

Palmoilis - Your Information Partner in the Palm Oil Business

□ Mardhiah Mohd Zin, Sakinah Che Embi, Fatimah Hanim Ahmad Zain and Mohd Arif Ahmad

THE INFORMATION SCENARIO

With the advent of the Internet resulting in an information overload amongst the researchers and knowledge workers of PORIM, there is an increasing need by the Palm Information Centre of the Institute to enhance its database service PALMOILIS launched in 1993 to be more user-friendly, more interactive by allowing users to interact online, more responsive to user's needs as well as instilling a sense of database ownership amongst the Information Providers (IPs).

The Palm Information Centre, being the gatekeeper of intellectual property and knowledge capital of the Institute, collects and collates all the published data and information and repackages them into digital form, making them accessible on the Internet via their gateway PALMOILIS. Since the Institute's establishment in 1979, much data and information have been independently generated at the various R&D laboratories, pilot plants and research stations of the Institute. PALMOILIS is an attempt to compile comprehensively from the unrivalled collection of these varied information resources and to make it accessible to the palm oil industry, the government sector and the public at large. The gatekeeper-gateway relations of the Centre and PALMOILIS is illustrated in *Figure 1*.

INFORMATION GATEKEEPER ROLE

Digitization Project

The Centre acquires all published litera-

ture and information on palm oil and oil palm globally. In 1997, the Centre embarked on its digitization programme to scan in all the PORIM-generated published information, so that PALMOILIS now is a full-text database, carrying the digitised images of the original references cited in the bibliography. In short, all PORIM publications are digitised for viewing over the Internet. Due to copyright restrictions, all other non-PORIM references only carry the abstracts/contents pages, wherever available. This Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) facility is accessible on PALMSEARCH database which now comprises approximately 23 000 images of scanned text of PORIM publications.

The PALMSEARCH database is one of the few OPACs on the Internet that provides a full-text content with searching facilities to view and search the retrospective collection electronically. The Centre has set up a digitization laboratory to facilitate the digitization programme, *i.e.* converting the original paper format into digital images to allow users to read online. This online searching facility is complemented with other databases developed to assist the business community.

The PALMCLIENT database provides directory-type information on business enterprises in the palm-related industry, providing the corporate profiles of millers; refineries; estates and plantations; bulking installations; equipment suppliers, food manufacturers, *etc.* Another directory database, PALMCONSULT, lists the experts in the industry for technical consultancy.

