School of Information Management (SIM) faculty member and Director of the Social Media Lab, Dr. Anatoliy Gruzd, has received a Leaders Opportunity Fund award of $150,000 from the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Nova Scotia Research and Innovation Trust.

A new three-year **Partnership Development Grant** from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada in the amount of $198,795 will provide a significant boost to the information research initiative headed by SIM's Bertrum MacDonald.

The American Library Association has passed a Memorial Resolution honouring Dr. Norman Horrocks, professor emeritus at SIM, former school director and Faculty of Management dean, recognizing the immeasurable legacy that Norman left to the field of information management.

profile *Charles Bloom, Master of Information Management'11*

As a senior manager working in information management, Charles had a lifelong dream to earn a graduate degree in his field. Such a degree wasn't offered in Canada until 2008 when Dalhousie's School of Information Management launched the MIM program. Charles' deep engagement with distance and on-site classes, his public championing of this new program and voluntary role as Dal recruiter, along with his intellectual and personal support of fellow students from Vancouver Island to Nunavut, make him an outstanding exemplar of a mid-career learner.

Are oceans of information swamping us?

Graham North

We live in an age of information, where technology has enabled us to share research with unprecedented ease. But this newfound freedom has created an explosion of information and changed how we decipher the knowledge around us.

Bertrum MacDonald, professor of Information Management, heads up an interdisciplinary team.

We are bombarded with an ocean of information that flows quickly and mightily, but we are rarely equipped with the time or tools to discern good quality from the useless. As a result, vital information can get lost in the storm.

The consequences of this ocean are enormous. Researchers spend years of their lives and millions of dollars of public money producing groundbreaking research, only to discover that their reports never reach the policymakers and stakeholders who would most benefit from that information.

This is something that Bertrum MacDonald is looking to change. A professor of Information Management, Bertrum has assembled an interdisciplinary team dedicated to tracking the awareness and use of environmental marine research, as well as its influence on policies that help save our oceans.

"There is a huge volume of information from so many sources," says Peter Wells, a marine environmental scientist with a public service background. "How do users surf the waves of information to use it appropriately?"

It's a complex question without a simple answer. There is a wealth of scientific information that tells us how we could mitigate the deterioration of our oceans, but the policies aren't always making use of them.

So where is the momentum lost between research being published and that information finding its way into the hands of decision-makers? According to the team, most of what is called "grey literature" – valuable non-commercial reports, often produced by governments – rarely speaks the same language as policymakers.

"Scientists will write in a technical language that's understandable to them," says Bertrum. "But for other people who work in policy, it can be difficult to understand."

In addition, policymakers rarely have the time to sift through stacks of wordy reports, making it difficult for them to tap into the immense amounts of research available on any given subject.

Bertrum's team brings together people from a range of backgrounds – from information management to public policy to environmental research. The team's diversity allows it to approach every problem from multiple angles, which is vital when dealing with such complex and unpredictable flows of information.

"Too often we work with people who are in the same discipline," says Kevin Quigley, acting director, School of Public Administration, who brings experience with the inner workings of government. "But you can really put yourself in a position for great growth and great learning by putting yourself with people from different fields."

Many research groups have a tendency to function in silos, says Quigley, where you work with people of similar backgrounds who think in similar ways.

The key to this group, says Quigley, is that every member brings a specialty to the team. Rather than having "focused and ferocious debate" on individual subjects, the team allows experts to bring their own perspective. Together, they track the influence of research and find ways to get high-quality information where it needs to go.

"The fact that we come from different experiences really capitalizes on our creativity," says Suzette Soomai, an interdisciplinary PhD student with a focus on fisheries information.

The tools used in tracking information are constantly being reinvented and re-evaluated – from analyzing citations to interviewing the people that use them – with wide-reaching implications for anyone who needs to wade through the oceans of information to find something useful.

"Most of the people who graduate from the Faculty of Management end up in decision-making positions," notes Bertrum. "They're grappling with these particular challenges, and the findings that will come from this research are relevant to a much broader audience."

The success of an interdisciplinary team is a testament to the Faculty of Management, where people from very different disciplines – in this case, information management, marine studies, environmental studies, and public administration – have the opportunity to interact to develop creative solutions to emerging problems.

"As a junior academic, I was looking for colleagues to collaborate with, and I was attracted to the interdisciplinary function of the group," says team member Elizabeth de Santo, who comes from a background in environmental governance and the science-policy interface.

That spirit of collaboration has become infectious, and Bertrum's team has nurtured unlikely and unprecedented relationships with government agencies at the provincial, national, and international levels, including partnerships with the Gulf of Maine Council and United Nations agencies.

The Gulf of Maine Council, for example, was so impressed with the team's work that it integrated information management into its newest action plan. It reflects the trust that Bertrum's team has earned with its partners, helping to ensure that high-quality environmental marine information is making a valuable contribution to improving the state of our oceans.

The quantities of information will only continue to gain force and momentum as technology further encourages us to freely share information. Learning to harness the data will be critical to ensuring that the best information makes it from the researchers to the decision-makers.

For now, Bertrum and his team of surfers are on the crest of a wave that looks poised to set the standard for how we use this ocean of information to its full potential.