

The Sterling Committee 1992 Survey of Sydney Law Firm Libraries

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Chairperson, Survey Committee

Introduction

This survey on law firm libraries was distributed during July 1992 to all 25 members of the Sterling Committee of Sydney Law Firm Libraries. The results were compiled from the 17 responses received.

There were two reasons for compiling this survey: a) to raise the profile of law firm libraries, and b) to assess the current status of their operations. This included seeking a clearer perspective of the principal operations of these libraries and trends within them. Of equal importance was to determine the scope of the law firm information manager's role.

Members of the sub-committee who tabulated and analysed the results were: Kathy Maguire (Chairperson), Karen Rowe-Nurse, Hazel Fell and Philip Mullen.

We wish to acknowledge work done in an earlier survey by the Working Party for the Australian Special Library Standards of South Australia as published in (1992) 25 (3) *Australian Special Libraries* 83-99.

All references to "law firm libraries/librarians" refer specifically to respondents to this study.

The Organisation

The respondents to the survey are divided into the following groups according to size of firm:-

Group 1:	1-20 Partners	1-50 Solicitors
Group 2:	21-40 Partners	1-50 Solicitors
Group 3:	21-50 Partners	51-100 Solicitors
Group 4:	51+ Partners	101+ Solicitors

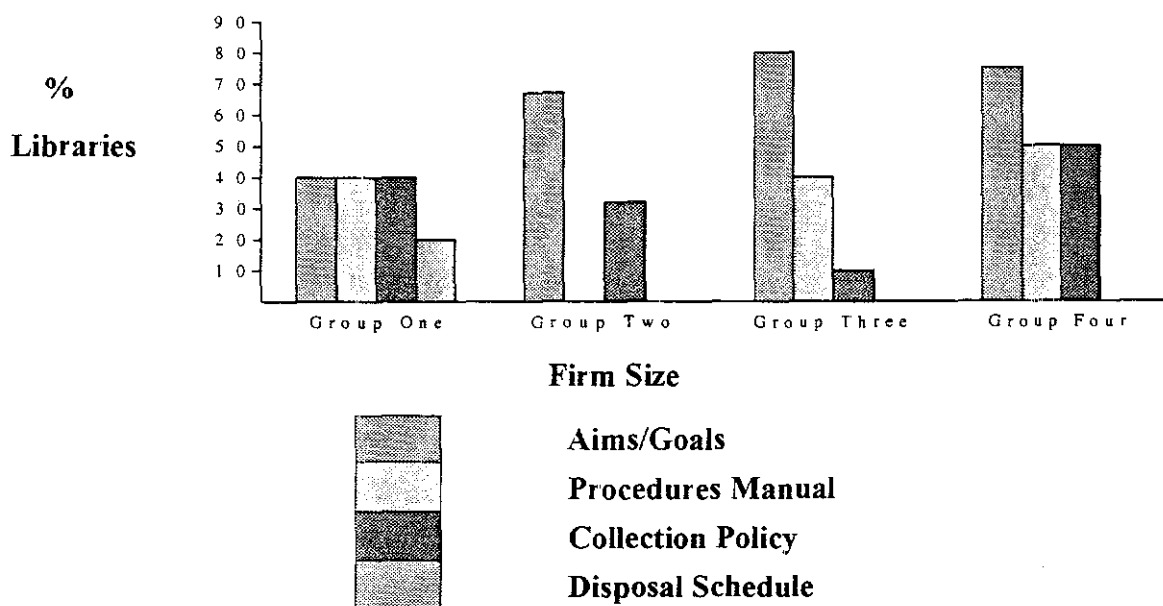
Within the law firms surveyed, over 80% of librarians have less than three levels of management between them and the highest internal position.

37.5% of all librarians report directly to the highest management position, i.e. the Managing Partner. The smaller sized firms constitute much of this percentage, with most medium to larger sized firms being answerable to two or more levels of management. 50% of librarians report to the second level and 12.5% report to the third level of management.

82.4% of librarians provide a written report to management (23.5% annually, 53% monthly; 5% six monthly) with 76.4% of reports being used to identify significant achievements and delays in achieving goals.

