

The Information Search Process for the Perfect Rug
LI 802XR Theoretical Foundations of Diagnosis & Customization

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Neutral Questions Asked during the Interview

The following neutral questions were asked during the interview. Some of the questions were repeated at different parts of the interview:

1. Could you describe your information need?
2. Could you tell me a little more about it?
3. What are some of the steps you undertook?
4. What kind of assistance did you receive?
5. How did you feel at the different stages?
 - a. Initially?
 - b. Once you started looking?
 - c. When you found what you thought you were looking for?
 - d. After you made your decision, but before it was in place?
 - e. Once your undertaking was finished?

Lori is a vivacious woman in her forties. She has a college education, lives in the suburbs, and works in a middle school as a receptionist. Lori is a very talkative and open person. Before we began the interview, Lori spoke about the fun she has facilitating her Sunday School class for adults with teenagers. This statement, combined with the fact that she is a school receptionist, quickly gave the clues that Lori most likely has strong interpersonal skills. It is also obvious that she would be an “E” on the Myers-Briggs. During the interview, Lori spoke about the importance of finding the right color, and about looking through many catalogs. I took these clues to mean that she is a visual learner.

Lori’s information need was to find a large area rug for her living room. She needed to find a rug that would both match her décor and be within her budget. In July, Lori and her husband had the wall-to-wall carpet in the living room torn out and had replaced it with wood flooring. Lori said that she knew, even before they put in the wood flooring, that she would want a large area rug for her living room.

Once Lori decided to begin her search, she started with catalogs first. She spent about three weeks in August looking through catalogs, mostly to get some idea of what area rugs cost today. She studied the catalogs, “dog earring” pages. Lori received additional catalogs and suggestions from neighbors and friends, with whom she had shared her information need. Lori also checked into two rug companies on the Internet. She found the rugs at these sites to be expensive, especially with the additional shipping charges. Lori was not satisfied with her Internet searches. Downloading the pictures of the rugs “took forever” and she said that she “couldn’t tell the true colors.” As an example, Lori said that the “yellow wasn’t yellow...it was actually harvest gold.”

Lori stated that after a total of four weeks of “preliminary looking” through catalogs and the Internet, she was ready to look in person. Lori waited until her mother was in town, and then, in one day, they visited six stores near her home that carried area rugs. Lori’s mom was “not the person making the final decision” or the person who Lori was “looking to please,” but Lori said she did value her mother’s opinion. They found one store that was “too fancy.” “The rugs weren’t even new; they were investment pieces!” Lori exclaimed. Two of the stores, which are also large hardware stores, had “cheapy rugs.” After that day of looking, Lori had narrowed down the search to two stores that had similar selections of rugs she liked – Benchmark Express and Home Expo.

Lori was now willing to take her husband to help make the final selection. She said that if she hadn’t done all of the work to this point, her husband would have chosen the first rug he saw because he didn’t care. This wasn’t his information need. After visiting the two stores with her husband, they had two or three rugs they were interested in that were available at both stores. However, Lori now spent a week “mulling over the decision.” She said that the decision was going to be based on the price and the availability – how soon they could get the rug in their house.

Lori and her husband went back to both stores after the week of “mulling” to make the decision and the purchase. This is what she said about the two stores:

Benchmark Express

- “No salespeople to be found”
- “Had to seek out a person to ask for help”
- “Had to run back and forth to a desk to ask a person to answer questions”
- “Can you get me a rug in this size and style and color?”
- “Salesperson couldn’t answer the questions, he had to check with someone else”

Home Expo

- “Salespeople were more knowledgeable”
- “There was one policy for everything and they could get it in any size”
- “There were no delivery charges and they could get it quickly”
- “Salesperson was walking behind me and he had knowledge of his products and he knew what I was looking for”
- “Friendlier”
- “Nicer caliber of store”

Lori and her husband ordered the rug that they liked in the size and color they wanted from Home Expo. They ordered it on Saturday and it was delivered to their home on the following Thursday by Federal Express. She said that she would definitely recommend the store, and that she had already told others about her positive experience with the Home Expo.

