

# Branding and Promoting Law Firm Libraries

**Abstract:** Loyita Worley discusses the need for librarians to promote library services more avidly within their organisations. She argues that providing a high quality information service to clients is not necessarily sufficient and that librarians need to give considerably more effort to promoting and branding their services, in the way that other teams in law firms already do. She looks at why librarians should brand, how they should do this and what they should brand. The perspective of the user is also taken into account and the importance of building trust and confidence with clients is identified as a key feature in the approach to branding and promotion.

**Keywords:** law firm libraries; information services; marketing strategy; branding

## INTRODUCTION

We see branding everywhere we look in our daily lives. On TV, in the newspapers on hoardings and on the sides of buses, so it is a concept that we have become used to. However, how much thought do we give to branding and promoting our own services?

I have always believed that by far the most effective form of branding for any information service is to consistently provide a quality service to our clients. I still stand by that but accept that it may not always be sufficient to safeguard the ongoing necessity for an information service team and to give us the recognition that we deserve. I look around and see other teams within the firm who brand and market and wonder if we are in danger of being left behind.

## SO WHY PROMOTE YOUR SERVICE?

Although the importance of the library may seem obvious to us librarians unfortunately not everyone around us will see it like that and with the increasing commerciality of the legal industry including the constant review of costs and the rapidly changing environment, it is worth reminding people what we do that others can't and why it is so valuable. After all we are a significant overhead in terms of space, people resource and expenditure on materials. Our libraries may have got smaller and in some cases our numbers have dwindled but online costs have taken over where print materials have decreased so our budgets have not reduced significantly and that trend does not look like changing in the near future.

We need to prove once again that we are in fact an asset and that rather than being an overhead we are playing our part in improving the efficiency of our lawyers and therefore increasing the profitability of the firm. We have

already delivered on this as demands made of law firm librarians over the past few years have required us to react by streamlining our services and become more efficient and commercially aware. We are more conscious than ever before of how we need to perform and our challenge is to persuade our users of our skills and capabilities.

Other teams within law firms have been asserting themselves which has resulted in some overlap of ownership of certain areas and responsibilities. This might apply to knowledge management and business development for instance. Of course branding, promotion and marketing is the essence of what the business developers do and they are good at it. It has been observed that KM is an area where librarians might have been expected to make significant contributions and yet in many cases they have been overlooked. Librarians are perhaps less good at promoting themselves and it is something that they should spend time focusing on. Promoting ourselves takes time and effort and often gets forgotten in the effort to deliver what our customers need.

## WHY BRAND?

It is all very well delivering a good service to the lawyers but if they aren't sure where it is coming from, you have a problem. I recall at a conference someone commenting that when they asked the question on a survey – 'do you use the Library/go to the Library' – most of the partners said no and yet when they rephrased the question and asked – 'do you use the databases on your PC/read alerts/have access to special resources' – nearly everyone replied yes. So it is down to us to make sure that our users understand what we do for them and who is doing it.

I have personal experience of producing documents which I haven't branded being taken and used by other departments. Also, if we don't brand, lawyers may

assume that alerts/reports are simply downloaded from the internet without the need for intellectual input. We must make sure that we receive acknowledgement for our work and branding is a key opportunity for that. Our brand should identify what we do i.e. deliver best practice services to those who need them, aligned to the business strategies of the firm.

## CHANGING ROLES

Many factors including the ongoing development of technology have contributed to the changing the nature of the services we provide and the roles we play. We do less legal research than ever before as the lawyers have online access to a lot of what they need on their desks, but we are no less busy. That time is now spent on providing other services such as more business related information or better current awareness and training. These days we have less involvement in managing hard copy collections and more as managers to help access the information for which we are responsible. Our skills have stood the test of time and librarians have proved that they can adapt and continue to provide necessary services. Core areas such as research, current awareness, training and resource management will still be included and we are constantly seeking ways of streamlining our services to carve out time to offer others that align more closely to the business. Most lawyers are aware of the change in delivery methods of legal information but do they equally understand how the role of the librarian has changed? Are we promoting ourselves as we should?

## WHAT MESSAGE DO WE WANT TO GIVE?

First we need to focus on our strategies for internal branding. We should reflect on what the library currently means to our users and what we would like it to mean. Who are our users? What do they want and expect? We need to explore the differences between what our regular users and those who use us less frequently think and then consider the message that we want to deliver.

We have been struggling with some perennial issues which never seem to fully resolve themselves and which may need to be considered within the context of each firm. These would include the name of the department and the job titles used by staff. Do you feel the need to rebrand the name of your department? Some firms have used Knowledge Centre or Information Centre. Does having the word 'library' in your job title send out a particular message and if so what can you do about it? I personally feel that the quality of the service will always transcend any negativity towards the title 'librarian' but I perfectly understand that people might want to brand themselves differently and with the trend towards the increasing digitisation of information I think that it is inevitable that at some stage the title 'librarian' will disappear

within law firms. The 2015 Law Librarian Survey from ALM Legal Intelligence predicts that US law firms expect their hard copy collections to disappear within five to eight years.