58.8% of libraries have a formalised/written statement of goals, aims and/or objectives for the library service, 47% only have formalised/written procedures manuals; however only 35% have a written collection policy. It is interesting to note that only 11% of libraries have a formalised Disposal Schedule. Figure 1 (below) compares this distribution by firm size.

FIGURE 1: LIBRARY PROCEDURES



Human Resources

62.5% of law firm libraries employ two full time equivalent staff (FTE) or less and only 6.3% have more than 5 FTE staff. The largest law firm libraries (Group 4) have on average 4.56 staff, approximately 3 times the number employed in Group 1 (average 1.42). The proportion of ancillary staff to librarians/information managers in Group 1 is 0.8, Group 2 0.9, Group 3 1.5 and Group 4, 0.93.

Figure 2 indicates average staff levels by staff type and firm size.

Total staffing levels remain stable for the 1991-1992 period.

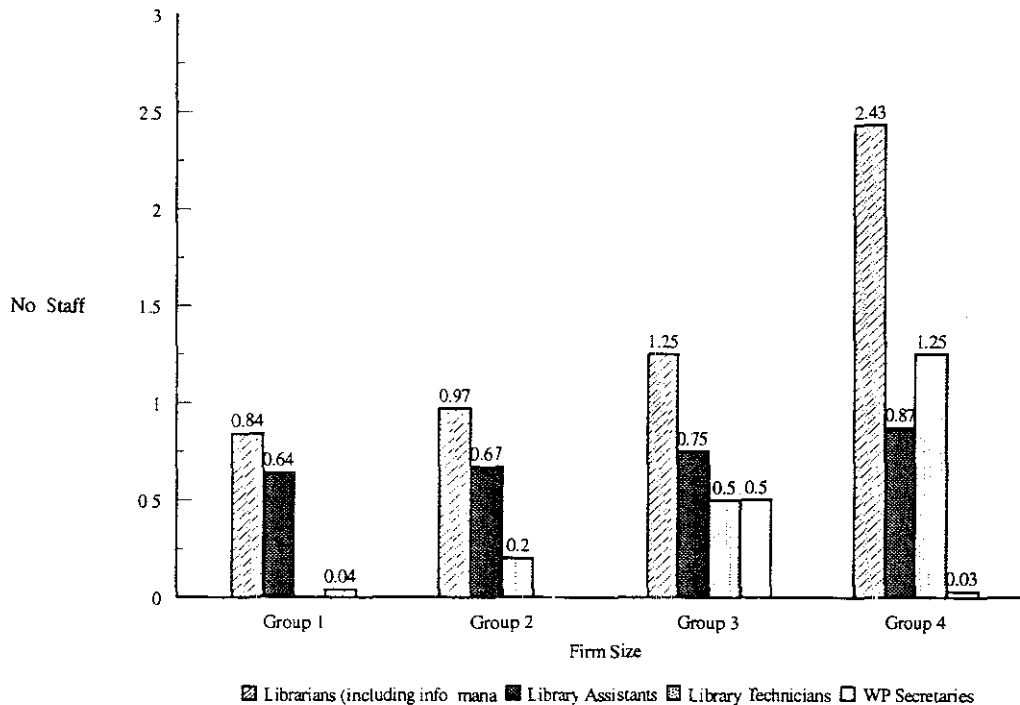
53% of respondents feel their staffing levels are inadequate. A substantial difference in perceived inadequacy of staffing levels occurs between the largest law firm libraries (20%) and all other libraries (60% and over).

Job satisfaction is rated as very good to excellent by 75% of respondents. Group 3 and 4 libraries have highest job level satisfaction with all respondents indicating high job satisfaction. By comparison, 40% of Group 1 librarians rate their job satisfaction fair.

On average each librarian has 6.6 years' experience as a law librarian, with librarians in Group 3 having the most law library experience, 7.25 years, Group 2 6.9 years, Group 1, 5.8 years' experience, and Group 4 had the least amount of law library experience with 5.75 years' experience.

Typifying the increased professionalism of librarianship all librarians hold library degrees, with 11% of librarians pursuing additional degrees.