Looking back at her rug information hunt, Lori said, “I always imagined that once I decided that I had the money, there would be a multitude of rugs to choose from.” She said that she was not disappointed with the rug that she chose, but that she had experienced frustration at times with the search. This was “an emotional, personal thing,” Lori stated. “My searches have to be in person; I need to see the rugs on the

rack.” The price was originally the crucial deciding point. Some of the catalogs showed rugs for thousands of dollars, but she wasn’t even interested. “I was trying to find a rug under \$400 to fit my needs and my budget. I just needed a rug to get through the next few years,” said Lori.

Lori’s information need may not be the standard research project, but it is the type of search that people undergo everyday. It followed Kuhlthau’s ISP model.

- **Task Initiation** occurred for Lori before her hardwood floors were installed. She knew that at some time in the near future she would be looking for an area rug. Lori at this time had ambiguity about the project since she wasn’t ready to start it.
- When Lori began to look at rugs in the catalogs and on the Internet, she was in the **selection stage**. Although her search topic was an area rug, she used the catalogs and the Internet to start to see what was available and to determine the cost criteria. Lori said that she was anticipating what she might find and was excited at this stage.
- As the weeks went on, and she continued looking at the catalogs, she began to be “dejected.” She said that “nothing was seen right away.” She also said that she “lost interest.” This would be the **exploration stage**. Lori was attempting to “investigate the topic and obtain a background understanding of its parameters” (Thomas, 1999, p.35). She found searching on the Internet extremely frustrating, a fact that she reiterated three times during the interview. The exploration stage continued when Lori took her mom out to area stores to look at rugs.

- Lori had moved into the **formulation stage** when she felt that two stores had similar selections of rugs that she could show her husband. She was able to focus on the selections available at the two shows.
- The first time Lori and her husband visited the two stores together, they gathered the pertinent information about their choices, which they had to agree upon. This would be considered the **collection stage**, which they continued in the second visit. During the week between the two visits, Lori “mulled” over the information that had been collected.
- The **presentation stage** occurred at the end of the second visit to the stores, when they made a decision. She weighed all of the information that she had gathered and then narrowed, and based her decision on three factors:
 - ✓ cost, which included shipping charges versus free shipping;
 - ✓ availability – how soon could they get the exact product that they wanted; and
 - ✓ the perceived competence, accessibility and helpfulness of the information service providers (sales representatives) at the stores.Lori said she was extremely excited at this presentation stage, when the final decision had been made. She eagerly awaited the delivery of her new rug, after a process that had taken seven weeks from her first look at a catalog.
- When the rug arrived, Lori was in the **evaluation stage**. She said she was “so proud once it was done. “ She received a compliment from her

husband for all of the hard work she had undertaken to find the right rug, and she stated that both of them were pleased with their selection. They have also had positive feedback from others who have seen the rug in place.

Lori's information professionals included her neighbors and friends, who gave her catalogs and suggestions about places to look for rugs. These were offered in the invitational mood. The other informational professionals were sales representatives at various stores that also influenced her decision-making. When she was in the formulation, collection, and presentation stages, the information professionals became as important to her as the actual rug itself. When Lori was in the indicative mood, the information professionals at BenchMark Express weren't able to meet her needs and assist her in collecting the information she needed. She had to go out of her way to hunt down the information she needed, which is information they should have easily provided. The information professionals at Home Expo, however, were "knowledgeable" and "friendly." They were on hand to answer her questions as she formed them. Lori said that when she is ready to get an area rug for her dining room, she will return to Home Expo. She has also recommended them to several friends for their service. One additional item of note was that Lori utilized her mother for her valued opinions, which occurred during her invitational mood; and Lori shared the decision-making process with her husband during the indicative mood.

A suggestion for improvement in the BenchMark Express store would be to increase the customer service training for their sales people. Those information professionals working in a department should be able to answer questions about that

department. Lori also mentioned that she would have liked a standard policy. At BenchMark Express, they had different rules about which rugs could be created in different sizes, and there were very different prices. At Home Expo, Lori found that they had the same policy about the sizing and pricing of the rugs. All rugs could be created in several different sizes, prices were clearly marked, and the sales people were available on hand to help answer individual questions.

Thomas, N.P. (1999). *Information Literacy and Information Skills Instruction*.

Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, Inc.