

Working Independently: Entrepreneurial Approach in Library and Information Science Profession

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Abstract

Purpose: To discuss the prospects of entrepreneurship in LIS profession and make an attempt to explore the unexplored ways library and information science graduate and post graduate can deal with.

Design/methodology/approach: The authors of the paper are working on different internet based technologies for last ten years. This paper is a descriptive paper based on the authors' knowledge and experience about different internet based technologies and their growing market in India wherein the library and information science professionals can make them self-employable.

Findings: In India, though a few professionals show their interest on entrepreneurial approach in LIS and are quite successful nowadays but a majority of the professionals still hesitate in taking the entrepreneurship route as their preferred option.

Research Limitations: This study covers only the issue of entrepreneurship in LIS based on the examples from India and other developed countries.

Practical Implications: The entrepreneurship areas those are explored in this article will help the fellow professionals in identifying the thrust areas for their work.

Originality/value: Entrepreneurship in LIS in India is still considered as a new concept. This article will throw some light on this area to make it more understandable. The explored areas and examples will certainly motivate the fellow professionals to take up this as a challenge in near future.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Approach, Entrepreneurship, Self Deployment, Self Employment, Library and Information Science Professionals, Librarianship.

Article Type: Descriptive, View Point.

1. Introduction: The word entrepreneur is originated from the French word "entreprendre" which means "to undertake". The term was first defined by the Irish-French economist Richard Cantillon and first appeared in the French Dictionary "Dictionnaire Universal de Commerce" of "Jacques des Bruslons" published in 1723 (Corbett, 2008). Entrepreneurship is a programme that inculcates creative, innovative, productive and managerial skills needed in business enterprises for self-reliance and national development. Entrepreneurs are the persons who establish their own venture and spread the job opportunities for them and for the others. Entrepreneurship has emerged in the 21st century as the most potent economic force the world has ever experienced.

The entrepreneurial approach in Library and Information Science will attract more students for obtaining degree in LIS and can shift the profession to a vocational one. It can transform the profession from service oriented to a business oriented and strongly motivate fellow people to think it in a different way. The rise of internet users in India provides a favorable condition to practice entrepreneurship in LIS. It is always good to take up the

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entrepreneurship as a viable way at the very initial period, when competition is virtually nonexistent and making mistakes becomes cheap and therefore, quite affordable. The Indian market is now fertile for the LIS professionals to put their hands and test the feasibility of any entrepreneurial venture. According to Levine (1995), “in spite of the entrepreneurial activity, however, librarians were slow to realize that they could leave the confines of the buildings which named their profession to perform fee-based services on a free-lance basis”.

2. Traits in LIS Professionals: There are lots of skills that can transform a librarian to a real entrepreneur and those may be the core concept to start a new venture. Some of such skills include

- i) The ability to excel at managing information organizations ranging in size from one to several hundred employees.
- ii) The ability to harness current and appropriate technology tools to deliver the best service in a most relevant and accessible way.
- iii) The ability to compile search strategies and find out the best/most suitable information to enable the clients to immediately integrate and apply the information in their work or in learning processes.
- iv) The ability to format citation in any standard type and do the documentation process.
- v) The ability to learn and un-learn continuously.
- vi) The ability to provide right information at the right time.
- vii) The ability to guide and mentor others on information literacy.

In the 21st century, information is regarded as a commodity and Librarians are the gateways to this commodity. So, there are lots of opportunities to explore in this area.

3. Why Entrepreneurship in LIS: By way or other all Library and Information Science professionals are Entrepreneurs. For instance, information professionals are paid for his/her service by the library authorities or their employers and they provide free services to the library users. In the case of entrepreneurship, an information professional is paid directly by the person receiving the services. However, there are many reasons which have made it necessary for the librarian to directly go towards entrepreneurship instead of waiting for any job opportunities to come. Some of such points are listed below

a) To Shape the Professional Status: Librarians have been continuously struggling for the survival of their professional pride. One reason behind is that the common people don't know what the Library and Information Science (LIS) professionals are doing and what kind of expertise they have. Most of the laymen are still holding the traditional concept about librarian and that thoughts are still pulling the profession back. Admittedly, Library professionals cannot claim that there is no fault at their end; rather some of the professionals have added fuel to it who doesn't feel like implementing and keeping track in the present day context of Information Technology revolution. Library professionals should first set up their mindsets in individual level to be accustomed with digital enhancements. In all cases, the librarians should generate money or justify funding on libraries, which itself is a call of entrepreneurship in libraries. So, if the library professionals start treating themselves as entrepreneur using different emerging technologies, the whole picture of the profession going to change in the eyes of common people and it may help to shape the figure of the professional pride.

