

# From Pages to Clicks – the Questionnaire

Janice Edwards, Librarian at Maclay Murray & Spens, and Chair of the LIM Editorial Board, looks at the responses to the Pages to Clicks questionnaire distributed to members via Lis-Law in the Summer, and its implications for the future provision of legal information.

## The questionnaire

There were twenty six responses to the questionnaire, of which twenty were from law firms, five from academic libraries and one from a professional institution. As the response was so small from the latter, I haven't included it in the collated responses. I have summarised the results section by section. The actual results will be posted on the website for anyone who is interested.

## Physical resources

This section aimed to discover how far online resources have taken over from paper, and how that affects budgets.

Generally, it was thought that a law library couldn't yet rely entirely on online resources, but around half of respondents reported that at least 40% of resources were now provided online. This did not mean that many paper subscriptions could be cancelled though; the majority of respondents had cancelled a maximum of 30% of paper subscriptions. These cancellations were largely made as a contribution towards the cost of the online as most people had not actually made savings. The largest saving anyone estimated (one person) was up to 20%. The comments that people had about the proliferation of online resources were:-

- Positive:
- Save space
  - Save time – no processing of physical items
  - Currency
  - Multi-use
  - Accessibility
  - Good for targeted research
  - Desktop access
  - Books get 'lost', databases don't
  - Less duplication

- Multi-site access
- Encourage fee earners to use IT

- Negative:
- Quite a few books still not available online
  - Internet reliability still an issue
  - Licensing can be a problem, as is different for each supplier
  - Duplication of paper and online
  - Pricing – opaque at best, and usually expensive against paper
  - Fee earner research skills often need to be improved
  - Visibility of resources
  - Browsing not so good
  - No archive if service cancelled

One comment was that a handover period when switching from a paper to an online subscription would be very useful. Mostly the changeover to online services was not solely a budgetary consideration. The pricing of online resources was almost unanimously felt to be too high, but the general feeling was that in fact some resources did offer value for money. The resources that were listed as value for money, which was judged as saving a noticeable amount of time, were:-

- Westlaw (6)
- Lawtel (3)
- Linexlegal (2)
- Perfect Information (2)
- PLC (2)
- Companies House direct (2)
- Justis (2)
- OED site licence
- Euromoney online
- Onesource
- Stair online
- LexisNexis Professional PAYG
- Eurolaw
- Bermuda Law Reports

### Impact of introducing online resources

Overall, online resources are accepted by most users although academic staff seem not to take to them too enthusiastically. The most commonly used methods of introducing users to new online services were:-

- Presentations by LIS staff or external trainers
- Hands on training by LIS staff or external trainers

with personal recommendations to individuals and using the intranet or Webex less frequently used in order of popularity.

Hands on training was felt to be the most effective method of delivery, with presentations and recommendation a poor second. Generally external trainers were seen to give a good service but arranging suitable dates could be a problem, and it is worth checking that they will use relevant examples.

### Impact on LIS staff

Most respondents' libraries have been using online resources for five years, although a third started at least 10 years ago. Most resources are accessible through silent authentication or by individual password depending on the resource.

The implications for LIS staff have been felt in several areas. Experience varied on a reduction in enquiries generally, and mostly the numbers had stayed the same, but there are fewer requests for basic primary materials, e.g. cases, with more complex enquiries, more online searching – which is an obvious one given the trend – but also more responsibility for training and a greater need for IT competencies. These last two may not yet be addressed by vocational training although there are short courses available, and they have been making a difference to the skills set for LIS staff for a while now, particularly in academic libraries where online and CD resources have been used for longer than in law firms.

The impact of online resources was generally felt to be positive by practically all of the respondents.

