

PUBLISHERS LIAISON COMMITTEE

Fay O'Grady

Coordinator

From the first issue of the *Australian Law Librarian* 1996, the new PLC convenor will be Kerrie Millgate.

With the change of editorial control to South Australia, it seems an appropriate time for me to hand over my role. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time heading up the PLC Committee, although at times it has been hard work encouraging members to contribute to the column. At least I have laid the foundation for the column to continue to flourish and expand. I believe I have established a good relationship with the legal publishers.

I would like to thank the publishers for their interest and their speedy responses when printing deadlines were imminent. Thanks are also due to the state convenors and their committees for consistently advocating the PLC. Thank you to all members who have sent correspondence to the column in the last two years. You have proved the need for this column. I extend a special thank you to our editor, Jacqui Elliott, who has given me continual encouragement and helpful suggestions.

Finally I wish the column continuing success in achieving its objectives, and urge all members to support the new Convenor.

Today many legal materials are being produced in electronic format either on CD-ROM or on LINC. Law librarians are more often than not cast in the role of critical reviewers, far more than with print materials. It is an important role and one of which the legal publishers are very much aware. We are the ones with limited budgets and

we want to spend our scarce money wisely. Law librarians also know their users, their idiosyncrasies, the research they require and the assistance electronic products can provide in the shortest possible time.

Law librarians also know the limitations of these products. In most instances no single CD-ROM online service will provide the total solution to complicated legal research.

Opinions on these products must be passed on to their legal publishers' representatives. In doing so, it should be remembered that these representatives promote their organisations while going about their work, just as we do. They did not create the resources themselves. So it is only fair to give them an impartial and objective review of their company's product.

If law librarians can provide constructive suggestions in a professional manner on improvements and modifications to electronically produced legal resources, everybody concerned stands to benefit: the librarians, the publishers and the legal profession.

Electronic Publications

 **Helen Wallace**

Publishers Liaison Committee (WA)

INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of 1995, law librarians have been expressing dissatisfaction with the cost of electronic publications, and in particular, with the apparent variation in subscription rates from library to library. Several members of the ALLG (WA Branch) formed a group to review the situation and have employed various strategies to gather information. A survey was undertaken of ALLG members to obtain some hard facts to

determine if there really is much disparity in subscription prices and to identify other factors which might be involved. Individual members have also been voicing their concerns to various publishing house representatives, and the ALLG Committee has been lobbying State Print and members of Parliament with concerns about the availability of Western Australian legislation

Already we are beginning to see results as publishers respond to similar concerns which have been expressed by the ACT and Queensland branches, and by individual librarians. The prices which have been given in response to the Survey are current prices, and therefore reflect the latest pricing structures at the time of the Survey, which are a result of reviews of pricing made by the publishers. The result is that there is not as great a disparity in prices as there was at the beginning of the year. Libraries are now receiving special offers from publishers such as Computer Law Services' 'Gold Group', but none of the libraries had taken up the offer at the time of the Survey.

THE SURVEY

The majority of respondents stated that they would like to purchase electronic publications but that there are a number of reasons which prevent them from doing so, including the cost of subscriptions; hardware and software limitations; the need to return the product when the subscription is cancelled; the poor quality of some products; and the need for extensive end-user training.

The major reason is the cost of subscriptions. In most cases, libraries are required to continue the hard copy as well and therefore the cost of the electronic version is additional to the print version, not a replacement. The reasons given for needing to hold both the print and electronic editions are that, at least at the time of the Survey, courts still require a copy of the authorised report; there is usually a full spectrum of computer literacy among a library's patrons with some patrons having no computer skills at all who continue to demand access to print copy (this point will be discussed

further); and the unreliability of some computer networks and computing facilities. At a time when library budgets are shrinking it is difficult to justify the extra expenditure and therefore several libraries which could not maintain both have chosen to continue with the print format.

The pricing structure in some cases is open to question, such as when publishers price a networked database according to the number of potential users in the organisation, e.g. Butterworths. Print materials are not priced according to the number of potential borrowers. We agree with the ALLG (Qld Branch) that this disadvantages larger organisations and it does not reflect the actual use of a database. Pricing should be negotiated on the basis of concurrent usage.

The next most common reason is hardware limitations. The availability of hardware, operational software and systems staff support for computing facilities are usually controlled by the organisation which is served by the library. The librarian not only has to make a case for extra funds for subscriptions, but also for the necessary computing facilities to support the product which may be an upgrade of current equipment or new equipment. This factor is compounded by the situation that few of the electronic products run on the same software or operating system. The library is also competing for computing space and systems staff resources with other applications used by the organisation. In some cases an organisation has not migrated to a Windows environment, but the database being considered is no longer supported in DOS. Even just "sampling" a product for 12 months requires financial outlay in terms of hardware, software and staff support. Several sets of the software are required if the product is being networked and this is one of the reasons given by publishers for the pricing structure which doubles or triples the subscription according to the number of concurrent users. As the software is often only available by lease agreement between the publisher and the software developer the library never owns the product.