FIGURE 2: AVERAGE (FULLTIME) STAFF NUMBERS



Library Resources

SALARIES

Since January 1991 71.4% of library staff have received increases in salary while 21.4% of salaries remained the same and 7.1% decreased. In relation to their law firms as a whole, 64.3% of librarians are of the view that they are fairly paid, with 31.7% indicating they are underpaid.

Comparison of firm size and salary range for law firm library staff is given in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3: FIRM SIZE AND SALARY RANGE

FIRM SIZE

	GROUP I	GROUP II	GROUP III	GROUP IV
INFORMATION MANAGER	36000-50000	30000-40000	36000-55000	41000-60000
LIBRARIAN	36000-40000	-	31000-35000	26000-45000
LIBRARY ASSISTANT	11000-30000	16000-35000	16000-25000	26000-35000+
LIBRARY	11000- 14000	-	21000-30000	21000-35000

What type of fringe benefits do law firm library managers receive? Conference and seminar expenses are provided to 94% while provision of membership for professional associations and legal services at reduced costs are granted to 75%. Other fringe benefits are listed below:

Non contributory superannuation	44%	Bonus(p.a.)	19%
Life insurance	38%	Medical/health	13%
Books and publications	31%	Meal provision/allowance	13%

Financial Resources

Total financial resources (including salaries) allocated to law firm libraries per annum are indicated in Figure 4.

Group I Libraries range from \$51,000 – \$100,000 p.a.

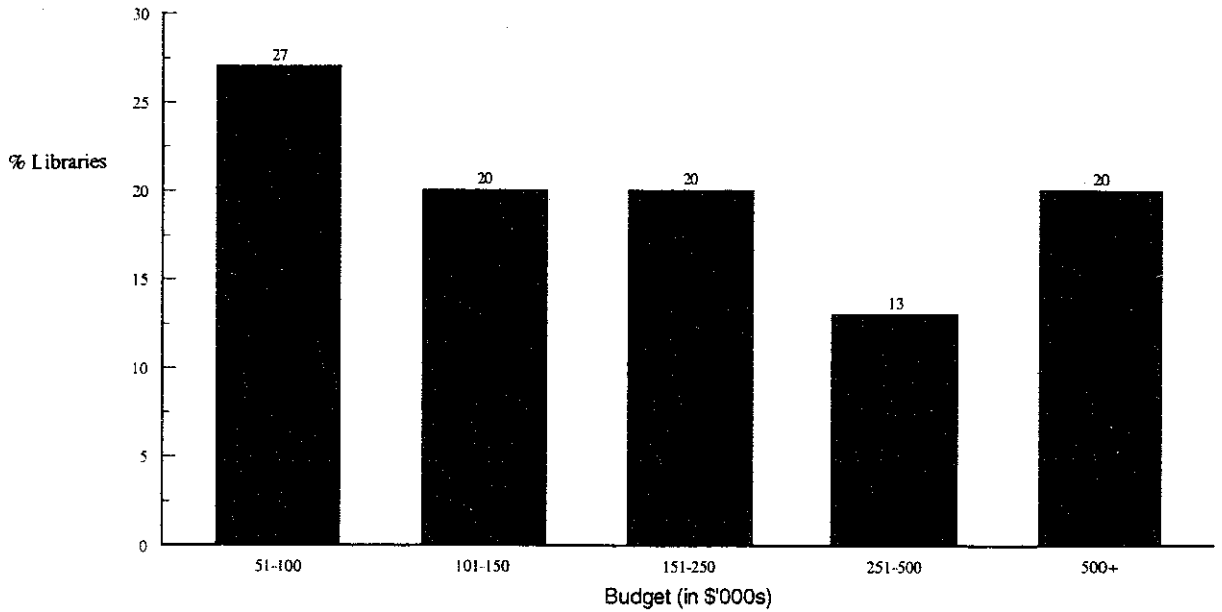
Group II Libraries range from \$101,000 – \$150,000 p.a.

Group III Libraries range from \$151,000 – \$250,000 p.a.

Group IV Libraries range from \$251,000 plus p.a.

All respondents in the study make recommendations regarding the financial resources allocated to the library. Full authorisation for expenditure of the budget is granted to 33.5% of librarians while 60% have authority to a certain dollar amount and 6.5% have no spending authority.