### The future

Concerns that were expressed by respondents regarding the increasing use and availability of online legal resources were:-

- They take care of basic enquiries, and are good for up to date information, but are relied upon too much for in depth research
- Internet reliability
- Licences – people working from home, hot desking, secondment, etc.
- Google

- Too many different services
- Changes to 'look and feel'
- Lack of research skills
- Pricing – non-negotiable, inappropriate bundling, high cost
- Withdrawal of paper sources – effect on costs
- Archiving online
- Content controlled by provider
- No print back up on cancellation of online service
- Reliability of continued access
- Fewer suppliers

New developments were seen to be in the direction of:-

- Pay per view articles and textbooks
- e-books
- Portability
- Disaggregation, eg FT
- PAYG services
- Individual customisation
- Aggregated services
- More competition among service providers
- Better searching on subscription databases

### Conclusion

This was an interesting exercise, I hope for you as well as me, as it mostly confirmed what I expected but it did raise some points which bear consideration.

The shift in emphasis on LIS staff's skills sets has been a fairly quick change, and one where we've had to adapt, although coming from a business information background I've been using online resources since the early Eighties, as have quite a few of you, I'm sure. The lawyers, on the other hand, are split between the pre-IT generation and the "Googlers", and both groups need focussed training to use the available resources effectively. I would guess that this is more of a challenge than keeping our own skills up to date. The fact that many of the respondents felt that, whilst some services are expensive, they do offer value for money as they save a lot of research time both in primary and secondary sources was an interesting one. I think this must reflect the improved user interfaces for most services, which I hope is due in some small part to our feedback to service providers. It is unfortunate that it is difficult to quantify when we need to justify the expense!

Other concerns highlighted are the pricing generally of online services, as well as licensing, given that the workforce is gradually becoming more flexible. A major worry is that there is no archive once a paper subscription is cancelled, so that if you cancel the online service there is no internal archive. Archiving of online material is another area that may need to be addressed,

regarding old versions of rulebooks, for example. Most of these points have been raised with service providers already, but not all of them have been addressed as yet, unfortunately.

It will be interesting to watch the future development of these resources, as it will inevitably be linked to

new developments in IT, as well as the expectations of users.

Many thanks to everyone who completed a questionnaire, and if anyone has any feedback on the above please let me know.

My e-mail address is [janice.edwards@mms.co.uk](mailto:janice.edwards@mms.co.uk)

*Legal Information Management*, 6 (2006), pp. 246–250

© The British and Irish Association of Law Librarians Printed in the United Kingdom

doi:10.1017/S1472669606000831

# Legal Information Retrieval Study – Lexis Professional and Westlaw UK

This article by Dean Mason looks at the retrieval effectiveness of the online legal research tools Lexis Professional and Westlaw UK and is the result of research carried out for his Masters Degree in Information Science.

## Introduction

The majority of legal institutions now use online databases to provide access to legal information, especially case law. There are many advantages to such systems, but the main one, it seems, is the ability of such resources to provide access to a wealth of information at the user's desktop. Information, however, is worthless without the ability to search and retrieve relevant material. How information is best retrieved has been the focus of much debate, with consideration given to how to resolve a complex range of information needs. Two common needs are a high precision and high recall search, i.e. the user requires the most relevant items or all the relevant items (Chowdhury, 2004). To resolve these needs it appears that providers of online legal databases, the main two contenders being Lexis Professional and Westlaw UK, have enabled users to search by relevance. The idea being that users are presented with a ranked list of results – the most relevant should be at the top and the least at the bottom. Therefore, when searching for case law on a



Dean Mason

particular point of law, lawyers would, in theory, have the key cases at the top of the list. Those of less importance, which also may be significant, will be further down this list. This order emphasises the need for both recall and precision measures. As a result there have been evaluations, but mainly US-based, of how effective specific systems have been in providing relevant results. The aim of this research article is to further this research to contribute to both the information retrieval and online legal research domains of study.

In a legal context, the need for a high recall and precision search is equal to the importance and nature of using case law as precedent. The doctrine of precedent can be understood in the basic sense that the English courts have to follow previous decisions, in the form of case law, within “more or less well-defined limits” (Williams and Smith, 2002, p.95). Therefore, when lawyers carry out a particular task on a point of law (e.g. advising clients, writing an article, producing know-how) they often need to see all available case law. This can be broken down further: they need to see the key authoritative cases on a point of law (thus, a high