

## **Dealing with Orphan Printouts\***

James B. Senter\*\*

*Mr. Senter offers various practical solutions to a nagging problem that exists in many law libraries—dealing with LEXIS and Westlaw printouts that build up over time when their “owners” fail to retrieve them from the print station.*

¶1 On November 12, 1999, I posted the following request for help to the law-lib discussion list:

I'm fishing for best solutions (political or practical) to a problem that's probably as endemic in law firm libraries as attorneys neglecting to check books out. . . . The problem has to do with orphaned LEXIS and Westlaw printouts. An attorney will send research results to the LEXIS or Westlaw printer (conveniently located next door to my office) and then forget to pick them up. Other forgotten print jobs get mixed in with that one, so that it becomes difficult to dig out any specific job from the growing pile. I usually try to separate them into individual stacks and leave them for a few days, then inter-office mail each one to the appropriate attorney, but it is not a great solution. Do you have a better one?<sup>1</sup>

¶2 Judging from the volume and diversity of the responses I received, the small but irritating problem of orphaned LEXIS and Westlaw printouts is common to all kinds of law libraries. Actually, the responses made clear that the issue is really twofold: how do you keep the printouts separate and how do you deliver them to their “owners.” Presented below is a brief summary of the solutions that were suggested to me by other librarians who have “faced down” both aspects of the problem. Detail is added to the summary of solutions by excerpts from many of the enlightening, and often entertaining, replies that I received.<sup>2</sup>

### **Summary of Solutions**

#### ***Keeping Printouts Separate***

¶3 To the problem of keeping printouts separate, solutions jelled around the following:

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1. James B. Senter, <James\_B.Senter@jonesday.com>, *Fishing for Best Solutions*, Nov. 12, 1999, law-lib@ucdavis.edu.

2. I have omitted names, affiliations, and “incriminating details” from the excerpted responses.

1. Use metal vertical files, one for LEXIS and one for Westlaw. Sort the printouts by name.
2. Place a tray near the printers. Clip, staple, or rubber-band the printouts together.
3. Stack separate piles everywhere (my inelegant approach).
4. Place a slotted file holder beside the printers.
5. Maintain separate file folders for each attorney.
6. Mount plastic wall pockets above the printers.
7. Stack printouts crossways in a tray.
8. With the new Westlaw standalone printer, use colored paper in tray one to provide a divider between print jobs.
9. Use shelves near printer labeled ABD, EBG, etc.

### *Delivering Printouts*

¶14 Respondents suggested a variety of solutions to the problem of delivering printouts:

1. For printouts unclaimed for 24 to 48 hours, the receptionist sends them to the “owner” by interoffice mail.
2. The fax couriers or mailroom messengers pick up and deliver printouts at least several times a day.
3. After a designated time period (ranging from a few hours to two days), the library staff sends the printouts to the “owner” by interoffice mail.
4. The library staff hand delivers printouts every two hours.
5. Printouts are not delivered or moved, but reminders that they are available for pickup are e-mailed to attorneys.

### **Commentary**

¶15 “In our firm, the receptionist on our floor does the daily ECLIPSE searches and sends them out via interoffice mail. The printers are in the library. All other printouts are monitored by the library staff on a rather ad hoc basis. We use metal vertical files, one for LEXIS and one for Westlaw, to sort by name and the attorneys know where to look. That helps to keep things straight although it is not fool-proof by any means. If the printouts remain unclaimed in the files for more than 24 to 48 hours, they are added to the ECLIPSE load for that day, and the receptionist sends them on their way.”

¶16 “We grab printouts from the printers throughout the day, put paper clips or binder clips around them, and leave them in a tray near the printers. The Fax Center couriers pick up the printouts from the tray several times throughout the day and deliver them to the offices. Our attorneys have learned that if they don’t pick up their printouts, they will get them eventually. It depends on how much of a hurry they are in.”

¶17 “We keep them in separate piles during the day, hoping they will be picked

up. Printouts that are not picked up, are routed to the attorneys the first thing the following morning.”

¶18 “At an attorney’s suggestion, I recently placed a slotted file holder beside the printers. Initially, I placed the orphaned print jobs there myself in order to keep them separated. However, the attorneys have been great in keeping up the use. As they pick up their print jobs they are apparently separating others that haven’t been picked up into the file holder. I also send them down through interoffice mail after a few days, but at least this way they are already separated out. And there isn’t a huge, unorganized pile of paper accumulating beside the printer. The original suggestion I received was to set up file folders for the heavy Westlaw/LEXIS users so they could just check their files. We have too many attorneys (over 100 in this office) for that to be practical. The slotted holder seems to be a good compromise.”

