



## Information sage

*Corporate librarian well versed in the ABCs of BP*

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**By Ron Pazola**  
STAFF WRITER

Tom Pardo knows that knowledge is power.

As corporate librarian at BP in Naperville, he responds to requests for information from the company's staff by accessing books, journal articles and reports in print and online. He also keeps the company abreast of market trends and new technologies.

"We spend a lot of time putting together reports that tell what's going on in the petroleum refining field, so that BP can position itself in a proactive way," Pardo said.

Companies have found their librarians to be an integral part of their success.

"BP is a knowledge-driven organization," said Scott Dean, media relations director. "In this day of rapid information flow and thousands of information sources, it is essential to have a really skilled library staff that can act as a filter for the company and help the company access and make sense of those sources."

Corporate librarians must not only be familiar with various types of information but also have to identify and translate that knowledge to the specific needs of their companies. Since BP is a petroleum manufacturer, Pardo must tap into chemical and technical resources that help BP scientists in their search for technical innovations and a less expensive product.

"Some of our chemists want to know about a particular metal or chemical that can be used as a catalyst in BP's refining process," Pardo said. "We have to know what the physical properties of that substance are and how important that substance is in the marketplace today. The end purpose is to make a less expensive fuel gasoline or motor oil or anything else that's produced at our refineries."

On the business side, Pardo assists product managers in finding out about BP's competitors, the products they manufacture, the locations they make the products, and the cost of the items they sell.

For example, Pardo sometimes accesses information from the trade press about a company that is rumored to be in the process of being purchased by another company. He tries to determine the truth of the rumors and how the sale of the company would affect BP.

As technology changes, so do the tools that the librarian uses. Although some corporate libraries have become almost entirely electronic, Pardo said BP's library is in transition, delivering more information by way of databases, the company intranet and e-mail, but also maintaining print collections of books and journals.

"There are many people at BP who still want hard copy in their hands," Pardo said.

BP's Naperville library is a shared-service facility that assists employees throughout the world.

"We get requests for information anywhere from Alaska to Abu Dhabi," Pardo said.

Managing a library staff of seven, Pardo's early professional background was in archives and records management. After earning a bachelor's degree in history at Miami University and a master's in American studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, he worked as an archivist at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland and the Society of American Archivists in Chicago. In 1981, he was hired by BP, then known as Amoco.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of Pardo's job is providing historical information about the company to both staff and the public. Pardo acts as the unofficial archivist for Amoco, Sohio, Arco and Standard Oil, heritage companies that London-based BP acquired during the past 20 years.

"We try to gather and preserve as much historical information as we can so that BP has a record of its North American past," Pardo said.

Collectors often call Pardo asking him about service station memorabilia that include old oil cans, gas pumps and signs.

"I get calls from people wanting to know the exact shade of red on the 1944 gas pump they are restoring or how many inches was the original Arco sign below the top of the pump," he said.

Students working on term papers also call Pardo about the buildings that Amoco used to occupy in downtown Chicago.

Pardo said it's important to accommodate the public because the experience they have with BP may motivate them, their family and friends to buy BP products.

"Corporate librarians, like all librarians, should be service-oriented," said Carol Berger, president of Carol Stream-based C. Berger Group and public relations chairwoman for the Illinois chapter of the Special Librarians Association.

Berger's firm places librarians on a temporary or contract basis with companies, hospitals, banks and professional associations across the United States. She said there are 14,000 specialized librarians worldwide and the demand for their services is growing.

"In today's information era, companies need librarians who can access sources quickly and efficiently and who can organize those sources in a logical way," said Berger, who previously was a librarian at the defunct Beatrice Foods in Chicago.

"Many people think that a librarian's job isn't exciting, but it is very exciting because a librarian is faced with the challenge of finding new and pertinent information every day."

Berger recommends people who want to become corporate librarians should earn a master's degree in library science and obtain business and management skills.

Pardo has no qualms about his career choice. "As a corporate librarian, I get a lot of satisfaction helping people," he said. "You are finding information that's compelling and interesting. The job is a discovery every moment."