

Interview with Karen Waldron of LexisNexis Butterworths

Roger Cook met Karen on 27 November 2006, at the behest of the chair of the Editorial Board, to try and clear up some of the issues relating to the new LexisNexis Butterworths platform and to hear about some of the developments which will be happening during 2007. You will probably have seen some of these already, given the lead time between the interview taking place and the publication of this edition of LIM. He had been given some specific questions which had been raised by members of BIALL, but the conversation ranged beyond these to other areas.

Keywords: legal publishers; online services

Why move to a new platform?

One of the first areas covered related to the reasoning behind the move to the new platform. According to Karen, there were 62 legacy products on the old system (I had never realised there were that many) and the means of accessing and using them was not consistent. The intention was to create uniformity of use for all the products. With the development of the new platform, there had also been no Netbos enhancements during the previous years, so customers were being upgraded to take advantage of technical developments.

In the run up to the new platform being designed, LexisNexis spoke to some 6,500 users worldwide, working in a variety of roles, to aid in the development of the product. What they found, however, is that use of the service differs in a real situation from how it was envisaged in the abstract. Since the launch in June 2005, the company has received a large amount of feedback on the platform through outlets including customer visits, sales and training representatives, and via the e-mail feedback form on the product. In addition, usability studies have been carried out with the involvement of information professionals, fee earners and end users of the product with the aim of understanding how people use the service. From these studies, the business has established that users tend to do one of three things:-

- 1) Search over the whole content;
- 2) Search within specific types of content; and
- 3) Browse their favourite sources.

To help users carry out these tasks, a new series of three different entry screens have been designed, which will allow customers to fast-track to certain content, and streamline what they see on the front page. This clears away information and functionality from the front page which some users don't require - something which LexisNexis have found necessary to include given the vast range of users on the service, all with varying needs. Having seen versions of these new screens during the meeting, I can say that they do look a lot clearer than the current one and, if you are one of those people who search in different ways each time you use the system, it is simple to choose which entry screen you use. This is aimed at giving users "flexibility of design, without losing functionality". Going forward the company will also be setting up a range of advisory boards across different sectors to review and feedback on any changes being made to the platform.

Content on new system

As far as content on the new system is concerned, there are several reasons why this is not completely the same from the old service to the new platform. Firstly, LexisNexis sold several titles to Tottel in 2004. It should be noted that, subsequent to this, some content has been licensed back, either because of its potential for use, or because of its use in specialist areas. Secondly, material that was very rarely accessed and used was dropped in favour of newer, more relevant content.

Going forward there will be as much investment in the system next year (2007) as there has been this year,

Roger Cook

so that enhancements can continue to be made. This investment will be coming from the business growing into new areas and markets, though there is a feeling that some of the developments to the service will have to be paid for by the existing users. As an interesting comparison, the online side of the business has grown by some 16% over the past year, as against the print side, which has grown by about 2%, and the aim is to maintain this level of growth through penetration into new markets. This means that, contrary to the belief of some, the online arm of LexisNexis is not being subsidised by the print side. Also, the company believes the service represents good value for money, despite the relatively high proportion of individual's budgets that it takes up. They point to a comparison with the rates charged by many lawyers in the market, as well as the need to provide these same lawyers with comprehensive, up-to-date and authoritative information during a time when the law is changing rapidly. However, they do recognise that pricing is something which is an issue for their users across the board and maintain that they will continue to remain competitive, while balancing the need to develop products based on the demands of their customers.

Taxonomy enhancement

Further investment is also being made in the taxonomy which underpins the indexing of content on the system. This will use background indexing to aid searching and cross-referencing within the different services. Currently, it is possible to access commentary relevant to cases or legislation which you may be using, but the aim is to reverse this process and be able to retrieve relevant cases, legislation and recent developments from the

commentaries and articles you're viewing. This functionality should be being added during 2007.

Other new products

LexisNexis' parent company, Reed Elsevier, is making most of this investment possible and is taking the future of the business seriously, as the purchase of Visualfiles last July shows. The acquisition demonstrates the business' commitment to moving online and to the wider strategy of delivering content to end users' desktops. This is further shown by the new workflow application product range recently launched. The first product, *KnowHow*, was launched last summer, with two sections covering Employment and Dispute Resolution, linking into the wider LexisNexis library of materials. They were launched following feedback from the market place and LexisNexis secured its first sales in September 2006. The product has since been short-listed for the Legal Technology Awards 2007, though you will probably know the result by the time you read this. The company is also looking at introducing further workflow related applications, concentrating on the areas of Client Development, Research and Knowledge, Practice and Productivity Management, and Risk and Compliance Solutions.

All in all, I was impressed with Karen's enthusiasm about the product and the projects which LexisNexis are lining up to release soon. I believe the company has learnt the lessons from the release of the new platform and hope that we will see the benefits of this learning through the coming upgrades to the system and in the new products being prepared.

Roger Cook
Chair
BIALL Council, 2006–2007