SOME LESS CONVENTIONAL SOURCES OF INDUSTRIAL INFORMATION

A brief account of less conventional industrial information sources is given. Need for a detailed survey of such sources, and regular and systematic collection, storage and dissemination of information contained in them is stressed.

INTRODUCTION

Information seekers, in general, consult published and conventional sources of information such as encyclopaedias, handbooks, monographs, reviews, abstracting and indexing periodicals, primary journals, etc. However, if the information sought, is on a particular industry or on some industrial topic, the relevant information is not usually available in the above mentioned conventional sources. In such cases, one has to obtain the information and data from various less conventional sources which include unpublished sources. Such situations generally arise with techno-economic information, though quite often, technological information like details of processes or machinery and equipment is also not available in standard books. Even if such information is available, processes followed in the country are not known.

These less conventional sources of industrial information come in various forms such as irregular mimeographed publications, reports of meetings, papers read in seminars, feasibility studies, project reports, market reports, handouts and other publicity materials, hand written manuscripts as well as oral communications. Such sources are available to anyone, but the generators and holders of this type of information are so many that locating them often becomes a difficult task.

Much of the technological and techno-economic information is accumulated in the offices of all the government departments and agencies dealing with industrial development, R&D centres, manufacturers’ associations, consultancy organizations and financial institutions. Besides, industrial institutions are one of the important sources of such material as they are prime generators of industrial information.

In the following paragraphs the less conventional industrial information sources are discussed at some length under two heads, viz. (i) technological sources, and (ii) techno-economic sources.

LESS CONVENTIONAL SOURCES OF TECHNOLOGICAL INFORMATION

Processing of raw materials, details of machinery and equipment, and description of manufacturing processes are generally available in encyclopaedias, monographs, journals, etc. However, this is not true with each and every industrial product. Specially, when the industry is less important or smaller in size, it becomes rather difficult to procure such information. Particularly, when one is seeking information on the process followed in the country, the problem becomes all the more difficult.

The following are some of the less conventional sources of such information: (i) newsletters or house journals of large industrial houses; (ii) survey reports on industries prepared by various agencies of central or state governments; (iii) Tariff Commission reports; (iv) impact schemes and prospect sheets prepared by the Small Industries Development Organization (SIDO); (v) annual reports of the...
R&D institutes engaged in industrial research or information available with them in the form of know-how, expertise or experience; (vi) technical analysis reports prepared by organizations dealing with industries and ad-hoc and irregular publications brought out by them; (vii) various reports prepared by public or private consultancy organizations engaged in feasibility report preparation, design and engineering, plant erection, etc.; (viii) advertisements of industrial products; (ix) publications like standards and specifications, British Pharmacopoeia (B.P.), Indian Pharmacopoeia (I.P.), etc. which sometimes give manufacturing and other technical details.

Though the main aim of newsletters or house journals of R&D organizations or business houses is not to cover technological information, there are house journals like Changing Scene of Indian Oxygen which sometimes discusses the technological developments in the field, the organization deals with.

For one reason or the other, from time to time, the Government of India or various state governments have been conducting surveys on different industries. One example of such report is Examination of Indian Tannin Materials with Reference to Ink Manufacture, published as Bulletin No.80, Department of Industries, Government of Bengal, which gives details of writing ink manufacture. Such detailed information is not available in any standard sources.

Similarly, the Tariff Commission reports or impact schemes/prospect sheets prepared by SIDO are good sources of technological information, though their basic aim is different from providing details of manufacturing processes. For example, the details of zip fasteners is given minutely in Zip Fastender Industry, published by Indian Tariff Board, Government of India, Bombay, 1951.

Similarly, Barbed Wires, published as Small Industry Scheme No.34, Development Commissioner, Small Scale Industries, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956, has been the only source of information on barbed wires.

Annual reports of R&D institutes sometimes are vital sources of information, specially when a particular institute is the only one engaged in a topic on which information is not available elsewhere. In case, the institute has developed a process or product, it serves as a source of know-how for that process/product. For example, the Regional Research Laboratory, Hyderabad, is the proper source of information on the manufacture of hydrogenated castor oil as the Laboratory has developed a process for the manufacture of this product.

Sometimes R&D scientists having sufficient expertise with them serve as important sources of a particular information.

A few organizations bring out at periodical intervals technical analysis reports on the industries they are dealing with. The Electronics Commission is one such organization which has been bringing out such reports on various electronic industries which are very informative.