¶19 “What I have done, and it seems to work well, is to mount plastic ‘wall pockets’ above the Westlaw and LEXIS standalone printers. When I am near a printer, I take the prints off it, paper clip the sheets together, and put them in the pocket for pick-up. Any prints left in the pockets the next morning are put in the interoffice mail to the researcher.”

¶10 “Working for a much smaller firm (about 60 attorneys), I give them to the office messengers. If I waited for them to be picked up, I’d be buried in paper! Maybe you can get the printer area included as an interoffice mail pick up location?”

¶11 “I’m even ‘luckier’—the printers are in my office. Fortunately for me, most attorneys find it more convenient to print to the network printer on their floor rather than to the standalone, so I probably don’t see the volume of orphaned print jobs that you do. Near each printer, we have a sorter mounted on the wall, which makes it quick and easy to sort the jobs and keep them separate. Some of the attorneys even take the time to sort a stack themselves! Eventually, I do send the jobs through the interoffice mail.”

¶12 “You don’t want to hear this, but we deliver. It’s our only physical exercise of the day.”

¶13 “This is not a solution—just a warning. We have a printer just for law faculty in the faculty library and have had the same problem. Our solution several years ago was to impose the distribution duty on the faculty support staff. That worked for about two years. As you can imagine, paper began building up. The new system is that another librarian and I, who go through the faculty library several times a day, end up delivering material because we feel compelled to do so. The bottom line is that unless the task is made a part of some particular person’s job, it will get done only intermittently by people who think they should.”

¶14 “We file them near the printer by last name of user, on little shelves labeled ABD, EBG, etc.”

¶15 “Printouts not picked up by the end of the day are sent out before we

leave. The printer is checked again in the morning and the night prints are sent out."

¶16 "As part of their routine, the people who deliver interoffice mail pick up the printouts from the printer and deliver them."

¶17 "We address the problem by checking the print stack regularly throughout the day. For a long time we stacked them crossways in a tray. More recently we've been using a vertical divider on a shelf, which makes it easier for attorneys to find their printouts when they come looking for them. We're exploring using our outsourced copy service/mail room folks to make the deliveries on a routine basis too. In the meantime, we clip the stack together, circle the 'to' name on the cover sheet, and put it in the interoffice mail."

¶18 "This might not exactly answer your question, but if you have a new Westlaw standalone laser printer (Lexmark Optra S 1655, 1855, etc.), use a colored paper in tray 1. The first sheet of each print request uses only paper from tray 1, so each print request will be easy to spot."

¶19 "We have the same problem, mostly with Westlaw printouts, and, since we use the Lexmark printer with colored separator pages, it is very easy to discern and separate the jobs. It is a bit more difficult with the LEXIS HP III Si but it does shift from side to side so it isn't as difficult as it could be. We pull them out, separate them, and leave them for two days. Then they are clipped and pitched into the out box, figuring that if they didn't need it within that time period they can surely wait until the mail delivers it to them."

¶20 "The printouts go to the area network printer, so the secretaries are the ones who gripe. Generally, what they have done is make a slot for 'Web' and for 'case printouts' in addition to the slots for each attorney (and the ubiquitous holding tray). After a few days, whichever secretary is fed up with the space hogs (old unclaimed printouts) will just trash them, but I believe they give them a week to claim them. It's all more or less informal, but who's going to argue with the secretaries?"

¶21 "If you have a regular interoffice pickup, just staple the printouts, circle the names, and put them in the pickup box if it's conveniently located. You could also try e-mailing a reminder to the individuals."

¶22 "For faculty/staff LEXIS and Westlaw printouts we have plastic file bins (two) with hanging file folders designated for each faculty/staff person. This works fairly well except for extremely large jobs, which still need to be placed outside the bin. The bins retail for about \$10 to \$15 each. We used to keep faculty printouts on shelves, but this was too messy, with printouts sliding together and getting mixed up. When there are many jobs languishing in the bins, we deliver the printouts. The file bin method is much neater and more organized than our previous method, and there have been fewer complaints about lost printouts. For student printouts, we have stacking plastic shelves with ranges of the alphabet for filing by last name (e.g., ABC, DBF, etc.). There are far too many students to sup-

ply individual folders. Many student printouts go uncollected, but we discard those after a few weeks.”

¶123 “I don’t know if this is possible staffing-wise, but here at the law school we deliver print jobs every two hours—I have students who do this, and occasionally faculty will come pick up a job themselves, but it eliminates multiple people poring through the stacks of paper if you have just one or two people responsible for sorting, stapling, and delivering them.”