b) For Self Satisfaction: Day by day the number of qualified librarians is increasing but not the job vacancies. Although, some fresh students start absorbing themselves in different job categories, they don't get remuneration up to the mark or at per level of their qualification and knowledge. Many such professionals have to limit their work just to data entry or clerical routine jobs in the libraries. Even we witness some bitter scenario in case of recruitment of

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library professionals - some organizations recruit librarians at per University Grants Commission (UGC) norms but their authorities are quite reluctant to pay the librarians at per UGC norms or to consider them as equivalent as other faculty members. Therefore, the right time has come for the LIS professionals to set the mindset in an entirely different way, to earn at individual level and to jump at their own venture.

c) To Stay With the Profession: Some 21st century Libraries are advertising the post of Librarian where essential qualifications are M.Tech., M.Sc., diplomas in database management, with proven skills on search techniques, website design, electronic learning, and interactive web and Library and Information Science degree holders are completely or partially ignored in the recruitment process. As a result, the job opportunities are decreasing for the Library and Information Science (LIS) degree holders which compel them to shift to other jobs out of the profession. But with the notion of entrepreneurship, one can continue his carrier in the Library and Information Science field itself and help in sustaining the profession in a better way.

d) To Contribute to the National Economy: Day by day increasing number of institutes are producing increasing number qualified professionals in Library and Information Science to the existing pool which steadily decreases probabilities of job opportunities at percentage level. If this trend continues, unemployment will eat up the future of Librarianship and will transform into a social ill and affect the national economy. So, it's better to shift today itself to the venture of entrepreneurship in LIS and become independent.

e) To Help the Society: Information explosion makes it difficult for general people to retrieve relevant information. Rapid change in technology makes it further difficult to go for such information. So, people always need the LIS professionals to locate the information or to be trained up continuously in finding appropriate information and librarians are the right person to take this as a challenge.

f) IT Revolution is a Call for Entrepreneurship: Internet, Google, social networks, blogs, audio, video, growing number of internet users in India have eventually justify the entrepreneurial styles in LIS profession. Growing internet users and decreasing physical visitors to the libraries demand the entrepreneurial approach in LIS profession. It is the time when the professionals should explore the ways to earn of their own.

4. How to be an Entrepreneur in LIS: Entrepreneurship is a hot topic of discussion throughout the world where job prospects become saturated. Increasing unemployment throughout the world has raised a steadily growing interest in entrepreneurship and continuously pressurizing all the subjects to be merged in its fold. Just like other subjects, the information science professionals should also try to acquire the concept at the earliest to grow up with the society and the emerging trend. Further, technology and entrepreneurship are the foundations for national development. In the 21st century, the information science professionals should acquire technology, should know how to market and be an entrepreneur, otherwise they will soon become irrelevant.

Courses in Entrepreneurship are already started invading the Library and Information Science programmes throughout the world. Now it's the time to proceed towards real entrepreneurship. In proceeding towards entrepreneurship in LIS, the following steps can be helpful

a) Preparing Yourself: Entrepreneurship is all about facing challenges and taking risks. Things can only happen when there is a conviction to face the challenge and surpass the fear of risk. Fear of taking risk is the reason why people pulling themselves back from taking the entrepreneurial approach and becoming an entrepreneur.

Such mental blockages forces people to stick within a job or search for a job (with assured monthly income) than to take entrepreneurship as a viable career option without any

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consideration of job satisfaction. So, self motivation is the first thing to do something new, creative and innovative.

b) Background and Market Study: Before implementing an idea it is very important to study the pros and cons of the background of that idea e.g. what are the underlying issues, what are the problems, prospects, scopes, risks and most importantly what will be the expectations of the patrons. Opening a new venture in LIS should be to enable one in meeting the competitions in the information society to sustain for long. Therefore, being an information science professional it's necessary to identify various information sources to study the background of the entrepreneurial thought.

c) Making a B- Plan: Business plan is always the base for any enterprise. A blue print of the plan should be prepared to have a clear concept of the service or the product right from the venue, manpower, monetary issues, etc.. Initially, the professionals should get started with the b-plan as a small project. After completion of the project, it will become easier to decide whether someone should go for the same or should drop out from that idea.

d) Deciding the Format and pricing of the Product or Service: The feasibility of a product depends upon the use of that product. Web has made it very easier to launch a service online or in a physical format. If the product is launched in physical format then they must be priced after conducting proper market research. In case of online products, online advertisements can be considered as a boon for the entrepreneurs as can be used to meet the running cost of a venture. Sometimes affiliate programmes can also be a good source to generate some money.

e) Marketing and Publicity: The product will gain momentum only when it will be publicized in every possible ways. Creating website, promoting in social media, advertising online, presenting in seminar and conferences, publishing brochures, leaflets, writing articles, making the people aware by giving lectures, etc. are some of the possible productive ways to market any new venture.

