

# Legal Research 2000 AD....Bad News for Book Worms

John Hutley, Lynn Pollack and Josie Taylor from the Supreme Court Library offer visions of the research tools to come...

With the Year 2000 only ten years away, here are just a few predictions from a slightly scratched crystal ball.

Those practitioners who hope that computers in chambers are only a fad, and everybody will return to paper-based sanity, had better think again. On the other hand, those who believe in the totally "paperless office" are also suffering from a delusion. Society places too much emphasis on such documents as deeds and sealed contracts to abolish them in the foreseeable future.

What is more likely is that, even with massive paper recycling in the next ten years, today's paper extravagance will be economically and socially unacceptable. Unbound law reports, reprinted acts, loose leaf updates et al., all in the name of remaining current with legal developments, will soon be a thing of the past. Paper is already and must continue to give way to optically and electronically based storage media. This media is typified by the laptop computer and CD-ROM disks. These disks, which are the size of musical compact disks, can store whole series of law reports (e.g. years) with the capacity of near instantaneous retrieval of relevant passages.

Armed with a briefcase sized machine and a handful of optical disks, the barristers of the year 2000 A.D. will draw from a vast array of primary sources, both public and proprietary, anywhere and at any time to prepare their arguments. To achieve its purpose of a mobile chambers this machine, (red or blue models optional!) will combine the present technologies of the fax, the mobile phone, the modem, the hard disk and the photocopier.

This combination of technologies should allow the bar to access their own electronic libraries, the electronic transcript of the day's proceedings and their pleadings wherever they are i.e. in court or on their yachts. They will be able to dial into databanks all over the world at any hour of the day or night and libraries, such as the Law Courts Library, may provide 24 hour access to their catalogues and indexes and their electronic collections of rarer material. Researchers will be able to access the data they want, copy it electronically either onto their own machines or to the library workstations, add their comments, convert it into a word processing document and then dispatch it by electronic mail to the court or to their colleagues interstate or overseas. (What challenges for the intellectual property bar!)

Established publishers overseas are already transforming their paper-based services to these alternative storage media and building from there to enrich this primary data with commentaries and relevant related publications. A typical example is West's Federal Civil Practice Library which provides on 2 x 5" disks all the information the American lawyer needs to research federal practice on disks which fit in the palm of your hand. Using these 2 tiny disks and without leaving their desks, American lawyers can now page through Wright & Miller's 20 volume work, Federal Practice & Procedure, or find a topic in the table of contents or index and jump directly to the relevant section; they can check the procedure against a range of manuals and textbook commentaries; they can search for jury instructions or just select a case citation in the text and go directly to the opinion in the Federal Rules Decisions. In hard

copy the sources contained on these 2 disks take up several bays of shelving in major law libraries.

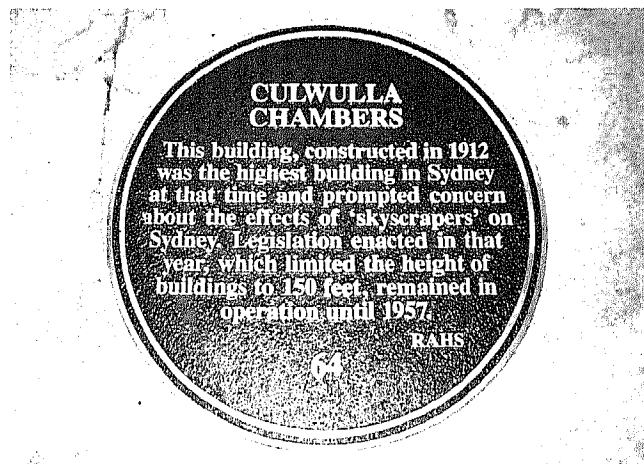
It is only a matter of time before our local publishers produce similar libraries of local law, which will be sold to practitioners, who specialise in that area, on a subscription basis much in the way they subscribe to loose-leaf services now. Already Diskrom Australia is marketing a Commonwealth Corporations Disc and a Commonwealth Statutes and Statutory Instruments Disc and INFO-ONE is marketing NSW, Victorian, South Australian and Tasmanian case law on CD-ROM. These developments have the potential to overcome the problem of out of date editions of major works with new disks being issued as changes in the law occur. Current delays in obtaining unreported judgments and new legislation will be overcome as the courts and the legislature use technology for the electronic transmission of new judgements and legislation. The drudgery of photocopying will be just a memory.

In the future, libraries will have jukeboxes of such data, which will either be available on a dial-up basis or even possibly for loan. A range of expert systems will be available in libraries to enable counsel to test a known set of facts against inbuilt formulae based on current legal principles and current legislation and these will be updated on a subscription basis to ensure they are always up to date. Electronic floor libraries will be linked by a local area network (LAN) and gone will be the day of running from room to room hunting for misplaced volumes.

These brief views of the future offer the prospect of blessed release from overloaded bags of books and to some degree from the need to purchase expensive chambers to house the remains of long dead trees. Counsel will be able to operate equally effectively in remote parts of the country, interstate, overseas or even perhaps from some far flung planet.

Yes, it will cost - but so do filing services, space and your time!

Most of these predictions are the logical extensions of already existing technology. Barristers who ignore these developments will one day face opposing counsel with outdated, cumbersome and unacceptably expensive information at their peril. □



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