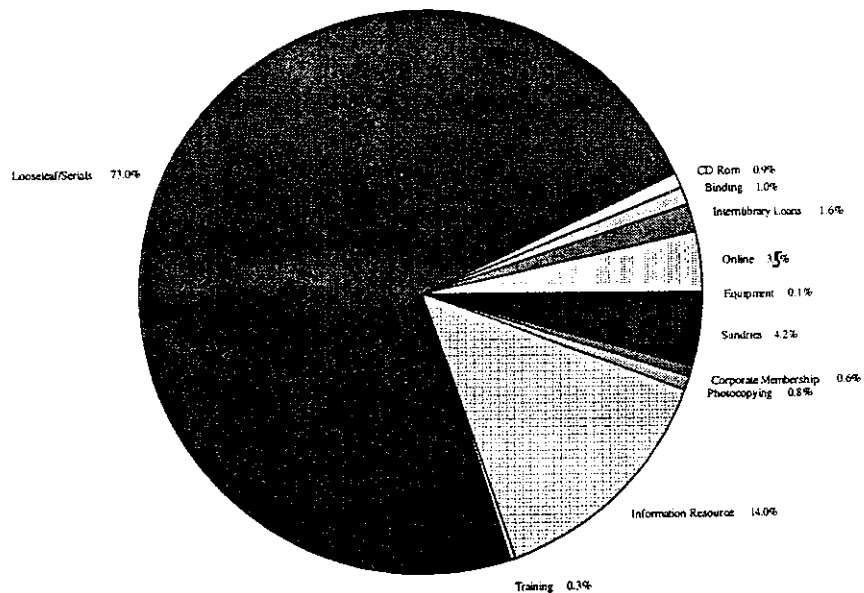
FIGURE 4: ANNUAL FINANCIAL RESOURCES (INCLUDING SALARIES)



How is the budget utilised in regard to services and resources? An example of "average" library expenditure is indicated below:

LOOSELEAF/SERIALS	73.0%
INFORMATION SERVICES	14.0%
SUNDRIES	4.2%
ONLINE	3.5%
INTERLIBRARY LOANS	1.6%
BINDING	1.0%
CD-ROM	0.9%
PHOTOCOPYING	0.8%
CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP	0.6%
TRAINING	0.3%
EQUIPMENT	0.1%

FIGURE 5: AVERAGE LIBRARY EXPENDITURE (EXCLUDING SALARIES)



Utilisation of the law library budget, however, varies greatly from library to library.

Cost recovery measures are initiated by 68.75% of law firm libraries. Qualitative responses indicate that the most common cost recovery areas are photocopying (50%), online searches (50%), interlibrary loans (44%), and librarians' research time (44%). Where possible these costs "are billed to a client matter number or to a practice group within the firm".

