Designing – and Redesigning – Information Services for Maximum Impact

by Rebecca Jones and Jane Dysart

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GARY HAMEL, A LEADING STRATEGIST, THINKER, AND AUTHOR, recently wrote “the perpetual organization is the organization that innovates.” Perpetual organizations are those organizations that not only survive, but also thrive. They are those organizations that view innovation as using creativity to add value, and that recognize innovation goes hand-in-hand with ideas, change, success, and risk. Yes, risk. Risk is not a term most organizations are comfortable with, and yet there are no great rewards without great risks. When designing innovative information services, the trick is to integrate the ideas, manage the changes, minimize the risks, and maximize the impacts. Actually, it’s not a trick at all. It’s a process—a development process.

The Development Process
The development process for any product or service begins with an idea and, hopefully, ends with a product or service that clients can’t wait to get their hands on. The process (shown in figure 1) involves a series of steps. Although the diagram (figure 1) shows these steps occurring in an orderly, sequential manner, the truth is that they often overlap each other and are highly iterative and inter-related. As soon as you hear those two words, “iterative” and “inter-related,” you know that this means “there’s a lot of stuff happening at once, and a lot of people are talking at the same time.” This can be chaos. But by realizing that there is an overall process and there are ‘steps,’ ‘stuff,’ and ‘people’ involved, you can manage what would otherwise be chaos, and focus on ensuring that the innovation and impact occur. These steps include:

Grabbing the Idea:
Whether it’s a new service, or the redesign of an existing service, every design begins with an idea or a host of ideas—the more ideas, the better. The key is to sift through the myriad ideas floating among clients, staff and stakeholders, and seize one that will drive the service concept.

How do innovative organizations encourage ideas? It is actually very simple. They listen and they watch. They listen to and watch how their clients are working, how they are going about their daily routine, how they are interacting with information services and solutions—both formally and informally—including explicit (documents, presentations, etc.) and tacit (conversations) forms of information and knowledge. Innovative organizations also listen to and watch their employees, not as ‘snoopers,’ but as learners. What is making it difficult for employees to interact with clients or to do their jobs? What off-hand comments are employees making about “if only we could do this … or I wish we had that …” And every small idea from these clients and employees is captured and accepted, rather than countered and axed! Innovative organizations don’t greet small ideas with “been there, tried that.” They greet small ideas with “that idea may have merit, let’s explore it.”

Throughout the process, ideas will come and go and it’s important that the best of these are integrated into the service concept and development or into the marketing and launch. Nurture those ideas, give them room to grow and multiply, pruning out the stale and staking up the wildly offbeat or weak. Without ideas, innovation withers and dies. Those ideas resulting in the greatest innovation and impact are often those that seem the wackiest. Grab some of those ideas, wrap them into a draft service concept, and head off to see what the market—your clients—have to say about it.

Assessing the Market:
One of the ways you minimize risk early in the process is to test a draft service concept with clients. It would be an incredible risk to take a few ideas and immediately begin to develop a new service without first gaining some market reaction or identifying competitive services. By “testing the waters” you are not only learning more about your market, you are able to more fully define how big those waters, or those client groups, are. Ask questions like: what would the market for a new or recreated service actually be? Exactly how many are clients and who are they? What new information behaviors are you seeing in these clients? What new opportunities can you see in this market?

Defining the Concept:
Equipped with a better sense of the market and this service’s place in it, your next step is to scope the service.
There is a template for scoping a service design (figure 2). The questions listed in this template are simply starting points to capture everyone’s ideas concerning:

- An overview of the service:
- What is the service? What are its various components? How does the client receive the service?
- Development: What’s involved in developing and maintaining this service? What sources, content, supplies, and inputs are needed to create and produce this service? Should you build in-house or can you purchase all or some of it from a supplier?
- Marketing: What kind of marketing issues are involved? What groups should be the target markets for this service? What interest is there in this type of service now? What does its potential for growth appear to be?

There are many more questions to be answered when scoping the service, but these can ensure that all those involved are on the same page in terms of the depth and breadth of the service.

**Developing the Service:**
This step—developing the actual prototype of the service—is the most information professionals prefer to begin with. Yet without first exploring various ideas, testing the market, and then scoping the service, the prototype development can often miss critical inputs. Too often information organizations go straight into offering a service without fully clarifying the parameters surrounding the service, assessing if or how it will impact other services, or the issues and costs involved in development and marketing. Having taken the first four steps, the organization is ready to develop the service and engage market targets for formal testing.

