



Customer Service Breeds Success at a Firm Library

by Susan P. Siebers

When I think about providing quality customer service in a law firm, I recall my initial discussions with Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman back in 1979. There was no open position; I approached the firm. My intention was to sell myself based on the services I could provide. I persuaded the Library Committee and firm management that a professional librarian could oversee the firm's research resources and provide cost-effective materials and services. Thus a librarian like myself could contribute to the success of the firm by allowing the attorneys to be more competitive and improving the firm's bottom line.

The firm and its library have expanded since then. The firm is almost 10 times its 1979 size of 65 attorneys. The one office has grown into five. And the library has a staff of librarians and others to deliver its increased services.

The content and formats of the information that the firm's librarians work with have changed even more dramatically. Yet the goal of the Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman library has remained intact: providing timely, cost-effective and superior information and resources for the continuing excellence of the firm.

The firm's library maintains a collection of resources, physical and otherwise, to meet the varied information needs of all members of the firm, thus ensuring that the firm provides the best service to its clients. As information becomes available in more formats and prices, explaining the options available to the attorneys and instructing them on how to use the materials becomes increasingly more complex. (Remember when using a looseleaf service was one of the items near the top of our lists?) In addition, each department and user has far more individualized needs based on which products and services he or she uses.

Delivering Services to Varied Constituencies

The librarians at Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman provide their services and resources to an increasing number of specific groups within the firm. As the firm grows, the librarians solicit new constituencies. Often they anticipate and respond to the needs of these new users before the users have even ascertained their own needs. At the same time, however, the library sometimes finds it challenging to identify the appropriate recipients of its offers of service and elicit their feedback about the library's services.

The firm library's primary constituency is obviously the **firm's attorneys**. Although the library often works on other internal projects for the firm, attorneys' specific requests always take precedence.

“ **The goal of the Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman library has remained intact: providing timely, cost-effective and superior information and resources for the continuing excellence of the firm.** ”

Each attorney comes with widely differing research needs. Every library staff member must be equipped to respond

appropriately to these needs. It is also important that the staff recognize the sometimes subtle differences among the attorneys' information requests in order to plan and execute suitable services for them.

Firm Management. When it comes to firm managers, the challenge in many firms is to not only anticipate management's needs but to ensure that the information the library provides gets the attention it deserves. The information needs of firm managers are typically very specific and often confidential, so their requests are not always easy to fulfill. In addition, they usually need the information quickly. The librarians at Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman regularly provide budgets and other financial reports that assist projections and explain costs incurred at the firm, such as information resource expenses for a new practice group.

Attorneys in Departments and Practice Groups. The services of private firm librarians go beyond responding to specific information requests and providing the resources that enable attorneys to conduct their research. As new practice groups evolve, librarians must be able to supply the materials that attorneys need to be most productive. Hence librarians evaluate and suggest new resources to replace existing publications and to meet new needs. For example, the Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman library responded immediately after passage of the *Sarbanes-Oxley Act*. The firm's librarians quickly ascertained how many copies of the act would be needed for attorneys in various departments. I suggested a librarian who could help provide resources for an intranet created for the newly formed, cross-departmental, internal Corporate Governance Committee, which was established to answer questions and provide information for clients working under the new rules.

In firms with more than one librarian, it is often useful to assign librarians to different departments and practice groups to ensure broad collection development for the firm's library. Librarians will be able to develop contacts and relationships and gain supporters for the library and its goals.

Billing Attorneys. Quickly providing information when requested about client charges is a very important service. Billing attorneys need to understand the charges associates and others incur on behalf of their clients in order to be able to explain the expenses to the clients. These attorneys typically do not use the library's research services directly but need to have some understanding of their purpose as well as pricing.

“ **As information becomes available in more formats and prices, explaining the options available to the attorneys and instructing them on how to use the materials becomes increasingly more complex.** ”

New Associates and Summer Associates. Librarians provide many services to new and summer associates. They teach associates how to become cost-effective researchers, regularly critiquing their research skills. Helping associates understand how attorneys conduct research in their specific firms and departments — which differs from firm to firm — contributes to their success. Many attorneys have commented on how librarians have saved their careers by improving the attorneys' research techniques — there couldn't be a better tribute to the services librarians provide.

Private firm librarians also provide services to **other internal firm departments.** For example, the Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman library provides industry-related research to its marketing department and specific attorneys prior to presentations with potential clients. Later research may involve conflicts-checking and credit information. Much of what we provide to the Human Resources

Department consists of publications for continuing education.

Services are sometimes provided to **clients directly**, often as an extension of work for an attorney. Librarians may supply clients with continuing research, ongoing tracking or reporting in a variety of formats. Such direct services typically depend on working closely with the billing attorney. It can be very rewarding and always a good opportunity to showcase librarian expertise.

Library Staff. The library staff should also be considered a part of a firm's constituency that the library has an obligation to serve. The library's service orientation must include providing the library staff with the resources they need to succeed. The term “servant leadership” makes sense: As a leader in my library at Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman, my role and responsibility is to ensure that, just as the firm librarians provide resources and information for attorneys to succeed in their jobs, library supervisors do the same for the library staff.

A large part of my service orientation extends to the profession. This certainly isn't unique to firm librarians, but giving back to the profession isn't always recognized by firms. Fortunately Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman understands that librarians want to contribute to and advance their profession by participating in professional associations and collaborating with colleagues. To me it's an easy “sell”: The more I've been involved with the profession, the more I've personally benefited. As a result, my firm library benefits. Whether it is from growing in knowledge, leadership skills or networking, the value is there to be tapped.

The Bottom Line. Great customer service is what librarians are here for. It's what they deliver. And it's their continuing challenge and opportunity.

Susan P. Siebers (susan.siebers@kmz.com) is the director of library and information services at Katten Muchin Zavis Rosenman in Chicago.