

Lost in space: collection and space management

By Leanne Cummings, National Library Manager, Deacons

It's the age of the race for space where libraries are morphing into a new order of minimalism and divergence. In an era where publishing of electronic materials has hit warp speed, the physical library space is tittering on the edge of virtuality where librarian energy cells are on full throttle in striking a sustainable balance in the new frontier.

Trends and issues of cyberspace and physical space in law libraries

Not dissimilar to libraries throughout other industries, the physical size of legal libraries is shrinking in terms of floor space and can be attributed to three key factors:

1. increasing acceptance of electronic formats;
2. office property costs and demand; and
3. internal organisational influences

When electronic legal materials made their long awaited debut in the industry, libraries acquired electronic titles to complement existing hard copy collections, giving users an alternative option to search and access content. The past five years has seen an acceleration of user acceptance levels where today, electronic format is the expected standard with hardcopy, secondary. This is due to:

- greater stability of legal publisher platforms and less instances of unplanned downtime;
- online education environments where Y-generations graduates are very apt in using online content;
- increased publishing of court authorised law reports and legislation; and
- library budgets where duplicate holdings of hardcopy and electronic formats are not viable;

Google has further added to the acceptance of online environments bringing the technologically timid into a whole new stratosphere of "find and seek" fuelling confidence from days of woe when it was more like "hide and not seek". However in Google's meteoric rise to universal appeal, it has bought what I term the "Google Syndrome" and generally inflicts those in senior management positions. Symptoms include excited chants of "why do we need a library", "why do we buy books" and "I found it on Google". There will always be a need for a library but the trends show a library space today will be radically different in its physical being, in the future.

Confirmation of increased user acceptance of the electronic law library is seen through adaptation of collection development practices where today it's common practice to opt for electronic in place of hardcopy. Electronic legal materials are winning the space race against their hardcopy counterparts. Termed as natural shrinkage, law collections have and will continue to reduce in size in direct response to benefits perceived in electronic formats. In the main, hardcopy law reports, legislation and journals consume a high percentage of shelving space that grows each year. Electronic, not only facilitates concurrent access across multiple sites, but can effectively replace multiple hard copy sets of the same title, freeing up shelving and ultimately, floor space. Likewise, sole practitioners and small firms

are also gravitated towards the appeal of electronic, although licensing fees can carry inhibitive price tags.

Literature reporting on trends in Australian law library spaces is minimal however, in looking to the United States, statistics show that many firms are phasing out entire hard copy law report collections in favour of online. Of 73 firms surveyed, 63% cancelled subscriptions to some, if not all West Law reports in 2004-2005. 52% of those surveyed indicated their intention to phase out hard copy West Law reporters over a 2 year timeframe.¹

Office property rental costs and demand is another key attributer to law library shrinkage. Traditionally, law firms are located in what the property industry regards as "A-class" office property real estate. Along with accountancy firms and investment bankers, law firms pay top dollar per square metre to attract top dollar clients and top billing lawyers. As one leasing agent stated "it's basically a club...they like sharing the lifts with the people they do business with."² In fact some believe that working in an A-class building provides more opportunity for impromptu interactions with blue chip business people and offers appeal in terms of aesthetics in luring prospective high calibre employees and clients.

Market indicators show capital city office property vacancy rates continue to decrease with demand for more space increasing as prices continue to soar. Vacancy rates in the Australian office market are at a 15 year low at 6.1% whilst rental costs continue to rise.³ On average rental costs increased from 18% - 20% with Perth and Brisbane CBD office property enduring the highest increases, followed by Melbourne and Sydney.⁴

Sydney remains the most expensive city to lease premium office property where gross rents have reached \$1200 per square metre. The Governor Phillip Tower is predicted to earn \$1300 per square metre followed by Deutsche Bank Place, Aurora Place and Chifley ranging from \$1200-\$1250. In comparison, Melbourne floor rents range from \$215 to \$237 per square metre (Western space lures offices by Chris Vedelago and Marc Pallisco, *The Age* 7 March 2007 p. 9) with the top address at 101 Collins Street, averaging \$700 per square metre followed by the Rialto in the high \$600s.⁵

Brisbane rentals have doubled over the last 2 years and are predicted to push through the \$600 to \$800 per square metre mark with a recent signing for \$1000 plus being paid per square metre for an Eagle Street A-class office space. Perth office property rentals increased by 20% over the past 12 months with QV1 and Central Park, averaging \$600 per square metre. An extreme case of property rental increase was where a business based in Perth shut down offices and relocated to Sydney after a 50% rent increase.⁶

Internal organisational influences such as an expanding workforce and growing trend for breakout rooms further add to justifications to reduce library consumption of floor space. In many instances the option to relocate, lease or purchase additional floor space is not possible during times of low vacancy rates and when costs are at an all time high. The alternative to redesign existing floor layouts, reallocating floor space from other units or services such as the library is becoming common practice. Sheppard Mullin Richter & Hampton (United States) were required to reduce the hard copy collection to make room for a conference centre with seating for 75 people. The upside to this was the re-design bought people back to the library, even though it is for a different purpose.⁷

