

Parliamentary Library: infocus

Infocus - what is it?

- is a current information service for members of Parliament and their staff.
- provides clients with tailored and filtered electronic access to news and articles relevant to their areas of interest.
- provides 24/7 electronic access to news and articles. It can be accessed anywhere, any time with intranet access.

Infocus is made up of fifteen electronic bulletins, ranging from Arts and Culture, Politics and Government through to Social Issues and Transport which are produced each week. The bulletins contain news and articles relevant to a particular area.

Using **infocus** our clients can keep up to date with what has been happening in their areas of interest during the week. The **infocus** bulletins provide a comprehensive overview of news and articles around portfolio areas. This means that events, such as the issue of a major report, are given in context with news and commentary from a range of people, organisations and publications.

For example, coverage of a transport issue will draw on articles sourced from major newspapers throughout the country, press releases from organizations and political parties, as well as any articles published in industry publications or magazines (e.g. North and South, the Listener etc).

Infocus bulletins are designed for easy reading. Each **infocus** bulletin is divided into intuitive subject headings. For example the Communications bulletin includes Telecommunications, Information Technology and E-Government. This means that clients can quickly and easily browse down the bulletins to their particular areas of interest.

Because issues can have several related articles and press releases we have included "Related Links". A 'lead' article will appear in the main part of the bulletin, while similar stories, press releases and commentary will appear in the related links so clients can drill down into issues if they want.

Parliamentary Library subject specialists write succinct summaries of the week's news at the top of each bulletin. These are so clients can quickly get up to date with the main events for that week.

infocus can be used both electronically and on paper. Using **infocus** electronically allows clients to instantly access articles from their desktop. Alternatively clients can print off a copy of a bulletin and browse through it at their leisure.

Clients can subscribe to any number of bulletins. An email alert is sent to them when the bulletins are published each week.

The smart stuff

- **Using innovative technology to use our existing resources smartly.** We are using databases that were already used for every day library work in a more innovative and cost effective way. From a technical perspective, InterGen believes the use of WebDAV calls to automatic email feeds and the construction of scheduled tasks to gather and collate news items from multiple sources is an interesting technical problem with potential implications for the design of future integration technologies. They say that the

robustness of the final solution is a tribute to the quality of development and the use of the dot NET framework.

- **Working in partnership with our developers and the database suppliers.** Intergen and our suppliers have found **infocus** a really exciting project to work on. We are doing innovative things with their products and they have been great at helping us develop a fantastic service for our clients.
- **A balance of system and business rules.** To ensure flexibility we tried to use business processes to structure the **infocus** workflow rather than building in system rules that could not be easily changed.
- **Subject Specialisation.** Some Library staff specialise in subject areas for reference work along with responsibility for the corresponding **infocus** bulletin. To produce high quality bulletins staff need to keep up-to-date with their subject areas. This meant that producing **infocus** bulletins helped staff develop their specialisations further and apply their increasing expertise in other areas of their information work.

The hard stuff

- **Dealing with duplicate items coming into the database.** Articles often feed in from databases more than once. In order to reduce workload we had to work out a way of preventing this.
- **The parsing of database records into infocus.** Each database required separate development to ensure the right information was parsed correctly.
- **Coping with 5 different information networks within Parliament.** Different browsers, different email packages, different platforms. Lots of challenges!
- **Setting up the new workflow processes.** Almost every one in the Parliamentary Library is involved in developing **infocus**, people had to learn new skills and work to new time frames.

What our clients think

infocus is now used by 80% of our target market within Parliament. We have had great feedback from our clients. They find the system easy to use, and useful for keeping them up-to-date on a variety of topical areas.

Some recent comments on **infocus** from clients have included:

"I am finding **infocus** immeasurably more valuable than the one we used to have - I can't think of any criticism at all. It's great having something that is really up to date, and covers a mix of articles with some longer background stuff - Keep it up." - MP

"I am really enjoying the **infocus** system - it is so easy to access the relevant news articles. I particularly like the excellent synopses overviews of all of the news articles." - MP

The future

The Parliamentary Library negotiated control for the **infocus** system so that it can be shared with other libraries and information services. Since the launch we have demonstrated **infocus** to many libraries and Government agencies; most of them can see value in implementing it in their own organisations.

The Government Information Group (GIG) is a group of Government libraries working on collaborating and sharing electronic resources across government libraries and information services. Work is underway on the concept of a whole of government intranet, one component of this is an e-library. **infocus** is likely to be a key resource in the e-library.