

Suellen S. Adams
Adjunct Faculty, University of Rhode Island

Poster : A Model of the Information World of Serious Recreational Athletes

Abstract: This poster shows a model of information behavior among serious recreational athletes and examines the possible implications for other groups. The three-level model was derived in a primarily qualitative study of amateur duathletes, triathletes, runners, cyclists and swimmers who had trained for and completed at least one event.

Résumé: Cette affiche illustre un modèle de comportement informationnel chez les athlètes récréosportifs et examine l'implication possible d'autres groupes. Le modèle de trois phases est dérivé d'une étude principalement qualitative auprès de duathlètes, de triathlètes, de coureurs, de cyclistes et de nageurs amateurs qui ont participé à au moins un événement.

Research was undertaken to determine how serious recreational athletes, defined as those who had trained for and completed at least one event, attained the information needed to succeed in their athletic endeavors.

The research was intended to be essentially qualitative and exploratory. The researcher, herself a serious recreational athlete, put out a call through social network sources to others with similar interests, she also asked several race directors to include a postcard in their materials. She then extended her reach to a large group by telling all respondents to pass on the survey link to others with similar interests thus making use of a snowball technique. This approach yielded respondents who were road runners, trail runners, triathletes, duathletes, cyclists and swimmers with varying levels of experience who had trained for and finished at least one event.

The initial research was conducted in two stages. First, an online survey that asked about the sources serious recreational athletes used to find information on various aspects of their athletic activities. Then, a sample of volunteers was interviewed to get more in-depth information. In the end there were 396 responses to the survey and just over 30 interviews conducted. In an extension of the study, further qualitative questions were also submitted to a subset of the initial survey population.

The researcher conducted a detailed analysis of the answers from the online survey, both qualitative and quantitative, regarding information seeking and use. The interviews and qualitative questions were coded with the help of NVivo 9 and a model of the information environment of serious recreational athletes emerged.

The information environment of serious recreational athletes exists on three levels. These levels are the written, the human community and the self. On each level there are two layers of information sources, one formal and one informal. For written information formal sources include specialized books, magazines, and certain specialized web sources. Informal sources include forums and discussion sites. On the human level, formal sources include specialized professionals and intermediaries such as coaches and nutritionists to whom athletes have chosen to turn; informal sources are part of the community such as fellow athletes. The level of the self consists of formal measurable data such as changes in health, speed, and endurance; informal sources are internal and characterized by respondents as "it feels right" or "it just

works for me."

This poster will detail further the model, how it was arrived at and its possible implications for other fields of endeavor.