9.20: Evaluating Interviewees

Evaluating the credentials of those who might be interviewed is a small research task in itself. A sensible first step is to review all of the background material you have already collected about your information tasks and to make a list of those who have written or spoken on the subject.

For example, consider the background research for an advertising campaign on behalf of the Coalition for Literacy. The coalition seeks volunteers to work with functionally illiterate adults. Potential interviewees include officials of the coalition and of other groups concerned with adult illiteracy. Annual reports, newsletters, and boards of directors’ minutes of meetings also reveal names of important individuals in this field. Government documents display the names of members of Congress who have shown concern about the problem and the identities of specialists who have testified before congressional committees. Some of these specialists have published articles on the subject in scholarly journals and have been quoted in news magazines.

Another type of expertise you might seek is that of people who have themselves experienced the disability of illiteracy. Their expertise may not be evident in the indexes and journals, but members of the literacy organizations probably can help you to locate them. Perhaps some of the formerly illiterate adults have gone on to become volunteer teachers or members of the groups combating illiteracy. You can search a “create-one-yourself” social network site such as Ning.com to find people who have created an online community for those dealing with the issue.
After drawing up a roster of promising interviewees, you need to check the reputation of those on the list. You can do this by checking such standard reference sources as Who’s Who. In this case, Who’s Who in Education may include biographical information on some of those who have written on the subject or spoken before congressional committees. In addition, clicking on the author’s name on Amazon.com may reveal titles of relevant books written by these people.

Credentialing potential interviewees by their digital profile is now an important step for communicators to take. Checking social networking sites to see what people say about themselves, what interests they have, the people they know and connect with can give you important information about a potential interviewee’s likely contribution to your message. Professionals are likely to have a LinkedIn page; “informal” sources are likely to have a Facebook page, and many individuals “live” in more than one digital community that represents various aspects of their interests and connections.