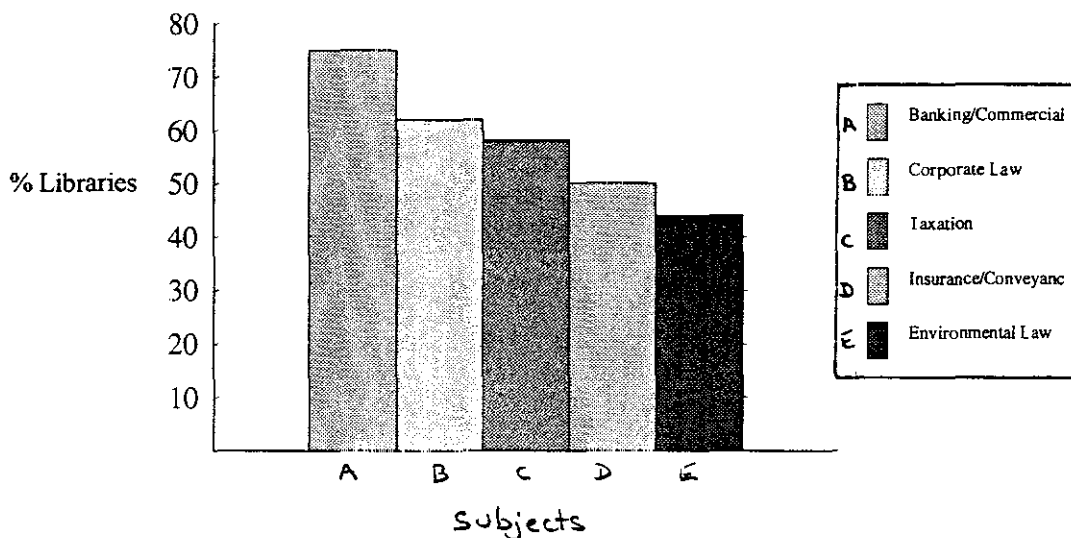
Information Resources

Overall, 56.2% of respondents have off-site collections. Libraries in Group 1 have no off-site collections, while those in Group 2 form the largest group with off-site collections (31.3%); Group 3 6.3%; Group 4 libraries 18.6%.

Sterling Committee members are commercial in orientation with a fair degree of consistency in their subject strengths. Figure 6 indicates the top five subject strengths with member libraries. Other subject strengths included by more than 25% of respondents are: intellectual property, industrial law, employment law and trade practices.

It is interesting to note that criminal law is listed as a subject strength by only one library, that being in the smallest firm size group.

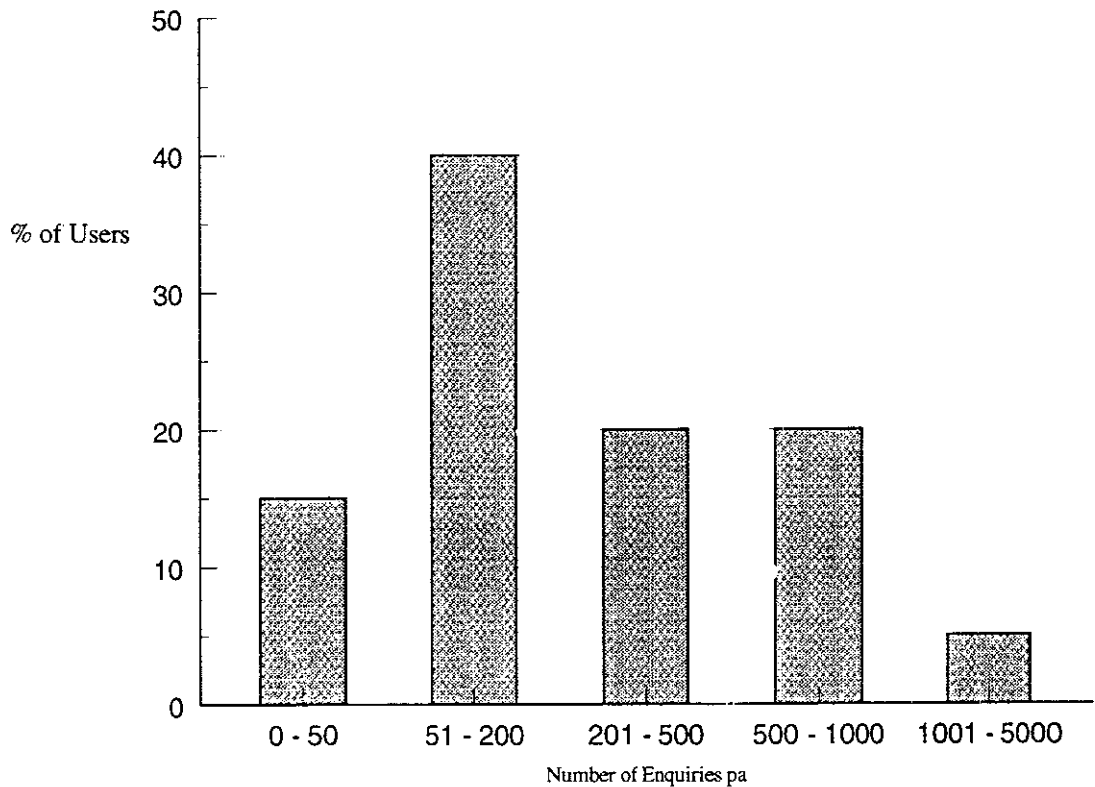
FIGURE 6: SUBJECT STRENGTHS



The level of participation in networks is very high, which indicates a great deal of cooperation between libraries, and a desire to utilise all available information sources. 100% of respondents participate in a wide inter-library network.