¹ Cohen, A, "Law librarians look beyond books", *The American Lawyer on the Web* 11 July 2006

² Midalia, A, "The high price of life at the top", *Australian Financial Review*, 14 April 2007, p.21

³ Stensholt, J, "Recycling assets", *Business Review Weekly* 3 May 2007 p.66

⁴ Cummins, C, "Push to ease CBD office squeeze", Carolyn, *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 Feb 2007, p.68

⁵ Midalia, A, "The high price of life at the top", *Australian Financial Review*, 14 April 2007, p.21

⁶ House, K, "Rental note: every city tells a story", *Australian Financial Review*, 4 Jan 2007 p.41

⁷ Biberman, T.K, "Technology brings about the incredible shrinking law office", *San Diego Source*, 30 April 2007

Online library catalogues, intranets and internet access to full-text electronic legal materials from a lawyer's PC, XDA or blackberry has brought about a decline in library patronage numbers. The ability to interact with library services and staff through email, telephone or sms replaces in-person visits to the library space. This in turn has also seen a reduction of seating and reading areas in libraries. Brown Raysman MilsteinFelder & Steiner did away with all library seating and hard copy reports in response to the online environment and access to electronic legal material.⁸ The flipside to this is the electronic environment can better cater for work-life balance where employees can remotely access a greater portion of legal materials than previously available to them.

The electronic law library has enabled firms to cap collection growth, reduce duplicate holdings and facilitate 24x7 access to library resources from multiple locations without consuming valuable floor space. The shrinkage of the physical size of a library is a rational outcome of technology, coupled with property market trends and user acceptance of electronic formats.

Space craft: balancing changing library space & collection management

Some may say that the renaissance period of the classical library is over, where long runs of shelving and the musty smell of books are lost. Yet others see a library's ability to quadruple its capacity and extend its collecting strengths independent of floor space as the modern day renaissance.

Banished are the times where librarians were prisoners of space limitations where acquisition criteria were dictated by available shelving, as well as cost. Many librarians have crash landed in a boundless frontier where electronic collection development is limitless in size and coverage. The course ahead shows there will always be a need for some hardcopy and this is our time to take charge, prepare a flight plan and drive the change. The harsh reality for many law libraries is our space will change to accommodate evolving organisational requirements and the first step is to transform collecting rationales, from "just in case" to "just in time".

Reading the ALLA listserv postings it is evident that libraries are well into weeding their collections of hard copy materials. Law reports is the most commonly discarded format followed by legislation and journals. Strategies adopted by libraries in managing collections with diminishing floor space include rationalising duplicate hard copy holdings especially across multi-site libraries. In the case of multi-sites libraries, some have assigned specified areas of law for collection development, to further streamline holdings. Others have taken a more radical approach by ditching all hard copies of a report or journal series, replacing it with its electronic alternative. Extensive weeding programs have seen the relegation of retrospective or low use material to cheaper housing options such as offsite storage and building basements. Whilst others have undertaken mass binding to reduce shelving consumption and in the case of multi-site offices, deployed collections to another office of greater storage capacity. The Age reported on 6 August 2007, that the majority of the Melbourne University Baillieu collection consisting of 320,000 texts was being relegated to offsite storage. The Baillieu collection is to make way for a learning hub style environment reflective of "quality of a nightclub or airport travellers lounge".⁹ Similarly in 2007, 1000,000 books were removed from the University of NSW library to storage in Melbourne.

A collection development policy is a key tool in documenting strategies to manage collection development and changes. Format preferences, collecting focuses, weeding and retention priorities, binding activities and risk management are programs that define a continuous course of action. Ideally a collection development policy is communicated to, and endorsed

⁸ Cohen, A, "Law librarians look beyond books", *American Lawyers* 11 July 2006

⁹ Edwards, H, "Student lost over shrinking uni library", *Sun-Herald*, 8 April 2007

by management. Although it may not change the outcome of a future decision involving library floor space, it does provide management with an understanding of collection priorities and associated risks.

Determining a prioritised list of hardcopy material for replacement with its electronic alternative should consider how users interact with library material such as analytical and definitive sources. Analytical resources usually involve the user reading large amounts of text, browsing and cross referencing. Materials definitive in nature such as case law or journal articles, are more conducive for use within an electronic environment and offer effective search and access functionality, preferable to wading through hard copy indexes and citators.

Outer space: satellite libraries, offsite storage and other alternatives

With floor space at a premium in many law firms today, what options are available to house a collection without compromising holdings?; do Millers and other offsite storage providers offer affordable long-term solutions?; are compactus and satellite libraries effective alleviators of downsizing pressures?; and finally, is inter-library loans in danger of being used as a crutch in managing collection downsizing?