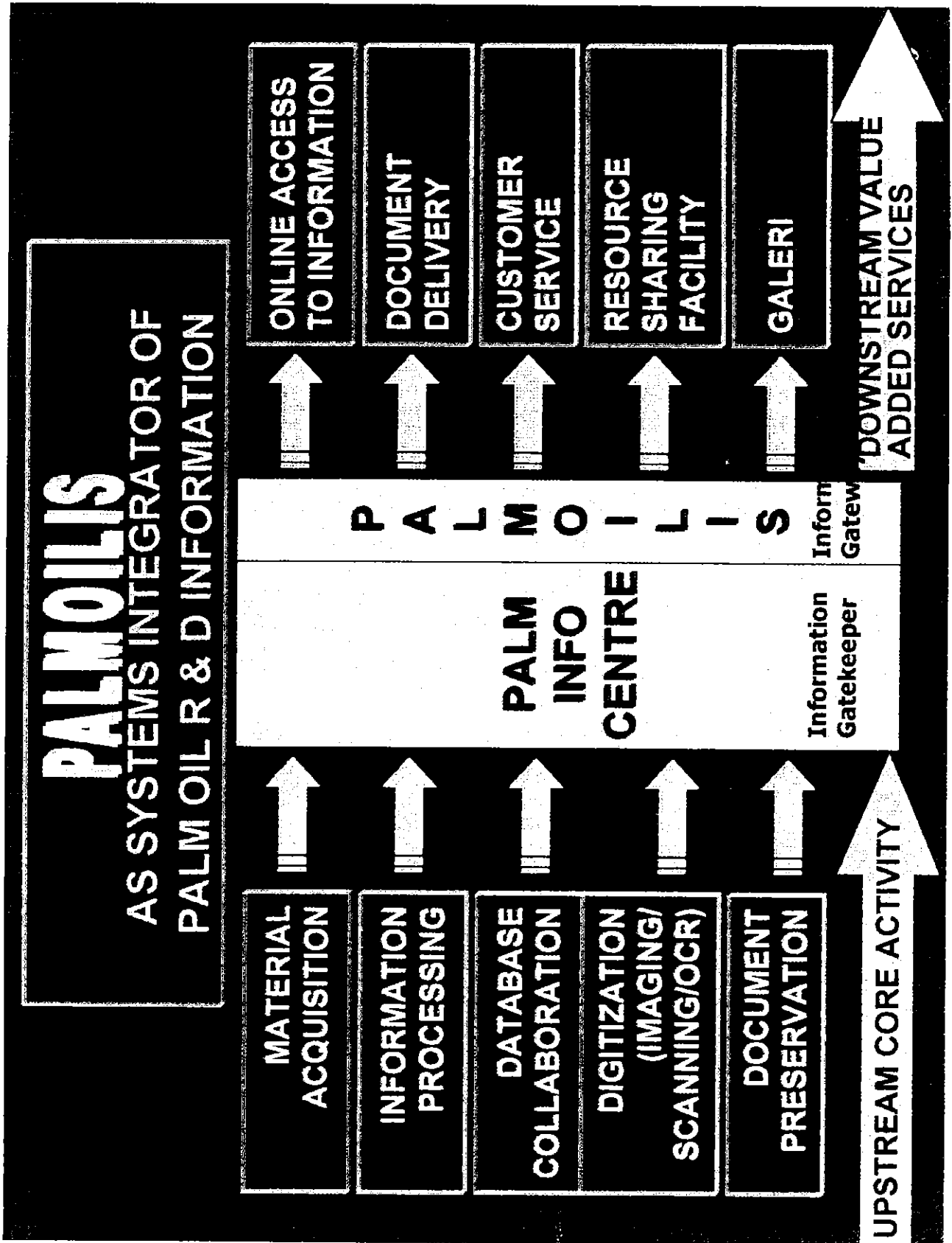


Figure 1. PALMOILIS as systems integrator of palm oil R&D information

PORIMTECH database provides all the commercialisable technologies of the Institute for industry take-up. This database not only provides a brief description of the new technology/process/product but also gives hypertext links to the researchers/inventors who developed them for further business transactions.

PALMTESTS is a database that lists all the test methods on palm oil, searchable by keyword searching.

Database Collaboration with Information Providers (IPs)

The Centre believes in user-end computing, resulting in database collaboration work with the researchers cum Information Providers (IPs) from the various divisions of PORIM. In short, the PALMOILIS gateway doubles up not only as a searching facility but also as a platform for centralised input for other divisions/units in building up their own inhouse databases. Database ownership is a catalyst towards knowledge-sharing efforts in PALMOILIS development. User-driven databases are as follows:

PALMSTATS: Statistics on palm oil/oil palm by the Technoeconomics Unit.

PALMPRODUCT: PORIM-approved product formulations by the Food Uses Group of the Chemistry and Technology Division.

BIOLINE: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on oil palm by the Biology Division

TASCLIENT/TASCESS: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) on palm oil by the Technical Advisory Services Unit.

PALMOILIS – THE INFORMATION GATEWAY

The end result of two decades of extensive material acquisition and information processing activities is reflected in the PALMOILIS Homepage at <http://netra.porim.gov.my> and <http://161.142.141.112>. PALMOILIS is the virtual gateway to the Institute's information and

knowledge assets, opening up the world of palm oil on the Internet.

