

1.1 INFORMATION: DIFFERENT MEDIA FOR DIFFERENT NEEDS

Gutenberg's combination of paper, ink, press and movable type triggered the first information revolution which resulted in the wide dissemination of ideas, general literacy and established contact between an individual and the world outside his immediate social, political and cultural environment.

The technology of mechanized print created the concept of mass proxy, a concept which is inherent in all contemporary media. Ideas are gathered, recorded, organized and interpreted by informed providers of information and are then distributed by various media to a wide audience. The recipient or user of this information is distanced from the source of information or events. While this allows vast amounts of information to be readily available, it limits the individual's understanding of ideas and events to the information he or she may have access to, rather than to his or her direct experience.

When assessing the suitability of various media to meet the information needs of an individual, several factors must be considered including the amount of necessary information; the need for the information to be immediate or timely; the need to be able to combine, relate or merge information from different sources in different forms; the need and ability to interact with the information media, to focus in on detail or to expand the scope of the search or scan as required; and the cost of distributing the information to its target market.

Examining traditional information media will provide an understanding of the potential impact of the new information access and distribution technologies.

PRINT

Gutenberg's technology allowed the distribution of ideas to a much broader audience, first in the form of printed books, then newspapers and magazines. Each of these means of distribution lends itself to different types of information.

Books permit the capture and distribution of a coherent and related set of information in a permanent form. Reference books such as encyclopedias, dictionaries and technical manuals are excellent means of providing access to comprehensive, cumulative information in a standardized format. They are, however, cumbersome and expensive, involve lengthy research and production, and often require a fair degree of skill to locate the needed information. In a society where the total information doubles every ten years, reference books are frequently out of date before the ink has dried.