Satellite libraries, compactus, offsite storage and digitising are feasible alternatives to housing material onsite within a single library space. Satellite libraries are specialist collections targeting a specific area of practice(s) and are located near or within the relevant legal practice unit. They offer practitioners with ready access to key practice material and a place to browse or research. By default, responsibility is often shared between the library and the legal unit where cases for library versus floor space can be debated by dual parties. Some satellite collections are staffed, but the majority operate using a self-help approach. The challenge facing satellite libraries is tracking materials removed from the collection and measuring usage of material.

Compactus has done to open shelving what binding has done to loose parts. It's a highly efficient space utilisation strategy which effectively houses a collection within a comparatively smaller space than that required for open shelving. The disadvantage of compactus is they are expensive, are consumer of floor space and require specified floor loadings.

Evolving from records management, offsite storage is the new galaxy in collection management especially when it comes to downsizing the physical collection. Increasingly, library catalogues are being flagged with holding statements denoting "storage" for materials that are housed offsite. Criteria for moving material to offsite can include low usage material but offer retrospective value, items published prior to a certain date, or it may focus on a particular format, jurisdiction and language. The process of relocating material offsite and retrieval of is relatively quick, easy to undertake and cost effective. The downside to offsite storage is the inability for users to physically browse, ending an era where a book is judged by its cover. Putting the spotlight onto quality bibliographic data, books in offsite storage are judged by their catalogue record which is the only indicator users have in determining item relevance. One would be disappointed to wait the required retrieval turnaround time for an item that fails to meet expectations.

Avoid the offsite storage pitfalls, "out of sight", or rather it is "site" and "out of mind" through implementation of regular weeding programs. Neglected offsite libraries have the potential to become climate controlled pest free dumping grounds. More so, weeding programs not only identify material for discard but also identify items accessed multiple times that could be more cost effective for inclusion back into the onsite collection.

With the blessing of copyright approval, some libraries have resorted to digitalising parts of a hard copy collection to reduce shelving space and enhance accessibility to historic or “hard to find” information. With the proper equipment and electronic storage facilities, this is a feasible alternative when offsite storage and other alternatives are not suitable to the format or desired usage of the material.

This is indeed an exciting and challenging era for libraries but in the words of the robot “Danger Will Robinson”, collection management should not rely on inter-library loan services as justification for deleting a title.

Watch this space: the future of library space

The future physical space of libraries will continue its transformation from large spaces, housing runs of hardcopy, to small spaces carrying minimal hardcopy with the bulk of collection in electronic material. Compactus will be a common in-house library facility, if not already, and offsite storage will be a key player in meeting cost effective storage objectives. Existing library floor space will be reallocated to address emerging organisational requirements, reviving library patronage levels.

Traditional roles such as end-processing and shelving will increasingly be replaced with intranet design and deep linking. As users continue to become independent and self-sufficient in undertaking their own legal research, a librarian’s role will move more towards library marketing and client/business development research. The costs of electronic materials will continue to rise, with rising library budgets offset by billing electronic usage directly back to the client. Similarly library staff will move from non-billable employees to billable. Maybe the following advert posted by Mobias Technologies Inc. in the November 1991 American Association of Law Libraries newsletter, is the way of the future for law libraries?

Whatever the future holds for libraries and library professionals, the changing space of a library is inevitable. Rather than wait for an alien spaceship of architects and carpenters to land on your planet, why not take the lead today and drive the space race for your library and organisation. Communicate your ideas and strategy with management in how the library manages current space resources of today and of future plans and contingencies. This is your opportunity to join the space race; the option to do nothing may leave you stranded on a desolate planet as the space ship departs for a new frontier.

***MOBIAS Technologies, Inc.
Announces: 'Virtual Reality' In Law
Libraries Coming Soon.***

A Silicon Valley development company has announced that it is nearing a breakthrough in a new virtual reality application for law libraries. Insiders report that the idea came from the minds of the two company founders, a lawyer and a law librarian. The idea is that by using the new technology, which involves wearing special headgear, gloves and shoes, persons can "go" to the library to conduct research using "books" without even leaving their offices. The headgear places two miniature screens in front of the user's eyes and permits 360 degree, 3-dimensional vision. The gloves and shoes allow the user to interact with the "virtual world" that s/he is viewing. Using this technology, the user will be able to "walk" to the library, scan shelves for books, and remove them from the shelves and read them "just like the real thing," according to the same sources. Just think, since the books are just images of the books, they can be checked out and even lost and still remain on the shelf! What's more, in a virtual library there will be no elevators, stairs, lighting problems, people, or crowded hallways and aisles to contend with anymore. Virtual study carrels are presently under development by a division of Mobias Technologies, according to an anonymous source from within the company. The division, Notnude furniture, is at work on, among other things, a virtual water bed and a virtually Lazy-Boy Rocker.... If you would like more information, or to simply offer your comments or suggestions, please call Mobias' remote comment line, 804/523-7463. Ask for Mr. Itsu Yolk. ▲▲

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