Access to the retrospective files of this databank requires membership registration for a minimal fee to maintain the UserIDs and Passwords in the system. Various online library services are made available for registered users, such as searching the backfiles of PORIM Publications; checking their loans status; making reservations for resource materials; viewing their SDI hits (Selective Dissemination of Information) online; and e-mailing requests for documents. These online library transactions are offered as part of our efforts towards a digital library and to encourage users to use the Internet in support of our Government's call towards a computer-literate society.

Online enquiries on general information regarding the palm oil and oil palm are also entertained at the TASCLIENT and BIOLINE databases respectively. The question-and-answer format of these databases also facilitate users to e-mail directly to the resource persons/technical experts for more detailed information pertaining to their enquiries.

INFORMATION ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This pay-for-information practice via the registered membership scheme is not a new concept but is now increasingly acceptable amongst clients who are in need of information. Hitherto, the information culture was free of charge (FOC). Unlike the medical profession, the possession of information has never been a matter of life and death. Hence, when information is obtained without any charge, the assumption is that there is no value tagged to that information. Nevertheless, the costs of purchasing processing, disseminating resource materials and administrative staff costs are reflected in the company budget, hence making libraries a liability rather than as an asset to the company.

However, as we approach the new millenium, information and knowledge is

destined to be a crucial asset in the era of the knowledge-based economy. As Peter Drucker said, 'Knowledge is being applied to knowledge itself. It is now fast becoming the one factor in production, sidelining both capital and labour.' In business, one needs to have the right information to be able to make good decisions to survive in the competitive market place. The demand for information to support business activities has given information the leverage as a new commodity that companies cannot do without.

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT - THE COMPANY LIFEBLOOD

The future of the company depends on adjusting to the changing wants, needs and demands of the consumer. Change requires research, and research is done orderly, scientifically, and by design, hence generating new data, information and knowledge. Research is change, and change is necessary if a company intends to be productive and competitive in the fast-changing world. The strategic use of information and knowledge now determines the rise and fall of the corporation. Information now is a matter of life and death to survive in the new millenium.

INFORMATION USE AND COMPANY PRODUCTIVITY

It is increasingly recognised within the business circle that the strategic use of information improves the competitive positioning of a company and the country in the global market place. In order to use information strategically, business and industry need access to information resources. Many of the information resources and much of the human expertise exist in libraries and information centres of the companies concerned. Thus, as the information keeper and gateway of the company, libraries and information centres are energetic and creative participants in economic development.

Various studies are revealing the linkages between information use, user productivity, corporate profitability and national

productivity. King Associates (Mobley, 1991) studies conducted in the United States have found a number of effects of information use on productivity. Their research results report that productivity is positively correlated with the amount of reading. Professionals who read a great deal produced more formal records of reports, made more oral presentations, received higher salaries, and were consulted more times. The studies also found that the use of information resulted in savings in time and use of equipment, activities were completed faster and with greater quality, and more new activities were initiated. Another study by Robert Hayes and Harold Broko (Mobley, 1991) found that industries with a high level of information expenditures per employee are those with high productivity rates. Other studies undertaken by the Special Libraries Association (SLA), US found that the use of information professionals often saved time and money, and thus made the users of this information more productive and/or the company more profitable. One example revealed that a US\$11 database search saved a company over 200 hours of laboratory work. Another example told of a company which had invested US\$500 000 in research and development costs which could have been avoided by spending US\$300 to do a patent search.

In conclusion, access to information and knowledge is crucial to the survival of any organisation to meet the ever-changing demands of customers. To have access to a ready source of palm oil and oil palm information is a boon to all sectors involved in this Industry. Subscription to PALMOILIS database service will give you the extra edge above your competitors.

PALMOILIS - YOUR INFORMATION PARTNER IN THE PALM OIL BUSINESS\$

REFERENCE

MOBLEY, E R (1991). Libraries and productivity. In *Special Libraries*. Spring Issues, 1991. pp. 106-108.