**Developing the Marketing Plan:**
The marketing plan is more than determining communications and promotional packages. At this stage the organization needs to select a name for the service, especially if it is a re-design or enhancement of an existing service. What position will this service hold in the organization’s offering portfolio? How will it be priced? Is it actually replacing a service? If so, then how will the organization manage this change with clients?

**Testing the Service:**
This all-important stage enables you to test the service with a portion of the target market before fully launching to everyone. By setting clear market test objectives, with a strict timeline, this step can yield incredible insights, all of which will minimize risks and maximize impacts during and after the launch. Some of these insights include:

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**Service Development: An Overview**

- Define target, needs & size
- Identify competitive offerings
- Define service & its components
- Identify inputs needed
- Confirm content, source availability
- Build prototype
- Position service within market & portfolio
- Establish name & packaging
- Establish pricing, sales & distribution
- Set market test objectives, sites, timeframe, training, documentation
- Client satisfaction
- Quality control

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Grab the Idea

Assess the Market

Define the Concept

Develop the Service

Develop the Marketing Plan

Test the Service

Launch the Service and Marketing Plan

Manage the Service
• How the market truly perceives the service, and the long and short-term ‘positions’ this service can hold in the market.
• Strengths and weaknesses of the service’s design: What changes need to be made?
• Barriers to client acceptance of the service: What do they really hate about it? What’s going to be essential in managing the change to this service?
• ‘Tag-lines’ or phrases to be included in market collateral: What are clients saying that can be incorporated into promotional communications? What messages should be avoided, at all costs, in communications?

This step highlights the interactive nature of the design process, since all these learnings, ideas, and insights gathered during testing need to be integrated into the marketing plan as well as further service development. If these steps aren’t inter-related, and if ideas are not continually injected into the process, the small flames of innovation will be extinguished, and the risks will start to outweigh the impacts.

Launching the Service and Marketing Plan

Voila! This is the step—when everything comes together and the initial ideas come to fruition—that everyone yearns for. The service is marketed and delivered to clients. As with all great events, it requires much planning and careful coordination. The “launch” is much more than an announcement. Considering the metaphor of “launching,” the service is being put into the water, and there needs to be a mechanism for ongoing listening and watching of client reaction to both the service and marketing messages to spot unforeseen icebergs that could sink the service during its initial cruise.

Managing the Service:

Although this is depicted in the overview as the final step, we all know that it is the end of the beginning and the beginning of the end. In other words, as soon as a service is introduced in an innovative environment the process for integrating new ideas and enhancements begins. In fact, part of the “developing the service” step should include determining the service’s lifecycle. Effectively managing the service means paying attention to:
• The production and delivery of the service to clients
• Client satisfaction—aggressively monitoring and acting on
• Quality control—beyond statistics to measures and assurances

Each of these areas is rich with ideas and a hotbed for nurturing an innovative environment and innovative information services.

One of the factors for successfully designing—or redesigning—innovative information services is managing the change. This whole process is about change. The introduction of a new service or the redesign on an existing service is a change for both clients and staff. One of the reasons adults tend to view ideas as “wacky” is simply because they are different from what we “know.” To even entertain a “new” idea means to change the way we think about something. When we are all so busy and stressed, we don’t want to change anything. Even if our clients aren’t delighted with a particular service, they sometimes feel it is easier to keep using what they know rather than to change to a new service or change their routine.

What’s the biggest barrier to innovative information services? Probably the fact that innovation depends on ideas and creativity, both of which are risky. No risk, no reward. No ideas, no innovation. No innovative information service, no information organization. Seize the ideas, manage the development process, and manage the change of the service introduction into your clients’ work lives, and you will minimize the risks while maximizing the impacts.


Service Design Template

**Overview:**
• Description statement: (what is the service? what does it do?)
• Parts: (what are it’s various ‘pieces’?)
• Delivery: (how is it offered to clients?)
• Benefits: (what pain does it ease for clients?)
• Competition: (what can they buy/use instead?)

**Development & Maintenance:**
• Key inputs, content & supplies required:
• Specialized skills or capabilities:
• Buy or build components:
• Issues:
• Timeline:

**Marketing:**
• Target:
• Current interest:
• Growth potential:
• Service use: (How do clients use it? When? Why?):
• Unique selling proposition:
• Positioning:
• Base assumptions:

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