

Technology:

Theory Versus Reality

in a Private Law Library

by Beatrice Wise

The changes in technology in the typical law firm library are continuing at a fast and furious pace. Today, the challenge for firm librarians is to sort through these changes, weeding out the bad and implementing the good. This sounds easy, but, in fact, is one of the more challenging aspects of the job. Not only is our time a limited commodity, but, after instituting new technologies and corresponding procedures, we must convince our patrons of the benefits of these new technologies/procedures for their work product and then teach them how best to use the new applications to their advantage. The difficulty of this almost impossible feat is compounded by the fact that we all must deal with at least a few computer-phobic attorneys and staff.

Challenges of a Mac and PC Office

Howrey & Simon is not a typical law firm, however. When I began working here last January, I walked into one of the only Macintosh-based offices in the Washington, D.C., area. Up to then, my experience with Macs had been limited to the Library School computer lab, and even that was a long time ago. I needed to relearn in "Mac" all the software that I was already familiar with in PC format, including LEXIS, WESTLAW, and Dialog. In addition, the reference staff at Howrey & Simon delivers documents electronically to patrons; this added another level to my learning curve. It happened that, as soon as I became comfortable with the Mac

environment, the firm began rolling out PCs to some lawyers, so I had to learn the newer PC-based versions of the old software. The rest of the reference staff had been away from PCs long enough to need to go through this relearning process as well. The reference staff now uses both the Macs and PCs, switching from one to the other as we move from one reference desk in the library to another. To make matters more interesting, some of the reference desks have both a Mac and a PC, so all applications can be used, sometimes at the same time!

At present, approximately 35% of the office is on the PC, while the remainder still uses the Mac. This means that any program that we use must be both Mac and PC compatible (including Microsoft Word, the firm's word processing software). It also means that the reference librarians must be comfortable with both types of software for their personal uses in order to support the attorneys and staff who are working from their desktops.

Moving to a "Virtual Library"

The "powers that be" at Howrey & Simon have fully embraced the "virtual library" concept. While this is a boon for most technology-oriented librarians, it is problematic for the Howrey & Simon reference staff because of the two platforms. For example, we are testing a CD-ROM tower, but it cannot be used by the firm's Mac users at this time. To reduce space, we are looking into the electronic delivery of some of the more popular weekly and daily serial titles, thus reducing paper copies and providing needed shelf space for other storage. We also are investigating more titles on CD-ROM for the future, when the PC/Mac compatibility issue is resolved. The CD titles that we currently own are available in the library on a standalone computer, but not on the desktop/network level.

Delivering Documents by E-mail

After conquering the Mac world, the next challenge that I encountered was the use of e-mail for document delivery. This is the firm's preferred way of delivering any reference products to the attorneys and staff. Although about 90% of the electronically generated work product produced by the reference staff can be delivered in this way, there are, of course, some limitations. For example, PDF documents commonly found on the Internet can only be delivered by e-mail if the

patron has Adobe Acrobat on his or her computer; if not, the documents must be printed out by, and picked up from, the library. Sometimes materials must be printed out for inclusion in filings or other documents as well.

The search results from all commercial online services can be downloaded and converted to Word (or another word processing program) easily and quickly at the librarian's desktop, then e-mailed to the attorney or secretary for various uses. The uses of these documents are endless. For example, the attorney can read the document, then cut and paste the appropriate sections into a brief or memo, or e-mail a client an interesting section. When an attorney calls the library three weeks after a search was done because "I lost the information" and the client is waiting in the conference room, the search can be reconstructed easily (due to our saving of search strategies), and the librarian is viewed as a hero/heroine. This is probably the single best aspect of electronic document delivery for the librarian.

Saving space is always a concern, especially in the world of the "virtual library." The biggest paper files that our library maintains are of speeches from the Federal Trade Commission and the Antitrust Division of the Department of Justice, both dating back to the mid-1950s. There is no other single place that this information can be found; some of the older speeches are no longer available even from the agencies themselves. In the early 1990s, the library staff decided that manually searching through the speeches for specific items or topics was too time-consuming, and came up with the idea of a searchable database of information on the speeches. The database is searchable by author name, title (including what is listed on the title page of the speech), and date. Carrying it one step further, staff decided that *scanning* copies of the speeches into the system would be even better. This guaranteed saving space (except for the last 10 years worth, hard copies of the speeches had been put into offsite storage) while allowing easier access to the information. In addition, for the last two months, the speeches and press releases from the DOJ and the FTC have been electronically gathered from the Internet. The reference staff collects, copies, and codes each speech, then sends it to the litigation support center where it is scanned into the system, which is accessible on everyone's desktop. It is an invaluable resource for the Antitrust group, as well as for the library staff.

The newest topic of discussion in libraries seems to be Intranet pages, and like others, Howrey is moving toward that goal. Our library page is slated for release at the beginning of 1998, and we are working diligently to produce a quality product that meets, if not exceeds, our expectations. The discussion with the MIS department continues about content, maintenance, continuing updates, and improvements to the page. These issues are key in presenting and maintaining a product that will be both used by and useful to the firm. Since any Intranet page is always a work in progress, these issues will be revisited in the months to come.

Appellate Database, Register Notices

The appellate database is a recent development for the firm. It was designed to keep track of the cumulative experience of the attorneys in the Howrey & Simon Supreme Court and Appellate Practice Group. The database includes key information about any appellate cases, state or federal, that have in which the firm was involved, past and present. It is an index of the entire firm docket, searchable by all segments, including: case name, attorney or attorneys, briefs filed (including

notes about the types of documents), court, judges, outcome, if any, and official cites. The library maintains the bibliographical portion of the database, and the practice group continually uses the information to track and share the firm's collective appellate experience. For example, if an attorney is about to go before a new judge, he can search the judge's name in the database and find out who has appeared before that particular judge, thus giving the attorney a source of valuable information that can be very useful in the courtroom.

About a year ago, the reference staff began downloading the Table of Contents, CFR Sections Affected, and Reader Aids, as well as the full text of relevant sections, from the *Federal Register* and then e-mailing these items to interested attorneys. We still receive several hard copies of the *Register* for routing in the traditional manner to those who have chosen this option. The advantages of the electronic version are several: it is available much earlier than the hard copy; there is no waiting for your name to be at the top of the routing list, and attorneys have much more flexibility to manipulate the information received.

Technology is moving forward at a record pace in the library world today. As soon as we think that we have the situation somewhat under control, along comes something new to make us question the status quo. Push technology, new databases, and Internet II are just around the corner. The best we can do is keep up with the literature, investigate new technologies to see how they might best benefit the communities we serve, and continue to educate ourselves and our patrons. One way to accomplish this is by reading the professional literature and using the continuing educational opportunities that are presented to us through the Law Librarian's Society of the District of Columbia and AALL. We must also keep the lines of communication with our colleagues open in order to discuss new issues and ideas, to learn and expand the base of knowledge that we rely on in our profession, and to teach others.

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