5. Entrepreneurship Areas in LIS: The entrepreneurial concept is already leveraging in LIS profession and librarians are nowadays started concentrating on the self sustainable policies and entrepreneurial approaches. By the early 1980s, librarians and many others had begun to sense the potential of the free-lance information brokering business. With the increasing usages of Information Communication Technologies, many library and information science professionals have started applying their skills to the mixture of computer, internet connection and commercial and free databases and start turning a room into money-making business ventures.

In 1976, Susan Klement created the outline of a course on to work outside of a library building. The name of the document was "Draft of a course for librarians' alternative duties" (Draft Proposal for a Graduate Course on Alternatives in Librarianship). This document was published in the Canadian Library Journal in the Vol. 35, No. 2, April 1977. She also included, in a separate article in the same journal, a 41-item "Selected Annotated Bibliography of Articles Relevant to Alternatives in Librarianship".

In 1977 Kelly Warnken published the first information store for a fee, which has since continued to be published today and was extended to the events happening around the world. It is named as "The Directory of Fee-based Information Services". With 87 entries on 74 pages, including both academic-based and free-lance information service providers, the book took a well-known technique of information organizing, the traditional directory format, and applied it to this field. Helen Burwell of Burwell Enterprises, Houston, Texas, now publishes the international edition of this directory, still a self-published product.

In 1979, "the journal of fee based information services" comes into existence and in 1983 Burwell enterprise obtains the right to this publication.

In 1980, Betty-Carol Sellen convinced Gaylord Professional Publishers to publish What Else You Can Do With a Library Degree. This collection of first-person accounts

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outlined the wide range of alternatives available to a library school graduate who wanted to be independent of the library building. The book presents over 50 successes from a broad range of library backgrounds who have found fulfilling work in non-library settings. Authors include entrepreneurs who have founded thriving companies, information brokers, corporate information professionals, booksellers, storytellers, Internet trainers, consultants, Cybernarian, and more.

In 1981, R.R. Bowker entered the field to publish Warnken's *The Information Brokers: How to Start and Operate Your Own Fee-Based Service*, indicating how far the field of Library and Information Science has come.

In different Library and Information Science programmes of different universities of the World such as Indiana University, Bloomington, United States; University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria; Salem University, Lokoja, Kogi, Nigeria; Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya, etc started providing entrepreneurship as a half or full course syllabus. Even a few Universities such as Graduate School of Library and Information Science of the University of Illinois start providing advance level course on entrepreneurship in LIS.

In 1987, 26 people came together in Milwaukee to form the first U.S. organization devoted solely to the information brokering profession. With their sights set firmly on building a network among themselves and their colleagues and on aiding struggling entrepreneurs, the group created the Association of Independent Information Professionals (AIIP). It is an association of owner-operated, for-profit information enterprises that offer information services to clients.

Some of the areas with working examples are provided below for the entrepreneurship in LIS.

a) *Be an Information Broker / Information Consultant / Free-lancer:* An information broker, also known as an independent information professional or information consultant, is a person or business that researches information for clients. Freelance Information Providers work for different companies at different times rather than being permanently employed by one company. LIS graduate can effectively discharge their duties as information brokers or free-lance information providers for researchers and information seekers. They can also think of launching consultation firm that will work for the planning and establishment of new library, accessioning, ordering of document, classification of documents, cataloguing, data entry in software, etc. The consultation firm can also work in the line of Knowledge Process Outsourcing (KPO), where it can be used as outsourcing of core activities of the library, which often are competitively important or form an integral part of the library's job.

