

Law Librarians As "Resourceful Strategists"

BY PROFESSOR PENNY A. HAZELTON



Professor Penny Hazelton has been a law librarian for 20 years. As law librarian and professor of law at the University of Washington's Marian Gould Gallagher Law Library, she runs a program to prepare lawyers and library students for careers in law librarianship.

Today's lawyers face a common problem, and it goes something like this: *For every one traditional source of legal research information, there are now 15 different ways to access that information.*

Thankfully, for most problems there are

solutions. In this case, law librarians hold the keys to solving the information dilemma.

Lawyers simply don't have the time to learn today's dizzying array of information sources, much less determine the accuracy and reliability of each. It is the law librarian who possesses the

expertise to wade through the ocean of information resources and provide lawyers with only the best, most efficient, most reliable and most accurate information.

This kind of expertise is more important today than ever before. Like the legal profession, the profession of law librarianship has seen significant changes in the past several years—many of which mirror changes in the legal profession, and all of which have led to an increase in the amount of raw information that has to be refined into something useful.

These changes include:

- Unabated lawmaking from all three branches of government at the international, federal, state, local and tribal levels
- Technological developments that have made possible powerful and complex legal research and business management tools
- The highly competitive nature of today's practice of law

- The increasingly international aspects of today's practice of law

What skills can today's law librarian provide? Besides a genuine working knowledge of the organization itself, law librarians who will help that organization move into the 21st century must be **resourceful strategists**. Using organizational, networking, problem-solving, teaching and creative talents, law librarians can find ways to provide sought-after information and resources in the most efficient and cost-effective ways.

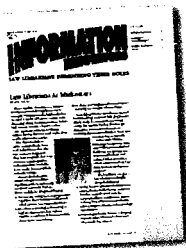
The harnessing of technology is a core competency in making these tasks possible. New legal publishers and new products must constantly be evaluated and measured against the needs of the organization. These include information sources that did not exist five, much less 30 years ago. No one is better suited or more qualified to take on this task than a law librarian.

Whether they are locating a specific document, gathering legal or nonlegal information, negotiating vendor contracts, expediting the routing and handling of library resources, hiring competent staff, training organization members to use the online catalog or strategizing with associates on the best ways to approach a research assignment, law librarians are increasingly needed by lawyers as resourceful strategists.

Some lawyers will find the time and develop the skills to understand and use information resources themselves, but most will need to rely on law librarians to help them evaluate and use the best resources for the research jobs at hand.



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