

CCH Electronic Summaries: Current Awareness Services for Lawyers



Kristine Goodin

Blake Dawson Waldron, Brisbane

The concept of providing electronic summaries for CCH looseleaf services was a result of my increasing frustration, not to mention that of the library users in my firm, with traditional methods of circulating library current awareness material. Our previous system required the purchase of multiple copies of CCH summaries which were then circulated within work groups of the firm with five people per item. This procedure resulted in people on the top of the list receiving information quickly, with people at the bottom receiving the material with varying time delays. Our longest record for distribution was six months!

The legal environment and customers are increasingly sophisticated and demanding, making currency of information a matter of primary importance to legal firms. Traditional circulation procedures are inefficient and defective in achieving these goals. Initially I experimented with scanning CCH summaries and found that the variations in print style resulted in a high proportion of errors in each document. After discussion with CCH about these problems the conclusion was reached that the provision of information electronically would provide the speed and accuracy I required. As a result I began to test the system in the Brisbane office of Blake Dawson Waldron, and later to all Australian offices of Blake Dawson Waldron.

Obtaining Information

The information is retrieved by logging onto CCH's database via a modem each day. The number of summaries varies from day to day according to CCH's publishing schedule. The summaries are received as an ASCII file and converted to our word processing system. During this procedure basic formatting of the document is carried out. Initially the information was not formatted in any way. This results in documents with no bold or underlining which previously made the information more difficult to read. (The addition of bold for all headings and underlining for all cases received positive feedback from solicitors.) Once this is completed the individual CCH summaries are then lodged on the internal Document Management System (DMS) and allocated a unique number.

Distribution of Information

A daily e-mail is sent to all solicitors listing the title of documents received, and a brief summary of the information they contain with the DMS number. To retrieve the document he or she requires from the DMS the solicitor copies the document and can print a copy or read it directly from the computer screen. If there is nothing of interest for that particular day the e-mail can be deleted. A sample of the format used in the e-mail is set out below.

"Today's CCH Flyer contains the following information:

- *AUSTRALIAN TAX CASES REPORT No 10, 20 April 1994 - Private ruling on frequent flyer benefits set aside - Payment for restraint agreement not assessable - Tribunal failed to make necessary findings of fact - Dismissal not due to bona fide redundancy objection granted - available on Brisbane DMS 1528427*
- *AUSTRALIAN TORTS REPORTER REPORT No 98, 19 April 1994 - Mengel v Northern Territory - Reliance and proximity: no claim against auditors - Complaint against solicitor absolutely privileged - Negligence absorbs rule in Rylands v Fletcher - available on Brisbane DMS 1528429"*

The system in use evolved after consideration of the abilities of Blake Dawson Waldron's computer network. Other options were considered which proved to have various problems. The decision to use the DMS in combination with e-mail was seen as the most effective means of distributing a large amount of information nationally to some 500 people on a daily basis. The current system will be assessed regularly as new software becomes available to improve access to information.

A major issue in the use of CCH electronic summaries is that electronic distribution is not a breach of copyright, in contrast to the practice followed by some libraries of distributing photocopies of material. The essential advantage of the new approach is the immediacy and accuracy for the information dissemination. The Licence Agreement allows all CCH summaries to be printed and copied internally as required. Lodging all documents on the DMS provides an historical record of material held, which at present can be searched by title, date and keywords. When full text searching becomes available on the DMS the information will become a useful research tool to add to the library resources.

Training and Promotion

CCH electronic summaries require training and education to gain users' confidence and acceptance. The important element to stress is that this system provides up-to-date information which gives an advantage over traditional paper circulation systems. It is essential to stop the distribution of paper copies of CCH summaries once the system is in place. Often I found that the people who did not like the system were not using it in the most efficient manner. Group "hands on" training, and personal training have gone a long way to increasing the acceptance of electronic information dissemination.

When the system was implemented nationally for Blake Dawson Waldron each library was involved in promotion and training for use of the system. Initially there was some trepidation from solicitors about an electronic circulation system. The majority of people now realise the benefits for them after attending training. Furthermore, once the system is in place libraries stop circulating paper copies of CCH summaries to solicitors to encourage use of the electronic summaries.

Savings in Cost of Circulation Material

Previously all Blake Dawson Waldron libraries used paper circulation systems which required the purchase of multiple copies of CCH summaries. This tended to be a costly package with additional copies of summaries available for purchase at costs calculated on a scale relating to numbers purchased. An example of the cost involved to purchase additional copies is illustrated by the *Corporations and Securities Reporter* at \$240 for 40 copies. The cost of extra copies across all Blake Dawson Waldron libraries amounted to a substantial sum of money which compared unfavourably with the cost of the electronic licence agreement. In comparison to the previous situation there is now a considerable cost saving in the time spent distributing the material within the firm. Whereas each office previously duplicated the effort of distribution, we now send the information from one central location.

Currency of Information

CCH electronic summaries provide a considerable time advantage as the electronic summaries are available within twenty-four hours from the time that the item is cleared for printing. Electronic distribution allows all solicitors to receive the information simultaneously. Under the old system the summaries took three to five days to arrive by post, and then distribution within the firm took between one to two weeks (this was an optimistic view!).

The major problem for solicitors is keeping up-to-date as clients today are more sophisticated and knowledgeable. CCH electronic summaries allow solicitors to have access to the most current information. In addition CCH electronic summaries provide an introduction for solicitors to the use of electronic products which will help familiarise them with new technology and prepare them for other new products as they arrive on the market

CCH Electronic Summaries Price Structure and Licence Agreement

The CCH Electronic Licence Agreement provides access to 68 electronic summaries. The Australian Tax Weekly is available in an electronic format as a separate licence agreement. For further information about the Licence Agreement and the titles available please contact Helen Routh at CCH on (02) 888 2555

The key issue in the distribution of summaries electronically is the delivery of up-to-date information to all solicitors in the network at the same time with minimal effort. It is for this reason that Blake Dawson Waldron took a national subscription, rather than each office undertaking the project separately. A national subscription means that information is only handled and distributed once. This is in contrast to separate subscriptions which would require each office to download information by modem, convert data to word processing, lodge documents on the DMS and send an e-mail to solicitors. The system employed at Blake Dawson Waldron suited the size and technology of the firm and could be easily adapted for use on a smaller scale