The LIS graduates can start their service on payment basis for other people and businesses to find out their content and information through them. They can provide paid search, web design, installation and customization of Joomla, Wordpress, Wiki, customization of Blogger, creation of Facebook fan page, setting up of other networking pages for business houses, indexing service to the publishing houses, book review for authors and publishing house, preparation of bibliographies services for researchers, library consultation to small businesses or even to large corporations, etc

Example: In India a lot of people are working as Consultant or Freelancer. Mrs Lalitha Panchanathan from Andhra Pradesh is a good example.

b) *Develop Subject Specific Websites and Make Money from Advertising:* LIS degree holders can think of developing subject specific websites for example "Job Vacancies for Computer Science Professionals in India", "Tender Notice from Assam", "Jobs Advertisement from Delhi", "To-Let in Uttar Pradesh", etc. with text and/or photo and/or video and can monetize such website with online advertisement.

Selling banner ad space is recommended for all type of websites, if its daily visit is more than one thousand. Again if the website content is for the casual user group, then Cost Per Click (CPC) gives highest revenue whereas if the website content is for the internet savvy

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user then Cost Per Mille (CPM) produces good results. Most of the banner advertising follows CPM i.e it pays for one thousands views (in roman numbers M=1000) to the website owners. Whereas the text ads follows Pay Per Click (PPC) (also called Cost Per Click) where advertisers pay the publisher (typically a website owner) when the ad is clicked.

Some ad networks include Google AdSense (www.google.com/adsense), Media.NET (www.media.net), Infolinks (www.infolinks.com), Exponential (<http://www.exponential.com>), Chitika (<https://chitika.com>), EBay Partner Network (<https://www. ebaypartnernetwork.com>), Vibrant Media (<http://www.vibrantmedia.com/>), GumGum (<http://gumgum.com/>), SkimLinks (<http://skimlinks.com/>), Bidvertiser (<http://www.bidvertiser.com/>), Clicksor.com (<http://www.clicksor.com>), eClickZ (<http://www.eclickz.com/>), BuySellAds (<http://buysellads.com/>), etc.

Some of the options that can be used to make money from website are as follows

i) Sell Banner / Text Ad Space: These can be anything from Google AdSense to Chitika or sponsorship. One can also directly sale the ad space to the company in the same niche.

ii) Display Related Tags: In case of related tags, the ad network's algorithm will choose the best keywords for the page and display them as tags within the ad space unit. When a visitor hovers over or clicks on the tags, an ad bubble appears or it takes them to the ad, and each click awards the account with revenues. Example of such ad network includes Infolinks (<http://www.infolinks.com>), Google AdSense (<http://adsense.google.com>), etc.

iii) Display Tag Cloud: Tag Cloud uses precise algorithm to create a colorful cloud of keywords that are relevant to the site content and located within the text area. Whenever someone will click on the tag cloud, the site owner will earn some amount. Example of such ad network includes Infolinks (<http://www.infolinks.com>).

iv) Display In Text Advertising: Here, high paying keywords are double-underlined / single-underlined and every time a visitor hovers over or click on one of these highlighted words, an advertisement related to what they're reading appears. Each time a reader clicks on one of the ads, the site owner get paid. Example of such ad network includes Infolinks (<http://www.infolinks.com>), etc.

v) Provide Site Search Facilities: Some website provides site search facility. When a user search over the search box, then in the above or/and button or/and in the right hand side bar some sponsor link will appear. Whenever a user will click on such sponsor link, an amount will be credited to the website owner. Example of such service providers includes Google custom search integrated with Google AdSense (<http://adsense.google.com>).

vi) Display Search Widget: The Search Widget on a particular website displays sponsored search results related to their search for the visitors when they arrive from search engines (such as Google, Bing, Yahoo and others). It allows earning while adding relevant content user is searching for at the website page. Each click means more money for the website owners. Example of such service provider includes Infolinks (<http://www.infolinks.com>).

vii) Working with Affiliate Programme: The website can have affiliate membership of other sites. The affiliate agency will then pay a percentage of successful leads. Example: Commission Junction (www.cj.com), Amazon Associates (<https://affiliate-program.amazon.com/>), Flipkart (www.flipkart.com), Clickbank, etc.

viii) Sell Merchandise: One can sell merchandise such as music, books, tickets, branded clothing, travel - anything that feeds the website members' passions. The site owner can subscribe to a third-party shopping cart and promote the merchandise on their website.

Example: Badan Barman launched the CBSE UGC NET Guide Book (www.cbsetnet.com) website for aspirants of UGC NET Examination. During last three years, he has been independent, i.e., self-employed, for at least half of his work-related time and earning.

c) Create Paid Contents / Paid Membership Websites: Create your own library related website or a site based on one of your hobbies or passions that people need, want and will pay monthly or yearly basis to access. Paid Access lets one charge a fixed price or requests a

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contribution for site membership, or access to specific areas or feature of the website. Particularly the website owners should follow the option of paid membership / contents, if their content is much valuable to the target user group.

