materials for field staff to incorporate into customer presentations. David's information is timely and extremely beneficial," says Godlewski.

But an innovator never rests. Responding to feedback from users of the database, Probst started watching how the competition handles the courts' mistakes over time. In a large percentage of the cases, West's main competitor never finds the mistake or doesn't correct its databases, which creates an even greater competitive advantage for West.

In addition, Probst recently added the ability to browse the information by jurisdiction. Sales representatives in Florida wanting to demonstrate Westlaw superiority can now quickly find Florida-specific examples where Westlaw information and headnotes were more accurate than the competition's.

"I enjoy the challenge of providing an accurate product for customers," Probst says. "Doing this helps reinforce that the work we do and the attention to detail we emphasize is worth it."

Expanding his innovation even further, Probst shares updates to this database monthly with **Diane Witzel**, senior technical writer, West, who publishes a flier called *Editorial Differences that Matter* every month on the Westlaw Marketing site on MyThomson. A blurb is also included in the Sales & Account Management weekly newsletter, *SAM News Capsule*.

Week in and week out, Probst keeps finding and publicizing more reasons why West's products are better than any other and why the competition can't, well, compete.



David Probst

Photo by: Jerry Hass, Deb Shoemaker

Innovative Relationships

When *Inside Thomson* caught up with **Bob Stembridge**, manager, Customer Relations, Thomson Scientific UK, he was in San Francisco, California, USA – half a world away from his home in London. Stembridge was at the American Chemical Society's (ACS) Fall Meeting speaking on the impact of older scientific and patent information (specifically from 1900 to the 1950s) on present-day scientific research as measured through the number of times old articles and patents are cited in recent articles and patents.

If that seems like a mouthful, it is.

His reasons for being there were simpler. The ACS is a Thomson customer, and speaking at its conference meets one of Stembridge's customer-outreach goals.

In the past, Thomson had close links with key customer groups in the patents and pharmaceutical information area. But something happened as the Scientific business grew. "We were rapidly expanding through acquisition, and our attention to these groups was reduced. We were looking outward and overlooking core customers and revenue," says Stembridge.

Two years ago Stembridge was asked to re-establish relationships with user groups and industry bodies – both influential customers. User groups comprise information professionals and information managers. Industry bodies comprise people involved in a sector who share common interests and are generally much larger than user groups. For example, the ACS represents the interests of chemists and has 45,000 members.

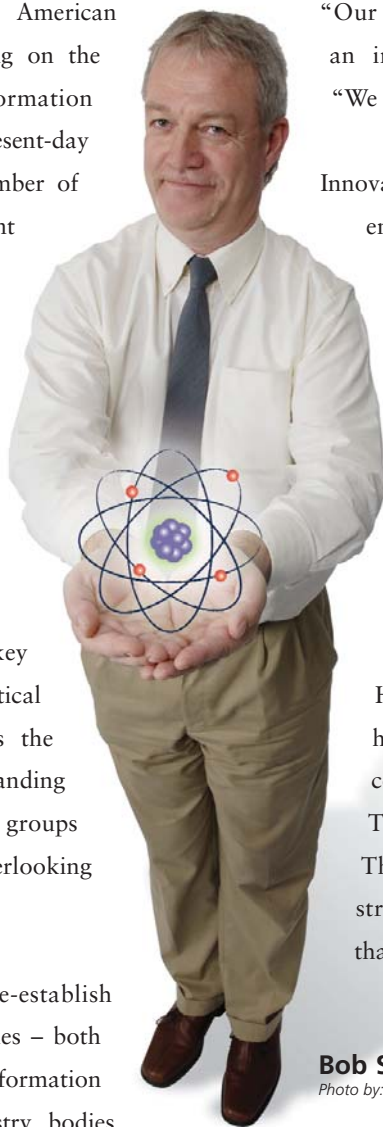
Stembridge was asked to move into this role because of his long-established credentials and reputation among these customer groups, and he enjoys his unusual role. While Stembridge isn't

focusing on traditional sales and renewals, he knows cultivating these relationships is vital to Thomson's success.

"Our goal is to position ourselves as more than an information-service supplier," says Stembridge. "We want to be viewed as a thought leader."

Innovative ways in which Stembridge is nurturing and enhancing these relationships include sharing a product road map outlining intended development pathways for Scientific products and services in the next two years and ensuring that Thomson Scientific senior management contribute to customers' major meetings. In addition, Stembridge finds opportunities to speak at information-industry events and provide thought-leadership articles for customer newsletters and industry press.

His trip to San Francisco was fruitful. Not only did he create exposure for Thomson, he re-established contact with a professor he first met 25 years ago. The professor would like to collaborate with Thomson on automated indexing of chemical structures. Thankfully, Stembridge knows what that means.



Bob Stembridge
Photo by: David Rose/Panos Pictures

These four innovators changed their corners of Thomson by searching for ways to meet customers' needs. They routinely look at their customers, the competition and the resources available to them. They look for better, smarter ways to do their daily work.

In the end, Thomson is innovative because the people are innovative. ■