

# INFO 200 Blog 03: Information Seeking for Makers

📅 October 3, 2019 (<https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/musick/2019/10/03/info-200-blog-03-information-seeking-for-makers/>)

👤 Dani Musick (<https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/musick/author/djmusick/>)

Members of the maker community seem to exhibit most of the information-seeking behaviors we have studied to some extent. Makers seek information primarily to create, and “things made are meant to be shown, used, sold, or shared” (Sheridan, et al., 2014, p. 529). Information-seeking becomes an iterative design process to optimize, explore, and find new problems stemming from the original one. This demonstrates a problem-solving approach in which makers “seek information in a series of stages that link to the performance of a task or project” (Kuhlthau, 1993, as cited in Spink & Cole, 2006, p. 26). They use diverse learning contexts and strategies to discover, explore, create, and extend information as a physical or digital product. This process involves play and tinkering to problem-solve via trial-and-error. Each iteration creates a new problem, which causes some fairly simple projects to develop into something much more complex than initially imagined. It can be hard to know the exact end result until it is actually realized. (Sheridan, et al. (2014) describe the high-altitude balloon project (<http://www.sector67.org/blog/2013/high-altitude-balloon/>) at Sector67 (<http://www.sector67.org/blog/>) in Madison, WI to illustrate this unexpected iterative process of working beyond the original goal or scope of the project).

This is partly because makers often learn by encountering information unexpectedly; they “have a tendency to stop and ‘collect’ useful or interesting information they bump into” (Erdelez, 1999, p. 26). Sheridan, et al. (2014) found that it was common in makerspaces for users to learn skills and information without that being part of their original project plan. For example, they observed a participant at Makeshop (<http://at Makeshop in the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh>) in the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh (<https://pittsburghkids.org/>) as she worked on a hand sewing project; she noticed a circuitry project someone else was working on, and that inspired her to alter and expand her original project after she learned more about circuitry. Had she been elsewhere working on her sewing project, she may have never added the circuitry component at all. But she did “bump into” that circuitry information and was able to learn, adapt, and extend her original project.

Stebbins' (2009, as cited in Hartel, et al., 2016, p. 1) definition of serious leisure can also apply to makers. Sheridan, et al. (2014) noted that while some participants in makerspaces dropped in as one-time users, others returned regularly to work on longterm projects, participate in the makerspace community, and learn new skills for personal use. Chatman (1991, as cited in Hartel, et al., 2016) found that some groups prefer human information sources rather than textual or digital sources. Makerspaces have an abundance of such human information sources ready for sharing. Sheridan, et al. (2014) found that makerspaces tend to rely on learner-experts: makers who taught themselves a skill or information and are now responsible for teaching that to other makers. They also make use of online forums, video tutorials, and other informal information sources in addition to workshops and apprenticeships led by trained facilitators and experts.

For many makers, information seeking is not for the sake of the information; it is often product-oriented and meant to be shared. Skills are learned and information is acquired to then be applied to a specific project. One of the fundamental principles of Mt. Elliott Makerspace (<http://www.mtelliottmakerspace.com/>), which Sheridan, et al. (2014) studied, was a responsibility to share what one has learned: “You should feel compelled to share your knowledge with somebody else” (p. 517). Makers do not keep secrets. Dougherty (2016, as cited in Chen & Wu, 2017, p. 1308) coined the term maker, and he noted that the term is powerful because it is inclusive—anyone who creates or designs can call themselves a maker, and makers tend to like to “make” new makers. Anderson (2012) argued that everyone is a designer in the modern age. Students learn to use basic design for PowerPoints and art class every year in school, but he argued that they need access to stronger design-based programs like Autodesk or 3D printers to realize their full potential as makers. The maker community values teaching and sharing as a reciprocal act, so information seeking and the repackaging and presentation of that information are equally important.

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Sheridan, K., Halverson, E., Litts, B., Brahms, L., Jacobs-Priebe, L., & Owens, T. (2014). Learning in the making: A comparative case study of three makerspaces. *Harvard educational review*, 84(4), 505-531. doi: 10.17763/haer.84.4.brr34733723j648u

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*Michael Stephens (https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/members/michael/)* says:

October 8, 2019 at 1:29 pm (<https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/musick/2019/10/03/info-200-blog-03-information-seeking-for-makers/#comment-10>) [Edit \(https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/musick/wp-admin/comment.php?action=editcomment&c=10\)](https://ischoolblogs.sjsu.edu/info/musick/wp-admin/comment.php?action=editcomment&c=10)

This is super interesting. I think Serious Leisure is a good "hook" for the makers. I wonder if any LIS studies have been done on them specifically – it's a rather new community.

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I haven't been able to find much in the way of makers as an information community, although I have found several sources about artists/designers. And there are some studies of makerspaces as educational or learning spaces that I think I can draw from for my research. I'll definitely dive more into the serious leisure studies, too!

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I like how makers collaborate and share their expertise with each other in order to teach/learn how to create. This is a very interesting community.

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Yes! It's almost like a community code from what I can tell. Collaborating and sharing tools and information seems like the main thread that pulls the community together.

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