Under the terms of most of the licence agreements, the product (that is, the disks) must be returned to the publisher whenever superseded by an update, or when the licence is terminated. This means that if a library decides to cancel a subscription to such a product it is left with nothing, in contrast to a subscription to printed material where the library at least has a run of volumes of law reports, legislation or journals, or a looseleaf volume that can be used (albeit with caution and due regard to the date of the material).

A fourth reason given is that in many cases the product is insufficiently developed. Librarians are unwilling to outlay funds for products which are still in an experimental stage or which come with promises of additional material being available in 6 or 12 months' time. A particular example is Computer Law Services' 'Gold Group' offer which comes with the promise of Western Australian, Queensland and other legislation materials being available once negotiations are resolved.

The final concern of librarians is the extra workload required to train end-users, a situation which will continue until software for search strategies is standardised and library clients become more computer literate. At present there is a vast range of computer skills among library clients from those who now find a computer indispensable to those who have no keyboard skills. Most require some degree of training to be able to use the databases effectively and need a training session for each product because of the variations in search techniques. Those who use the electronic sources infrequently do not become independent but require the assistance of library staff each time they use a product. In many cases they resort to the print version as being "quicker".

CONCLUSION

The ALLG (W A Branch) supports the issues raised by the ACT and Queensland Branches and the call for them to be included as an agenda item at the State Convenors' meetings. For their part,

librarians must recognise that electronic publications have a part (a significant part) in the future direction of the publishing of information. It is their responsibility to work with publishers to ensure that the standards of presentation and access are excellent and affordable.

Sixth Asian Pacific Special, Health & Law Librarians' Conference

Sydney, 27-30 August 1995

*Publishers Crawl - Thursday 31 August 1995**

Fifteen intrepid librarians boarded a minibus at Circular Quay at 8.45am on the Thursday following the conference for a tour of the three major Australian legal publishing companies.

Our first stop was **Butterworths**, where we were welcomed with coffee and biscuits and a chance to meet the new Managing Director, Stephen Stout, and other divisional managers. We then divided into small groups, and were taken on an extensive tour, covering customer service and accounts (where I was pleased to be able to meet my customer representative in person), editorial, library, production offices, warehouse, printing and despatch. The tour was followed by a demonstration of future directions in CD-ROM and online services, and a delicious morning tea, before we re-boarded our bus.

The expedition then travelled to **CCH** headquarters, where an introductory talk was given by Andrew Bird, General Manager - Customer Division, outlining CCH's proposed future developments. An ample lunch was provided in a courtyard setting, with the opportunity to chat to several CCH managers. Once again, the tour that followed covered most areas of operations - the

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library, customer service and accounts, editorial (all CCH authors and editors are employed in-house, so there is a rabbit warren of cubicles to negotiate), printing (all loose-leaf services and texts are printed in-house), warehouse and despatch

Once again we boarded our bus, heading for the final stop at **LBC Information Services**. Another comprehensive tour was provided, including the warehouse and despatch area (used jointly by several publishers owned by the parent company), instant printing, electronic publishing (both CD-Rom and online), library, production and graphics, and customer service and accounts. A group photo was taken to record our visit, before we met in the boardroom for drinks and nibbles hosted by Bill Mackarell, Managing Director.

We finally re-joined our patient driver at about 6.15pm for the trip back to the city - those of us not too exhausted by the kilometres of walking were able to enjoy the lights and sights of Sydney by night.

Some lasting impressions from the tours included the size of the operations - e.g. Butterworths send out 34,000 invoices per month; the libraries produce phenomenal amounts of photocopied legislation and judgments for authors and editorial staff; CCH employ staff in Parliament House in Canberra and in other states to monitor legislation, cases and press releases; each library collection includes all the publications of their competitors; and all multiple copies of looseleaf services on the shelves in the warehouses are kept up-to-date - a monumental updating task!

I appreciated the opportunity to visit these three companies and to meet various people, and we were certainly made to feel very welcome as valued customers wherever we went. I would definitely recommend a visit next time you're in Sydney!

Rosemary Hocking

Sir Samuel Way Library
Adelaide

For Sale

Commonwealth Law Reports

Vols 1-181 Buckram
Vols 1-127 Mixed Buckram
Vols 128-181 in Std Buckram
Urgent Sale \$6750

New South Wales Law Reports

1960-1970 \$800

Australian Law Journal

Vols 1-62 Bd 63-69 Parts \$2000

Queensland Reports

1860-1992 Bd & 1993-1995 Parts \$4000

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