

A tight economy highlights a common feature in smaller law libraries—the need to do more with less. One-person librarians are used to doing every type of library task because there is no one else to do it. Even with limited staff time and the same budget limitations that many law libraries are experiencing, these creative librarians are finding ways to innovate.

Some are using open source software to create inexpensive solutions. Others are using novel applications and relationships to extend their reach beyond traditional library services.

The libraries profiled below are all in Ontario, Canada, and are associated with law associations, similar to local bar associations in the United States. There are 48 law association libraries spread out across the province, spanning over 900 miles from east to west. They are mostly staffed part-time and serve large geographic areas including numerous small towns. Although they work cooperatively and share a funding source called LibraryCo, Inc., each law association is independent in its operations. Most of the libraries are located in or immediately adjacent to courthouses.

Open Sourcing Your Circulation

John Kerr staffs the Wellington Law Association library in Guelph, Ontario, which serves about 150 lawyer members. Like many small law libraries, staff is not always present to help lawyers borrow and return books. Kerr works alone and part-time, while his members have 24-hour access to his collection, leaving a significant amount of unattended time. Law association members who borrow a book fill out a paper card and leave it at Kerr's desk. Kerr keeps the cards organized in a box until members return books.

In addition to tracking borrowed books, Kerr wanted to be able to capture information about in-library usage and create overdue notices. Because the law libraries in Ontario have all their cataloguing done centrally by the Law Society of Upper Canada, and their members can search a single catalogue to find holdings in any of the 48 libraries, Kerr didn't have any local circulation management or integrated library system (ILS) software.

Kerr had one other requirement, and that was that the tool be open source and run on Ubuntu, the variant of Linux he runs at the library (www.ubuntu.com). He initially looked at Jabref (<http://jabref.sourceforge.net>), which handled some of the bibliographic needs but required a lot of cutting and pasting of information. He also considered the open source library system Koha

(www.koha.org), but decided it was overkill.

He selected a reference tool called Zotero to manage his collection (www.zotero.org). Zotero is a free extension created for the Mozilla Firefox browser that describes itself as a tool to “collect, manage, and cite your research sources.” Unlike some web research tools, it can store bibliographic information available in online resources like library catalogues and Worldcat, or online stores such as Amazon.com.

Now when a member checks out a book, Kerr uses the card to create the Zotero record. If the book has never been checked out before, he can enter information about new titles in a variety of ways. A simple click of a button inserts catalogue data into Zotero, then Kerr manually adds the call number and any subject fields he needs. He uses the Rights field, normally used for copyright holder information, to store the patron name for circulation purposes. He deletes the name when the book is returned, and the book's record is ready for the next checkout.

Since it is easy to search through Zotero, Kerr places a custom piece of information in the note field for each book that circulates. For example, he types “Circx” in the notes field followed by the number of times that book has circulated. A quick search of Zotero for “Circx” retrieves all items that have circulated along with the number of times they have been borrowed.

Zotero has the added benefit of creating bibliographies so that Kerr can supplement his circulation information with custom lists of online and print resources for his lawyers. Zotero can also take snapshots of websites and incorporate PDF files to enable capture of information that might later change or disappear.

Consumer Circulation

The Lambton Law Association library is staffed by Michelle Gerrits. Her library is in a courthouse in Sarnia, Ontario, across Lake Huron from Michigan, and serves about 120 lawyers. Because the Lambton library also offers 24-hour access for lawyers but is staffed only part-time, Gerrits faced a similar problem as Kerr, but took a different approach. Gerrits was interested in a circulation tool that could incorporate automatic check-in and checkout information. She looked at management software for home collections of books, CDs, and videos and wondered if she could adapt it to a small library's circulation needs.

Gerrits selected Readerware and ordered the kit that includes both software and a Cuecat scanner, which reads ISBN barcodes and places them

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*Innovative ideas from
small law libraries*

By David Whelan

directly in the Readerware database. Once in the database, Readerware queries large databases, both commercial sites such as Amazon.com and Powell's, and national libraries such as the Library of Congress and the Canadian Library and National Archive. It matches the ISBN to the database and retrieves additional information for the item.

The scanner can be a great asset. In this case, Gerrits was able to get a download of her data from the Law Society's Ex Libris Voyager catalogue and import it into Readerware to start her database. Some of the ISBN fields contained other information, which required some data cleanup. For these, she used an online catalogue and dragged and dropped the ISBN from the online record into the corresponding field in Readerware. At the same time, she added call numbers and location information. Once the collection is created, the Cuecat scanner makes it easy to manage future additions and weeding by using the information on the book if the barcode is available.

Unlike similar consumer-oriented collection management tools like Abebook's Homebase (www.abebooks.com/books/homebase) or Library thing.com, Readerware has a check in/out function to enable quick lending of materials in the collection. You can set the number of days for the loan and then run queries and reports to show what materials are checked out. Readerware lacks the subtleties of a full-scale integrated library system circulation module to account for weekends/holidays or overnight returns. It also does not have an automated way to add a large number of users. But for most subscription law libraries and law firms, the initial input of lawyers is a one-time task. New lawyers can be added on the spot, and as lawyers leave the association or firm, they can be deleted from the checkout interface.

