

## Integrated Communication Services

As illustrated by the Figure, Integrated Communications is a model in which all of the information products for a company are developed and maintained in a coordinated fashion. It is especially applicable to high-tech firms, or any company that must supply instructional materials for their products or services.



### Economy and the Reuse of Information

A chief advantage of Integrated Communications is its economy. Information objects are created once and reused multiple times--though they may be modified or reshaped for different purposes and different packages. For example, the design of a software product might require a user to perform a series of steps involving clicking on menus, typing in fields, and selecting options on a dialog box. This series of steps is written as a procedure in the online Help. The same procedure object can then be reused in a printed user manual. It may also be revised into an exercise for a training manual, and summarized as an example in a piece of sales literature.

### Information Design

The economy gains of Integrated Communications are made possible through the discipline of information design. An information designer analyzes the components of a communications problem and constructs a solution based on established principles and recognized information structures. Information is produced in small units (or objects) that are then combined into larger structures (and can be recombined and reused in other structures). The design and development processes are analogous those of object-oriented software.

## Organizational Issues

Key to the success of the Integrated Communications model is the communications team. A central team "owns" all of the information products for the enterprise, through all phases of the product cycle. The team includes, or hires, individuals with the talents necessary to analyze, plan, develop and produce all of the information products.

This does not mean that the communications team operates apart from the rest of the organization. On the contrary, the communicators constantly seek input and feedback from other groups in the enterprise. They work closely with the Development and Support groups on product design, documentation, and help, and with Sales and Marketing on proposals, articles, and sales literature. At all stages, they seek open communications with customers and clients. In fact, by the nature of its work, the communications team can knit together disparate groups in an enterprise and help it stay focused on its customers.

## Multiple Media

Information design and the Integrated Communications model support the use of digital media in all its forms. Information objects can be any media, including not only text and graphics, but sound, animation, and video. For example, a multimedia product demo might be prepared as a sales presentation, but parts of it can also be reused in a computer-based tutorial.

## For Further Reading

My ideas about Integrated Communications continue to evolve as I work with clients and test my theories in real business situations. If you are interested in the concept of Integrated Communications, I suggest the following for further reading:

- *The Fifth Discipline* by Peter M. Senge, Doubleday, New York, New York, 1990. All about cycles and feedback loops, and how they work for good or ill in organizations.
- *Meeting of the Minds* by Vincent P. Barabba, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, Massachusetts, 1995. How to create the market-based enterprise, using communication from customers to drive business decisions.
- *Designing Business* by Clement Mok, Adobe Press, San Jose California, 1996. How to harness the digital revolution for business communications.
- *Information Anxiety* by Richard Saul Wurman, Doubleday, New York, New York, 1990. An introduction to information design principles by one of its leading experts.