## GETTING THE MESSAGE TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE

This may be problematic as our direct users understand best what we do but they are not always the decision makers and often the decision makers are not lawyers and are therefore not aware of the breadth of our services. If you have direct access to the partners and practice group leaders, your job will be easier but another way of enlisting support is by winning over your most regular users such as the trainees and relying on word of mouth to carry the message to the top. This is where branding may also help.

## CLEAR BRANDING

Branding is only useful if it is good. We should recognise the importance of developing appropriate and consistent brand messages and these should always be strongly linked to quality.

I don't think that it matters what the recognition is for as long as it is for a positive contribution on the part of the library service. So, I don't mind people saying to me "you are the person who sends out those useful alerts" but I would be less happy if they commented "you are the person who sends out those alerts that I immediately delete as they are not relevant to me"!

You may need to tie in with the firm's own branding or you may be able to develop your own. Take the opportunity of working with other areas of the business to decide what is allowed and what is best for you. The marketing team may be able to assist with your marketing and could be useful in producing a good logo.

## WHAT CAN WE BRAND

We have numerous relatively straightforward opportunities for branding through the services we provide such as:

- logos
- titles of publications i.e. alerts, updates etc.
- headers and footers to materials we distribute – either email or print
- cover pages to reports and research
- training and inductions to new joiners

The intranet is also a great opportunity. It has replaced many of the printed offerings that the library traditionally produced such as library guides, journals listings etc. and is often the lawyers' first port of call. The first impression given by the library's intranet page may well be the one that the user will take away with them so it has to be

good. This is a place for you to showcase your services including some which may not be so obvious such as the enforcement of copyright perhaps.

Ideas for these could be:

- an outline of a full range of your services and activities
- examples of research you can do
- pdf versions of brochures that can be downloaded

If you are able to input to the design, you can present the service as you want it to be perceived and if you want to be more interactive you could use blogs or wikis to deliver your messages such as to publicise new products and changes to databases. Whatever design you choose it must be clear and easy to use and the information should be regularly updated.

There may be other opportunities like moving to new premises. On one occasion when I moved a library we were able to rebrand the physical space by renaming it, colour coordinating all the library furniture and equipment and having a specific logo related to the space. I appreciate that those types of opportunities don't come along very often.

If an existing brand is flagging or has negative connotations you should think about how to revive it. It may be that it is not worth reviving in which case you may want to start again or it may just need tweaking to refresh it. Alongside this we should regularly review our services to ensure that they are still relevant and delivering what the lawyers need.

## OUR USERS

One of the key elements in the success of any information service is building trust with the users. That is, trust in the team to deliver good, reliable information in a cost effective and timely manner. We should be seen as a trusted adviser who is adding value to the business. If this can not be done then any amount of branding will be a waste of time.

Interacting with your users is very important. Do not assume that they will always come to you. Lawyers may ask other people within the firm for help when you are the experts. Lawyers need to be aware of where their services are coming from and to ensure that this is happening it is down to us to create our own brand and push it. We may need to work with other areas of the firm to contribute to projects but above all we should

get the library name out there. The concept of the 'library as a service, not a space' is critical and embedded librarians are an example of how to reinforce this. Broadly an embedded librarian is a library professional who stills performs the duties of a librarian but is physically seated among the lawyers within the department they serve. Visibility is very important.

Be prepared to go to practice group meetings armed with a PowerPoint and more importantly, examples of what you can do for them and what you have done for other groups. It has been said many times before but if someone asks you what you do be ready with a positive response that instils confidence and shows that you understand the needs of the business. In my opinion one of the core information competencies is communication and having the ability to interact with lawyers to help deliver whatever it is that they need. Every member of the team should understand that everything they do is a marketing act and affects the perception of the brand. Make sure that every point of contact that we have with our users reflects how we want our brand to be positioned and perceived.

Consider taking on new responsibilities such as anti-money laundering screening or contributing to the business intake process if you can. These may not always come your way but when they do you should embrace them as it is not often that such opportunities present themselves and they are an excellent way of being seen to support the business. There may also be areas where the library itself can take the lead on a project.

If you are advertising or launching a new service make sure that you have thoroughly tested it and that it is a tool that will be helpful to the lawyers as they have a lot of competing claims on their time. Think about how a new service might be offered and make sure that you can deliver what you have promised. This may mean managing expectations. The last thing that you want to do is to damage the library's reputation.

## CONCLUSION

There has always been a need to advertise and promote our services and I would say that it is more important now than ever. There is a continual need to prove ourselves as being necessary within a modern law firm environment. Our role is important and will continue to be so but it down to us to make sure that our users get that message.

## Biography

Loyita Worley is an extremely experienced legal information professional. She is the Director of EMEA Library Operations at Reed Smith in London. She is a long-serving member of BIALL and was Chair of the Association in 1997/1998. She has been a member of BIALL Council, is currently a member of the LIM Editorial Board and she was awarded the BIALL Life membership Award 2015. Loyita is a prolific author and speaker at legal professional conferences and seminars.