Gerrit's next goal is to move to self-checkout. Unlike the automated systems in public libraries, she is planning to acquire a used PC to run the Readerware software. Lawyers will use the software to check their books in and out, enabling Gerrit to reduce her reliance on a card-based system even when she is not in the library. In the meantime, managing checkout information in the Readerware database will speed up the identification of overdue or lost items as well as the tracking of circulating materials.

Reach Out and LogMeIn

Pat Henry runs the Simcoe Law Association's library in Barrie, Ontario, serving nearly 400 lawyers in Simcoe County, which covers 1,800 square miles. Like Lambton and Wellington, the library is staffed part-time. In addition to its city-based library, the Simcoe Law

Association has extended its reach by creating three small, unstaffed branch libraries in rural parts of the county. Each branch is located in a remote courthouse and has a small print collection and a PC. Henry's challenge was to manage the increasing up-time for her lawyers on these PCs as legal research requires more electronic databases. Her part-time hours did not enable frequent trips to the remote locations for computer maintenance, and funding couldn't be stretched for on-site technical support.

Pat identified remote access software as the solution that would fit her needs and selected the LogMeIn Free product. LogMeIn requires a piece of software to be installed on both the remote computer and the computer with which you're accessing it. When you start LogMeIn,

Feed Frenzy

Adding an RSS feed is a snap when you use an online service like iGoogle. When you come across a site with interesting information—legal publishers, legal news, etc.—determine whether the site offers an RSS feed or not. Some sites clearly display a link or orange icon that says "RSS" on it. Others are not so obvious but nearly all blogs and news sites support RSS feeds. Click on the appropriate link for the RSS feed you want to add, and your browser will ask if you want to add it to Google. You can add it either to iGoogle or Google Reader, among other RSS readers. iGoogle is a bit more flexible, because you can add other Google Gadgets to it, whereas the Google Reader is all about RSS. Other RSS readers include Mobipocket, available as a download; Newsgator's Feed Demon (www.newsgator.com/individuals/feeddemon); and the Brief add-on for Mozilla's Firefox (<https://addons.mozilla.org/en-US/firefox/addon/4578>).

connect to the remote computer, and log in, you see the remote computer's desktop just as if you were sitting at it. If there is a problem accessing a database like Westlaw or LexisNexis, you can see the same error screen the lawyer sees. You can also start programs and make other configuration changes using LogMeIn. A frequent problem with electronic databases that rely on passwords is that the web browser "cookie" that holds that password gets deleted. Using remote

access software, it's easy to log in and embed the password again.

Remote access software, such as LogMeIn and Citrix' GoToMyPC, is ideal because no one needs to be on the remote computer to answer the incoming connection request. It can work from within your web browser or through a viewer like RealVNC. Some libraries might be able to use Microsoft's Remote Desktop, a component of Windows XP and Vista, but it relies on each computer either being on a virtual private network (VPN) or having a static Internet (IP) address.

Remote access software can also act as a multi-purpose tool by enabling remote reference support. Since you can log in and use the software to control the web browser or other software on the remote computer, you could also speak with your lawyer over the phone while simultaneously constructing the search or modeling the navigation necessary to complete the research request.

Feed Me

Current awareness can be an especially valuable resource for solo librarians assisting a diverse clientele. Joy Peterson runs the Kenora District Law Association library and relies on a variety of Really Simple Syndication (RSS) tools to stay current in different areas and provide current awareness support for her lawyers. RSS is a mainstream resource for information professionals. It can be a timesaver in library environments where one librarian is wearing multiple hats. Lawyers often ask solo librarians to monitor a particular type of case or topic, and RSS can help to automate that monitoring.

Before you can read RSS feeds and monitor topics, you must have an RSS reader. Readers come in two varieties: web-based readers, which read through your web browser, and readers that you download and install on your computer or smartphone as standalone software.

Peterson's solution is a Google-centric one, relying on the Google toolbar and a personalized iGoogle page. Both are free and are accessed within the web browser. Once you create an iGoogle page, you can start to add RSS feeds to the page. As you increase the number of feeds you track, you can create separate pages or tabs and segment your feeds for easier access. Peterson uses categories like News, Case Law (following court RSS updates), Bills (legislative updates), Publishers, and Libraries as her tab titles. Under each tab, she places the RSS feeds that are relevant to those areas. (See "Feed Frenzy" on this page for more information on managing RSS feeds.)

Government websites, particularly those belonging to legislatures and courts, and sites that republish government documents, are increasingly offering RSS feeds. Legal publishers offer

a variety of RSS feeds that can help in collection management and acquisitions.

Some websites may not have an RSS feed but still offer current awareness content that would be useful in RSS format.

Peterson uses Feedity.com to convert flat HTML pages into RSS feeds. Once she creates the RSS feed, she can cut and paste its URL into the appropriate tab on her iGoogle page by clicking on "Add Stuff."

