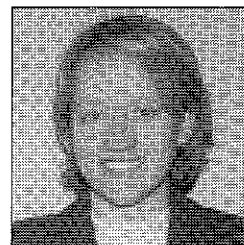


## Marketing a Law Firm Library

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### Introduction

The notion of marketing a library can be daunting especially if it conjures up a picture of speaking to a large group of stony-faced solicitors. Although presentations to the whole firm can be effective, there are a myriad of ways to market the law library and yourself as the law librarian.

### Library advocates

An article which recently inspired me in *The Law Librarian*<sup>1</sup> spoke about the importance of having key people from your organisation as advocates of the library - those who are enthusiastic users who value the services and will promote the library to others, if only informally.

This concept is obvious, but how many of us take advantage of such people by making them actively involved in the library?

As a result of Guy St Clair's article, we have introduced 'library advocates' in each practice group. They comprise partners and solicitors who were nominated by me and practice group heads as representatives of a department. The reason for establishing these advocates was to encourage involvement from solicitors in some of the decision making of the library (eg reviewing CD-ROM products) and to ensure that the library was kept informed of a particular department's information needs. It was decided that the approach would be informal and other than the first meeting with each of the advocates to introduce them to the idea and gain their support, there have been no formal meetings. Instead, we keep in touch as we need to with different advocates.

The amount of involvement depends on the individuals and the department they represent. It has been my experience that partners and solicitors are keen to be consulted and that this contact is invaluable. It goes beyond the formal structure of a library committee and establishes a rapport with key people across the firm, providing a forum for feedback and recommendations where every department can have 'a say' in the library's development.

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<sup>1</sup> St Clair, Guy "The realities of success in today's law library: the value of advocates", *The Law Librarian*, v 26, no 3, September 1995, p 434

## Visible marketing

By visible marketing, I mean making yourself seen. There are a number of ways to do this and if you are fortunate to have any staff, they too can be involved.

- As described above, *choose key people from departments* to bounce ideas off and encourage involvement in the review of products and services. If solicitors have played a small part in the decision process to purchase a new CD-ROM, they are likely to be keen to use it and tell others about it.
- *Attend practice group sessions* if you deem it appropriate. Ask to speak for 10 - 20 minutes on the latest developments in the library. It does not have to be every practice group meeting - twice a year is adequate if you back it up with other means of communicating to practice groups. If you are not comfortable with speaking to a practice group, ask to attend some meetings so that you at least keep abreast of what the group is doing. Your face will be a reminder of the library.
- *Walk the floors.* The mere presence of the librarian in a corridor can arouse many latent requests. Ensure that when you walk the floors you write everything down - one important aspect of marketing a library is ensuring that requests are responded to quickly. Forgetting a request which a senior partner yelled to you as you ran past will not do wonders for your credibility!
- *Provide training.* Other than training articled and seasonal clerks, offer training in legal research skills to practice groups or individuals and tailor it to suit their practice requirements. Alternatively, offer lunchtime refresher courses in using a particular product. This is particularly useful for encouraging the use of electronic products. Once you have trained one practice group you will be amazed by the requests from other groups as the word travels. No one likes to feel that they are missing out especially if it is giving another practice group the edge!
- *Greet all new solicitors.* Ensure that the library is included on all inductions to the firm and that you or your library staff spend time with each new solicitor familiarising them with the collection, the procedures, and offer training in any aspect of research.
- *Newsletters* or email provide an avenue for the library to keep solicitors up-to-date and to communicate with the whole firm regularly. Make them informative and relevant to the practice and use them to advertise other library services.

## Bribes and pleasantries

- *The lolly jar* is used in many libraries to lure users. It can be strategically placed beside a loans terminal so that a solicitor feels obliged to borrow a book properly before diving a hand into the jaffas. Not strictly a marketing tool, the lolly jar is certainly one way of making the library a pleasant place to visit.
- *Competitions.* In the same way the lolly jar rewards good borrowers, competitions can be a way of advertising and encouraging proper use of the

library For example, after a stock take of the library collection, reward the solicitor who guessed the number of books missing. It is a good way to highlight how many books are NOT borrowed correctly!! Occasions such as Library Week or Halloween can be turned to the library's advantage - try 'trick or treating' for the return of missing library books.

- *Host a morning tea* for articled clerks in their last week before being admitted, reminding them how they could not have survived without the library, the library staff and the lolly jar over the past year. One day some of them may be partners and hopefully they will remember the excellent library service.
- *Attend Friday night drinks* (if you are invited!) and talk about the exciting activities librarians have outside work. Blast away the image of the twin suit and hair in a bun. If drinks are not offered, ensure that you attend some social functions outside of work hours - it is a good way to see work colleagues, and they to see you, in a 'normal' (sometimes quite different) light.

### *Attitude*

- *Excellent service* is the key to marketing a library successfully. Quality service and best practice are terms in fashion and are very pertinent in a competitive law firm environment. Whether these particular terms remain in fashion is not relevant. What is important is that solicitors are always provided with the best possible information service from the law firm library.
- Hours of visible marketing will not be worthwhile if it is not supported by timely responses to requests, the provision of accurate information, anticipating needs and monitoring information in a new or potential practice area of the firm. Aim to have a turn around of requests in one day. If that is unrealistic, ensure that the requestor is informed and is kept up-to-date on the progress of a request.
- *Listening* is an essential skill, important to nurture. All relevant pieces of information should be gleaned from a solicitor by listening carefully and asking relevant questions in relation to a reference request. The library can be a haven away from a solicitor's office so make sure that if someone wants to come and have a chat, you have the time to listen.
- I am not encouraging law librarians to set up a counselling business on the side but be aware that the library may be one of the few places in the firm that a solicitor 'visits' other than the office and conference rooms - make it an enjoyable and accessible place. Make yourself accessible.
- *Smile*. This does not mean that you run around all day looking like Jim Carrey in *The Mask*. However, think about any good experiences you have had in shops or restaurants. If the attendant smiles at you, you feel as if you are worthy of attention. If the attendant remembers your name, you feel as if you are receiving special attention. If the service **and** food is good and the attendant remembers your name **and** smiles, you feel as if you are old friends and that you have shares in the restaurant. Relate this to the library environment and you will be well on the way to making your users feel 'special'.

- *Be professional* Although I mentioned above that the library can be a haven where solicitors may relax, it may also be the environment where a solicitor is most stressed and does require concentration and assistance with complex research. Ensure that you and your staff provide the attention and seriousness that is appropriate.
- *Be yourself.* Tackle marketing projects which suit or highlight your skills. If you are not comfortable it will be evident in your approach. However, do not slip into complacency and complete comfort - take on some challenges and new approaches. If necessary, have training in presentation or communication skills to enhance your marketing approach.

### ***Conclusion***

When asked to write this article I was not overjoyed, as I knew I would be preaching to the converted. There is no right way to market a law firm library and I certainly have not attempted to cover all methods. Keep in mind that the most important aspect of marketing a law library is to never stop. Never assume that what you are doing or have been doing is still the best approach and check this by encouraging feedback from those who use the library's services. Be in tune with the way your firm is moving and ensure that your approach and service is compatible with the firm's strategy. Finally, never lose sight of the main reason why you are there - for the provision of an effective information service.