

## The iChallenge 2016

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On 29<sup>th</sup> September 2016, the Sainsbury Library played host to 328 MBA students in a succession of teams throughout the day. Clustered around tables, they pored over cartoon strips, tapped away on laptops and scribbled furiously on sheets of paper. This was the iChallenge, a now annual event in the library's – and the Saïd Business School's – calendar, designed to introduce the students to the library's services in a fun and innovative way. But what makes the iChallenge special, and why would the library go to the trouble of organising such an event?

### The Problem

- Over time, Sainsbury Library staff, in consultation with careers department colleagues, had noticed a lack of full utilisation of the library's considerable resources. MBA students' time on the programme is short – just 12 months – with a busy teaching schedule. They receive carefully-targeted reading lists, but often do not take the chance to explore beyond these, due to the time and effort involved in seeking out information off the beaten track. The library holds a vast wealth of databases and other research channels which could direct students to key information about the market place, industries and potential employers, yet many may graduate without discovering these tools, and consequently, without developing the broad knowledge base needed to stand out at interviews.

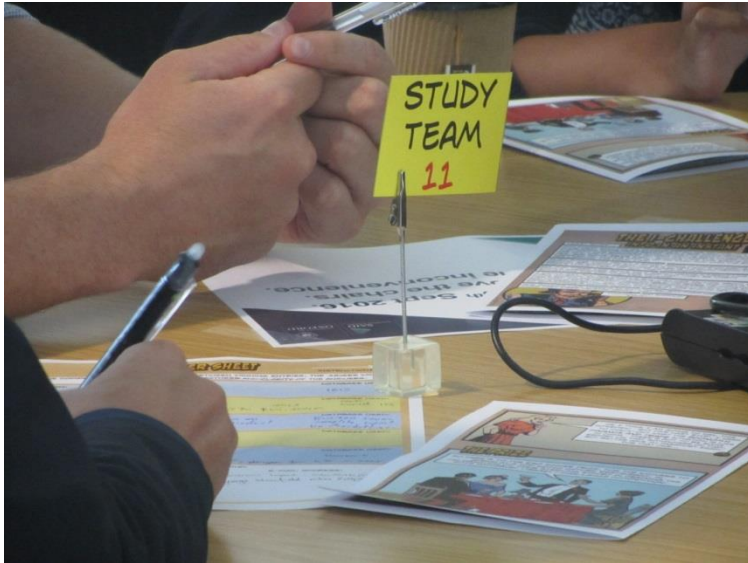


The iChallenge booklet and answer sheet.

The library, therefore, needed to find a way to introduce MBA students to the rich supply of resources available to them. However, formal training sessions can be poorly attended or pose scheduling problems, and it can be difficult to present the content in an inspiring and relevant way. A different format was needed, and so the iChallenge sprang into being.

### The Solution

- This alternative to a conventional library induction takes the form of a team competition, held as part of the three-week MBA launch in September. Each study group is presented with a set of information-sourcing challenges, drawn from a cartoon-strip story about a job applicant carrying out background research in order to impress her potential employer. The cartoon strip contains areas to investigate relating to the featured company, as well as clues to the different databases from which the information could be obtained. The teams, each



The students were grouped into teams to encourage competition.

supplied with a laptop, have the task of tracking down this information and citing which databases they use to source it.

The aim is to introduce the students to the library and its resources (for many, it may be their first opportunity to set foot in the library), by getting them actually using the different research tools to find real information. This mode of delivery, it was hoped, would demonstrate the value and relevance of what the library has to offer, in a way that an abstract

training exercise could not. It would also have the advantage of drawing on the MBA students' natural competitive spirit – alongside the opportunity to learn vital career enhancement skills, the £50 voucher for the winning team to spend at a top Oxford restaurant is an extra motivating factor. Not only that, but there would be an additional social benefit: the iChallenge would serve as an 'ice-breaker' and bonding experience as the students get to know their cohort and work together in their allocated study teams for the very first time.

Meeting all these aims necessitated collaboration from the whole Sainsbury Library team. What was involved in organising and delivering this event?

### The Implementation

- The iChallenge questions were based around five different profiles of real companies, ranging from Amazon to BP, which had to be researched and tested. These questions were then formulated into a scripted conversation, which included some subtle (and some not-so-subtle) hints as to the most suitable databases for sourcing the answers, as well as any usernames and passwords required. Then the comic strip was illustrated using 'Comic Life 3' software to create an authentic and professional finish.



It was pleasing to see a sustained level of engagement.

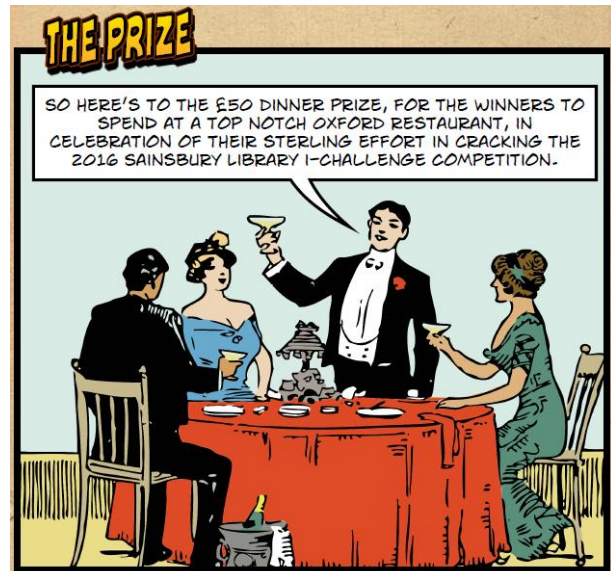
Just as vital was the organisation of the logistics for the day itself, which involved dividing the study groups between eight forty-five-minute sessions, planning the timings, co-ordinating with programme administrators, sourcing the prizes, setting up tables with laptops and printing

the materials. Each session ran as follows: After an introduction from the Librarian in the Founders' Room, the students moved to the library and gathered in their study teams. They then had 25 minutes to complete the iChallenge, before handing in their answer sheets and receiving a final debrief on the continuing role the library could play during their time on the MBA programme

### The Evaluation

- How successful was the iChallenge? Did it meet its aims of introducing the MBA students to all that the library has to offer them? As expected, during the sessions, very little instruction was needed – the students simply needed pointing in the direction of the information sources, and quickly picked up the mechanics of navigating their way around. As to the lasting effects, for this cohort, it may be too soon to tell; however, early signs look promising. The library desk has already been met with a flurry of requests for personal accounts for Capital IQ, a key database for information and analysis on companies and markets. Following previous iChallenges, helpdesk staff noted that the types of enquiries coming their way have shown an evident increase in fluency with the library's databases. Furthermore, initial reports from the careers department suggested that, unlike in pre-iChallenge years, they have not received a single question about how to find financial, company or industry information when preparing for job interviews. Instead, the students now seem aware that this valuable material comes via the library, and it is there for them to discover.

And what do the students themselves say? One approached the librarian at the end and said simply 'Thank you for making it fun.'



A panel from the iChallenge.