The consultancy organizations, on the basis of published information as well as by undertaking detailed surveys, provide a number of services like preparation of project feasibility reports, detailed designs including plant layout, product development, defect analysis and its remedy, turnkey project services, etc. In this process, they accumulate a lot of information which is hard to be found elsewhere.

Sometimes, the technological information has also to be culled out from publicity materials and advertisement of industrial products.

Though their aim is to provide information on standards, specifications and quality control, publications like ISI specifications, B.P. or I.P. have stood many times the lone sources of technological information. For example, while compiling an article on stoves industry for ‘The Wealth of India - Industrial Products’, the author of this paper had to depend solely on the ISI specifications on the project for the manufacturing process of stoves. Similarly, for an article on surgical dressings, B.P. proved to be the solitary source of information on the topic.

LESS CONVENTIONAL SOURCES OF TECHNO-ECONOMIC INFORMATION

Techno-economic information mainly encompasses information on manufacturing units, their capacities, production, demand, con-
sumption, targets of capacity and production, prices, export, import, etc.

The conventional sources of such information are annual reports of various organizations involved in industrial development, government publications like 'Guidelines for Industries', 'Statistical Abstracts India', Annual Survey of Industries', 'Monthly Statistics of Production of Selected Industries of India', 'Monthly Statistics of Foreign Trade of India', etc.

The above sources are generally backdated while industrial periodicals meagrely cover such topics. In such circumstances the recourse is only to less conventional sources.

Ad-hoc and irregular publications, appearing generally in mimeographed form, brought out by various organizations serve as relatively up-to-date sources of information. The Indian Chemical Statistics 1981-82 brought out by the Department of Chemicals & Fertilizers, Ministry of Petroleum, Chemicals & Fertilizers, Government of India, New Delhi, is an example of such publications. In the past, the same organisation has brought out a similar publication on drugs and pharmaceuticals industry. The Department of Petroleum has also been issuing similar publications from time to time, on petroleum and petrochemical industries. However, all such publications are for restricted circulation.

Newspapers, specially economic and commercial ones, apart from covering full articles on certain industrial topics give, at one place or the other, a passing reference to techno-economic information. For example, the Trends column in the Hindustan Times sometimes presents a number of manufacturing units of a particular product indicating whether the industry is old or being set up for the first time in the country. Sometimes production figures and capacity are also given.

In other papers such information is covered under the headings Industrial Studies, Economic Information, etc.

Besides, Chairmens' statement at annual meetings of the firms published in the newspapers or items like Company Reports of Financial Express or Company Profiles and Company Notes of Chemical Times serve as useful sources of techno-economic information.

Even announcements for equity shares or debentures give a brief picture of a particular industry in the country. Tender notices give an idea of the manufacturer or supplier of a particular product. This is also true with advertisements of industrial products.

Newsletters of some manufactures' associations and regular or ad-hoc publications of industrial development corporations or banks are also good sources of techno-economic information. For example, the Newsletter issued by the Vanaspati Manufacturers Association presents every detail about the Indian vanaspati industry. Similarly, the Bank of India issues two regular leaflets, viz. (i) Economic Information, and (ii) Industrial Studies. The former provides latest techno-economic news and the latter presents a detailed profile of a particular industry like Indian glass industry, Machine tools industry, etc.

Annual reports of public and private industries and handouts or publicity materials brought out by them also serve as information sources of techno-economic information. Industries having R&D units also provide technological information in there reports.

Besides, publications or literature brought out by the stock exchanges may also prove to be a good source of information.

Consultancy organizations engaged in the preparation of demand studies, techno-economic studies, export potential studies, market surveys or project identification are, in fact, one of the up-to-date sources of techno-economic information. It is, however, hard to extract such information from private organizations without paying a good price for their products.

As is the case with newspapers, industrial periodicals also give stray data which need careful scanning of each and every item and culling out useful information.

BIBLIOGRAPHIC CONTROL

The foregoing descriptions of less conventional sources of industrial information are based on
the author's personal experience. There might be many more sources of such information; at present, there is no bibliographic control of them. In fact, generators and holders of such sources are so many that locating them would be a topic for a big project. The bulk of such heterogeneous information sources are neither catalogued nor abstracted.

CONCLUSION

Keeping in view the increasing importance of such literature, it is high time for one of the organizations dealing with industrial information to take up the survey on such sources and their generators, and collect, store and disseminate them widely. It should also generate increasing awareness about the usefulness of this information among its prospective users. The organization that takes the initiative also find out ways and means of bibliographical control on such information so that it may come within the ambit of formal information systems. This organization could be separated as a depository of all possible less conventional industrial information sources.