Of these, all libraries use intrastate networks, while 87.5% utilise interstate networks and 50% utilise overseas networks.

FIGURE 7: ANNUAL NUMBER OF ENQUIRIES TO NETWORKS



It is encouraging to note that many libraries are purpose-built (66.5%), and a large proportion of these are from the smaller firms: Group 1 20% and Group 2 26.6% were purpose-built.

12.5% of these respondents however report that they now have chronic space problems because the information manager/librarian was not involved in the design process. This situation highlights the need for librarians to be consulted at the design stage.

Performance

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES

A wide range of activities is carried out by law firm libraries. Figures 8 and 9 indicate the types and range of activities and services undertaken.

FIGURE 8:

ACTIVITIES	Activities % Undertaking	Of these, % Keeping Statistics
ACQUISITIONS/ACCESSIONS	100.00	25.00
CATALOGUING/PROCESSING	100.00	31.25
BUDGETING	93.75	20.00
INDEXING	93.75	13.33
FILING	93.75	13.33
EVALUATIONS e.g. SOFTWARE	93.75	6.60
STAFF TRAINING AND SELECTION	87.50	21.42
STAFF SUPERVISION	87.50	NIL
MEETING ATTENDANCE	87.50	14.28
DATA ENTRY	81.25	15.38
STOCKTAKING	81.25	7.60
PUBLICATION PRODUCTION - LIBRARY	81.25	15.30
BINDING	75.00	16.60
ARCHIVES/DISPOSALS	68.75	18.10
PUBLICATION PRODUCTION - NON-LIBRARY	12.50	50.00

FIGURE 9:

ACTIVITIES	Activities % Undertaking	Of these, % Keeping Statistics
USER INQUIRIES	100.0	37.5
CURRENT AWARENESS	100.0	25.0
LOANS (INTERNAL)	100.0	31.2
INTERLIBRARY LOANS	100.0	37.5
ON-LINE SERVICES	87.5	35.7
USER EDUCATION	87.5	28.5
SDI (INHOUSE)	62.5	20.0
PUBLIC RELATIONS/MARKETING	50.0	NIL

It appears that many law firm librarians (37.5%) undertake a wide range of duties and tasks which are outside the role of managing the library. Of those who undertake additional tasks it becomes apparent that the majority are from smaller firms. In Group 1 50% of librarians undertake additional duties; in Group 2 33.3%; and Group 3 16.6%. No extra duties are indicated as being undertaken by information managers/librarians in Group 4, the largest firms.

33% of respondents indicate that they undertake roles involved in both the development of technology within the firm and maintenance of continuing legal education records. Other managerial duties include responsibility for precedents, litigation support, training, and supervision of deeds room. Non-managerial tasks undertaken include photocopying, delivering material, filing. It would appear that in a small law firm especially, librarians undertake duties and tasks outside the role of strictly managing the library.

The proportion of time library staff spend on queries of less than five minutes ranges from 10% (15% of libraries) to 50% (15% of libraries). 62% of libraries spend 20-30% of their time on inquiries of 6-10 minutes' duration. 46% of libraries spend 20-30% of time on inquiries 11-60 minutes in length. Inquiries longer than 60 minutes range from 2% (8% of libraries) to 30% (in 15% of libraries).

The response to the questions regarding the number of loans and inquiries was low (53% of respondents). From the available data however, it would appear that the number of loans made increases in proportion to firm size and range of resources.

