How can information providers connect information resources to entrepreneurs to spur innovation in economic development?
Co-sponsored by SIG-III and SIG-USE

Panel Participants:
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Abstract
Information and knowledge have been recognized as valuable resources for gaining competitive advantage, streamlining decision making and improving strategic management. In an increasingly competitive economic environment, the survival of organizations is heavily dependent on their recognition of information as an important strategic resource (Choo, 2005). Entrepreneurs, who have been regarded as the key drivers of innovation and have frequently been credited with boosting economic development (Timmons & Spinelli, 2009), find themselves in an increasingly disadvantaged position as a result of an inability to compete with the financial power of large companies. The benefits that entrepreneurs reap from having access to quality information resources have been documented in many studies, however, the accessibility and preferences of the information resources varies by context. The focus of the panel will be exploring how information specialists and institutions help entrepreneurs access and use information resources to support their business ventures. Panellists will shed light on different international perspectives drawn from research conducted on different types of groups/organizations. Discussion will be geared to illuminate existing approaches that have been taken to meet the information needs of entrepreneurs, with a view to propose future courses of action.

Individual Abstracts
Business information services in public libraries: Do they support economic development or do they need economic development to be supported?
By France Bouthillier, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

The provision of information services to small and medium-sized business entrepreneurs has been often identified as an important factor for sustaining their development but the design and sustainability of these services have been challenged for various reasons. This population of
entrepreneurs, wherever the country, is very diversified, their information seeking behaviour and information needs vary greatly, and strategies for reaching them require careful planning (Bouthillier, 2003). Nevertheless, in the 1980s and 1990s, public libraries were identified in various countries such as USA, Canada, Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom, as key institutions for providing such services and massive investments have been made by governments to facilitate access to business information (Bouthillier, 2004). The hope was to create an information infrastructure that would help economic development in general, and that would support small and medium-sized businesses in particular (Vaughan, Tague-Sutcliffe and Tripp, 1996). At the same time, access to business-related content on the Web was growing and the impact of public library services has been questioned in various quarters considering the proliferation of online resources generated both by the private and government sectors. In addition, after two worldwide economic recessions at the beginning of 2000 and in 2009, public libraries have faced a crisis in some countries (Flood, 2013) and special services and programs for entrepreneurs have been seriously rationalized. This brief background generates a number of questions: if information is an important resource to sustain economic development, how can information services be sustained? Do entrepreneurs still need information services or only information resources? Which services and resources should be provided?

Connecting entrepreneurs, economic development agencies, and information organizations: A study on the information behavior of microbusiness entrepreneurs in Louisiana
By Tao Jin, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA

Small businesses are foundation of any market economy. In the US, they represent 99.7% of all employer firms (SBA, 2014). Microbusinesses are the smallest businesses, typically defined as an organization with less than five employees (SBA, 2009). In 2011, there were about 25.4 million microbusinesses, representing nearly 88% of all businesses in the nation (AEO, 2014). Compared to large corporations as well as small and medium-sized businesses with hundreds of employees, microbusinesses are economically and socially vulnerable and need intimate attention of the society. Also, successfully starting up and running a micro-business requires significant information support. Unfortunately, however, the dimension of information has rarely been examined in conventional research about small businesses and entrepreneurship. Researchers often push information issues to the periphery and focus on other pillars of small business management and entrepreneurship theory. In a similar vein, in the information science literature, while much has been written about how managers, including small business managers, conduct environmental scanning and search for information (e.g., Bouthillier, 2002; Choo, 1994; McGee & Sawyer, 2003; Rosenbaum, 1996; Vaughan, 1997), the information behavior of microbusiness owners is severely understudied. This presentation will report some preliminary results of an on-going qualitative study about how microbusiness entrepreneurs need, seek, use, and manage information in helping them make rational decisions. The purpose of this study is to identify requirements of an information service model that intends to use various enabling technologies to connect microbusiness entrepreneurs with the federal and local economic development administrations and public-funded information organizations (e.g., state and public libraries), who are collectively mandated to foster the social capital of business communities. This study focuses on three biggest metropolitan statistical areas (MSA) in Louisiana (i.e., Baton Rouge, New Orleans, and Shreveport-Bossier). For each MSA, a cohort of microbusiness entrepreneurs, local Louisiana Economic Development (LED) officials, and information
professionals is interviewed with a semi-structured protocol. Do they hold similar views regarding the entrepreneurs’ information needs and behaviors? If not, what are the differences? Can these differences be reconciled through any ways? How can these entrepreneurs, LED officials, and information professionals knit themselves together as a synergistic community to create win-win situations?

**An examination of access to and use of information resources for entrepreneurs in technology incubators**
By Yao Zhang, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC

The infusion and wide application of information and knowledge have revolutionized the way organizations operate and conduct business. Information and knowledge have, for a long time, been regarded as valuable resources for strategic management and decision making (Porter, 1998). Entrepreneurs, specifically, face a constantly changing environment and are in a disadvantaged competitive position in finance and experience compared with large companies. Access to, and use of information resources, will help them improve their business performance. Innovation is a characteristic that distinguishes entrepreneurs from other small businesses, which is also necessary for survival and sustainable development (Timmons and Spinelli, 2009). The technical innovation depends on the flow and diffusion of knowledge (Nelson, 1993; OECD, 1997; Porter and Stern, 2001). More importantly, the nature of knowledge allows it to be transformed into economic gain through utilization (Jensen and Thursby, 2001; Gans and Stern, 2003).

**Panel Structure**
**Time:** 90 minutes
**Moderator:** Kendra Albright (University of South Carolina)
**Panelists:** Each speaker will have 15 minutes to present with time for questions at the end of the session.
**Panel Discussion:** discussion amongst the panelists based on the presentation with contribution/questions from audience.

**References**