In cases where the online resource might not provide RSS or other current awareness tools, Peterson creates an alert newsfeed by typing her query into Google Alerts (www.google.com/alerts), selecting the type of content—news, blogs, web, or all of them—and then setting it as a feed. She can manage her alerts from a single page and also elect to receive alert notifications via e-mail. Peterson often uses generic search terms (on a court name, for example) to snag as many references as possible. In some cases, it is a specific keyword or query for a particular lawyer who wants help in staying on top of recent developments.

Peterson has also trained some of her lawyers to use iGoogle and alerts themselves, which provides further versatility. If your lawyers use iGoogle, you can create and customize a tab and then share it with lawyers who might benefit from it. This can make it easier for them to get up to speed—it is easier to delete a feed than to add one—and enables you to provide an additional service. (To do this, create the tab and populate it with the RSS feeds and gadgets that you want to share. Then click on the tab, and select Share.)

Another benefit to using RSS is its portability. Once you have RSS feeds in a reader, you can export them as a single Outline Processor Markup Language (OPML) file and import them all into a new RSS reader. This allows you to take advantage of the RSS reader that has the features that best match your research needs.

Google and Outline Processor Markup Language (OPML)

While Google Reader exports and imports OPML files directly, iGoogle needs a bit of tweaking to use OPML files. Check out these blogs for more information:

<http://googlesystem.blogspot.com/2008/07/export-igoogle-feeds-to-opml.html>

<http://googlesystem.blogspot.com/2008/07/import-opml-files-to-igoogle.html>

CLE Replays

Current awareness comes in many forms, and continuing legal education (CLE) is an important one for lawyers. Many law firm and small libraries may not have the resources to put on CLE for their customers beyond legal research-oriented education. Jackie Hassefras at the Frontenac Law Association library has found ways to partner with CLE providers to create a resource for her members.

The Frontenac Law Association is located in Kingston, Ontario, and serves 175 lawyers about halfway between two major cities, Ottawa and Toronto, where many live CLE seminars occur. While teleconference and webinar CLE alternatives exist, lawyers at many law associations like to gather and share educational experiences.

Hassefras found a way to fill that need by creating partnerships with two large CLE organizations in the province, the Law Society of Upper Canada and the Ontario Bar Association. They provide a DVD with the CLE video or a web address for the online session, and she sets up the CLE event at her library. The CLE providers also send out the printed materials for the seminars. Typically, Frontenac hosts two to three CLE sessions a week.

The technical requirements are sufficiently low—and non-recurring—as to make this easy to pull off in almost any environment. Hassefras has a VCR, DVD player, and large TV. In addition, for web replays or CLEs that have high attendance, she purchased an LCD projector and pneumatic projection screen. The screen is self-supporting and doesn't use as much space as a typical tripod screen. A small library could acquire one or two pieces of equipment at a time, and refresh them every three or four years.

Hassefras sends out e-mail announcements about the CLE to her members and also posts signs in her library and information on the library website. Lawyers who attend pay a registration fee, which is split between the library and the CLE provider. The CLE providers benefit by reaching lawyers who would not be close enough geographically to attend the session; the lawyers benefit by not having to sit in their office watching the CLE on their own. Some jurisdictions limit how many hours of video or web-based CLE lawyers can apply to educational requirements. With interesting content and an interactive environment, though, law libraries can become a nexus for lawyers who simply appreciate the information and are not just seeking CLE credits.

CLE is also a great current awareness tool that law libraries can use to meet both informational and educational needs for lawyers. Even in Ontario, where CLE is generally not mandatory, lawyers rely on it

Solutions for Solos

Go online for more details on the many tools available to help small libraries do more with less.

Cataloging

Jabref
<http://jabref.sourceforge.net>

Koha
www.koha.org

Readerware
www.readerware.com

:CueCat Scanner
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/CueCat>
(The standard Readerware bundle is \$75 to download, or, if you buy the CD bundle for \$10 more, you can get a free scanner.)

Remote Access Tools

LogMeIn Free
Available for Windows and Macintosh computers
<https://secure.logmein.com/products/free>

Citrix' GoToMyPC
www.gotomypc.com

RealVNC viewer
www.realvnc.com

heavily to stay up to date on their practice areas. All of the law association libraries collect print CLE manuals. By partnering with providers, Frontenac has taken it a step farther without taking on the resource-intensive role of producing in-house CLE.

It can also be a great marketing tool. Every new and renewing member gets a free CLE course each year, a \$75 value. This can be a tangible measure for lawyers who are thinking about joining and trying to determine the value of the library. It is also a far more personal metric than many of the statistics libraries use to measure their operations, many of which lack meaning for an individual lawyer.

Lack of resources and staff need not hold small law libraries back. Solo law librarians have particular pressures and opportunities to be innovative, to help lawyers access information and stay current on changes in the law. Innovative ideas and adaptation of current technology can help law librarians provide a higher level of service to their clients. ■

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