Example: Matthew Lesko, turned a home-based newsletter “Washington Researchers” on how to get free information from federal government agencies into a \$750,000 a year business.

d) Provide Paid Library Services: LIS degree holders can think on launching new library with fee-based services instead of previous free-based. It rather should act as information centre instead of a library, where the LIS professionals can provide a wide range of information on careers, education, employment matters, rights and entitlements, leisure, sport, travel and other opportunities for a fee.

Examples: Societe Francaise de Radiophonie (SFR) (<http://www.sfr.fr/>) is an organization of professionals who supply information over the phone for a fee.

Roger K. Summit is the founder of Dialog Information Services, and has been called the father of modern online search.

The Informatics India Ltd launched JGate and Open JGate besides other similar products. The founder of this company is a LIS degree holder.

Online shopping is a new trend these days. Keeping an eye on that concept, some companies have started delivering library services at the doorstep. Some such agencies include DoorstepBooks.com (<http://doorstepbooks.com>), Doorstep Library (<http://www.doorsteplibrary.org.uk/>), etc. But most interestingly it is seen that these services are run by the non LIS professionals. Therefore, it is the need of the hour for the LIS professionals to open up themselves and think in a new entrepreneurial direction.

e) Be a Vendor of Reading Materials, Library Materials / Furniture: The LIS graduates can also explore the possibilities of working as a mediator between the information producer and existing libraries and information centres. They can also think of supplying library materials like book cards, book slips, book pockets, membership cards, date labels, catalogue cards, spine labels, accession registers, book shelves, display racks, chairs, tables, computer hardware, and computer software for automation/digital libraries, security system, etc. to the libraries.

Examples: The Informatics India Ltd was started with the aim of supplying printed journals to the libraries. Nowadays it is supplying both printed and online journals as well as different databases to the libraries. The founder of this organization is a Librarian.

In Assam, Aditi Library Services has first initiated the entrepreneurial approach by supplying library stationary items and the person behind this organization is also a librarian.

f) Write to Get Paid: The LIS professionals can also write over other platform that pays them like HubPages (<http://hubpages.com>), upload videos over YouTube (www.youtube.com) which can later on be monetized with AdSense and so on.

g) Start an Online Business: The LIS professionals can start making an online merchandize (www.cafepress.com), books (www.ebay.com), craft (www.etsy.com), Fiverr (www.fiverr.com), Photo Store, Video (www.youtube.com) and sell it to the users.

h) Provide Training to Others: The LIS professionals can use their specialized technology skills to make money by taking classes or by providing training. They can also teach business houses how to use social media for business, deliver lecture as teleseminar, webinar, whose attendee will pay for the lecture, how to use self-publishing service to earn more revenue, etc..

Finding quality information is the biggest challenge of today. Librarian is the right person who has the expertise in refining information. So librarian can guide people, how to use internet and search engines proficiently from the vast amount of information.

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In every workplace the demand of critical thinkers are growing day by day to meet the challenge in information age. Librarian can earn a lot by producing critical thinkers with the skill of information literacy and instructing them to be independent learners.

Knowledge of copyright or intellectual property right is vital for publishers and authors. LIS professional can therefore provide tutorials on copyright issues. Librarian and vendors can also exchange their thoughts which will result profitable output for both.

So, LIS profession has a lot of unexplored ways to pave and covers immense scope to prosper and to make some difference in the society. Rest depends on us to what extend we can realize our potential within and avail those.

6. Conclusion: Entrepreneurial approaches are the means to bring certain distinctly remarkable changes and to lead LIS profession towards the better height in this fast paced challenging world. Librarians have historically been experts in finding the answers to the challenges basically people are facing in this digital era. But now time has come to understand our traits and utilize it with an entrepreneurial effort. If we look around of this profession we will certainly observe a number of possibilities and opportunities lying unutilized. So, it's time to show our capabilities to work in an open environment than to work in a library bounded by walls, to work in an environment where there is no consistent funding provision than to work with pre-defined budgetary provisions, to work in an environment where our survival will be rest on our response to a situation than to work in a stagnant environment. Entrepreneurial approach of library professionals can help in staying out from a dissatisfactory and monotonous professional life. It is a step towards setting up of an individual identity on the basis of his / her efficiency. However, before proceeding towards entrepreneurship, it will be better to be aware of the hardness to make a dollar in the real world of competition, money and power.

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