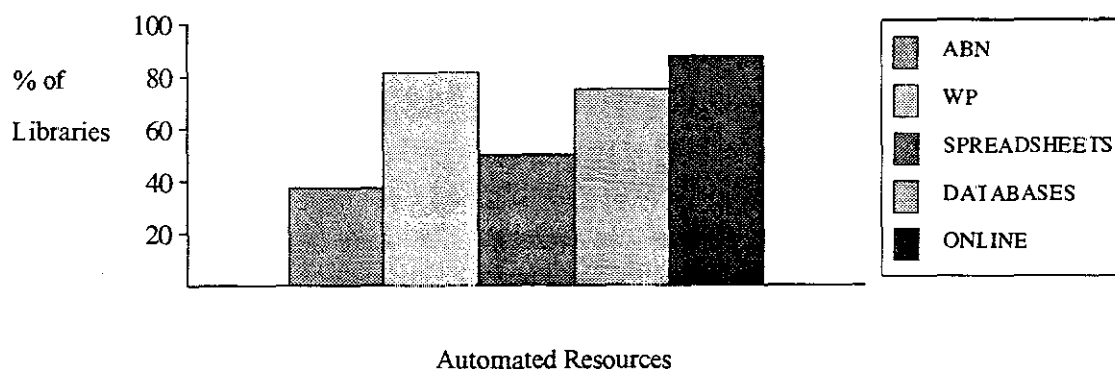
100% of respondents indicate that solicitors are the main initiators of library inquiries, as might be expected. However, in 12.5% of law libraries, secretaries as well as solicitors initiate inquiries, in 12.5% paralegals also initiate inquiries and 6.25% of libraries specify clients and work groups within the firm as initiators of inquiries.

Automation

Responses indicate that computers are used extensively within the Sterling Committee, and, it can be conjectured, throughout Sydney law firms. 69% of respondent libraries are automated to some degree, a further 12.5% are in the process of automating the library. 37.5% of automated libraries use a library management package.

Automated resources are extensively used within the library. 37.5% of libraries have access to ABN (via a dial-up line), 81.2% use word processing packages, 50% use spreadsheets, 75% use databases, and 25% use desktop publishing. 87.5% of libraries subscribe to online services, the average number of subscriptions being 4.8 (see Figure 10).

FIGURE 10: AUTOMATED RESOURCES



It is interesting to note that law firms as a whole are moving towards providing an integrated information system across the workplace. 25% of firms have such a system already in place; 31.2% are in the process of implementing such a system; and 37.5% of firms are proposing the introduction of such a system.

Marketing & Evaluation

75% of the Sterling Committee market their information services within their own law firms. All provide user education services, with 68% of respondents both providing an in-house library newsletter and representation at firm management meetings. One library also administers the firm's CLE program.

43% of libraries participate in external marketing. Of this group 71.42% provide assistance to the marketing manager/director, and 28.57% provide general research assistance. No library, however, provides an external client newsletter per se.

50% of the Survey respondents evaluate their library services, of this group 37.5% employ user questionnaires and 25% track user queries and use feedback from solicitors to locate new areas of interest. An interesting area for further study would be to examine in more depth how librarians evaluate and market their library services.

Conclusion

A descriptive analysis of 17 of the 25 Sydney Sterling Committee reveals that member libraries are similar in commercial orientation; active participation in inter-library networks; and in the range of information services and activities they provide to a predominantly solicitor-based user group. Clearly diversity exists in terms of the size of the user population and available financial resources.

The role of the information manager is diverse and flexible to meet user needs. Activities such as active marketing of information services and products, user education, current awareness and representation at management levels all extend the traditional boundaries of librarianship. Of particular interest is the extension of the information manager's role into information technology issues.

Across the 17 Sterling Committee libraries surveyed there is broad-based automation utilising a range of internal and external computerised resources, although use of automated library management packages remains a potential area of development.

A lack of emphasis of performance statistics by law firm librarians raises the question as to how their libraries are evaluated by management. Perhaps other criteria such as financial accountability, quality and efficiency of service are of more importance to management. There would seem to be a need for closer analysis of how law firm librarians may more effectively evaluate their libraries' provision of services. Further study should also be undertaken to analyse the needs and expectations of management and users so that law firm libraries may offer pro-active and efficient information services.

Note: Diagrams in this article were supplied by the Survey Committee.

Recent quotes ...

"I think the importance of libraries can be overestimated. They are important, of course, but their main use is for teaching research skills, so that students will be able to find information and keep up-to-date once they have graduated. The information in itself is not especially important."

Professor Philip Clark
Law School
Deakin University

Law Institute Journal May 1993,
p.349

"Some universities seem to think all you need is some chalk and a room to teach law - Australia has no required standard for law libraries."

Mr Eugene Clark
Faculty of Law
University of Tasmania

The Australian 19 May 1993 p.13