

### Practical Matters

At the Conference last June, Keri Weekes gave a very practical presentation on how to prepare for interviews. Her article is packed with extremely useful tips for all those of us who might be job searching in these recessionary times.

### Editorial Board

Michelle Celik, who has been a stalwart member of the Board for some years, has now decided to step down following her move into freelance work. I personally am

extremely grateful for all her support: she has always produced exemplary minutes of all meetings very quickly and I have relied heavily on her to come up with ideas and contacts for articles. The Board wish her well in her new position and will miss her contributions.

I shall be retiring as Editor in March 2011. I have had two stints as Editor – from 1990-1995 and from 2002 to date and have thoroughly enjoyed the work. It is now time for the younger generation to take over. I am sure the journal will benefit from a new perspective and I have every faith that it will be in safe hands!

Christine Miskin

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# Any Answers? Questions for Suppliers

**Abstract:** Because the focus of most of the themed articles in this issue of LIM is vendor relations from the point of view of the customer, it seemed sensible to allow the legal publishers to present their own views of relations with their customers to the readership, via a short survey carried out by BIALL's Legal Information Group.

**Keywords:** vendor relations; surveys; legal publishing; online services

### Introduction

This short survey was conducted specifically for the vendor relations theme in this issue of Legal Information Management. It was devised and sent out after the first BIALL Supplier Survey which resulted in the Supplier of the Year Award was completed. David Percik, Chair of BIALL's Legal Information Group, devised a list of appropriate questions in consultation with the LIM Editorial Board. The questions were sent to a range of publishers and the answers received are presented below.

### What is your reaction to your performance in the first BIALL Supplier Survey?

**CUP:** We would like to have more customers!

**Hart:** We were delighted to have had an "honourable mention".

**OUP:** The results sounded positive, but we could always do better. Next time I would really like more detail regarding how we fared against our competitors, so we can further improve our publishing and customer service.

**PLC:** Overall, it is extremely gratifying to see the results of the first BIALL Supplier Survey. This is a strong endorsement of our commitment to, and investment in, product excellence and reflects the importance we place as a business on first rate customer service.

The top ranking for product conveyed in the BIALL survey illustrates what PLC delivers. That is, a unique service which genuinely delivers value to the end user, the front line lawyer, and to the organisation as a whole. We believe our lower ranking in relation to pricing may stem partly from respondents looking at the question of pricing in isolation to the services that are being paid for.

We understand that there is more we can do to work alongside our library colleagues to improve the way PLC's true value is communicated throughout the firm. We also now run audit programmes, free as part of the

subscription, to help firms to maximise the value they derive from our services.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** We were delighted to come second in the vote for favourite supplier and pleased with our ratings in the individual categories. We appreciate such generous feedback from our customers and value the suggestions for potential improvements.

### What does excellent customer service mean to you?

**7Side:** A deep understanding of what each customer wants and what is important to them, and how we can quickly and effectively match our service to those needs, to include:

- Excellent knowledge and systems that engender implicit trust
- Offer and deliver valuable honest advice and excellent support
- Always meet promised delivery times or pre-advise of any external influences that affect timescales
- Deliver uncompromising accuracy in all we do
- Communicate what is possible and equally what is not possible (where possible present alternatives)
- Communicate at all appropriate times and on relevant matters to ensure a mutual understanding of all aspects of the services provided and customer requirements
- Continually develop systems, services and sources to provide the best customer experience
- Make the customer feel satisfied that they have made the right decision to use 7Side on behalf of their organisation
- Offering a service whereby customers are confident to refer us
- Overall that the customer experience is one of total satisfaction

#### Ashgate:

- Delivering the right product, in excellent condition, to the appropriate customer in a timely and cost effective manner.
- Responding to customer queries promptly and satisfactorily.
- Providing accurate and, as far as possible, up-to-date information for customers.
- Providing a service that is reliable and efficient.
- Identifying customer needs and responding to them as effectively as possible.

#### CUP:

- Strong products

- Knowledgeable and understanding staff
- A choice of contact methods
- A prompt response when the customer wants to contact us
- Clear service levels

**Edward Elgar:** Quick and expert resolution of problems or information requests.

As a family business we manage our business for the long term. We have low staff turnover so our staff are knowledgeable and can answer most information requests and queries very quickly. We have long-standing relationships with our suppliers and our distributor ensuring we get priority service if anything should go wrong with an order. We do not “off-shore” customer service.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Ensuring the customer is provided with a professional service at all times. This covers responding to enquiries quickly and efficiently and solving problems to meet reasonable customer expectations. It also means working in partnership with customers to enhance and develop future products and services and aligning them with customer requirements.

**Hart:** It means everything. It is something that we strive towards all the time. It does not mean the customer is always right, but it means we always listen to what they have to say.

**LexisNexis:** Excellent customer service means offering a high quality, timely service from every part of LexisNexis that the customer interacts with. Our number one priority is to identify and apply solutions for our customers’ issues and priorities.

In more detail, excellent customer service means:

- Ensuring contact points at LexisNexis are easily identifiable and accessible
- Getting it right first time
- Timely delivery of our hard copy and online products
- Flexibility to adapt to customer demands
- Professional, courteous and responsive service
- To listen to our customers, and improve whenever we do not meet our own high standards

**OUP:** Customer service is highly important to OUP and a key part of any successful organisation. It comprises many things including honest and open partnerships, prompt action on queries, and excellence in distribution and Account Management.

**PLC:** At the heart of excellent customer service is the combination of great product with exceptional service. PLC excellence is underpinned by the following:

- **Knowing our customers.** We are committed to maintaining a deep understanding of who our customers are and the challenges they face. Over 200 ex-lawyers work for PLC, so we appreciate the challenges lawyers face daily. They remain fully engaged with lawyers working on the front line and

some are even seconded into client organisations. We also work closely with groups such as the GC100, for whom we act as secretariat, and bodies such as CRELA and ELA. Our association with these groups further promotes our close relationships with the industry and our clients.

- **Listening to our customers.** We listen to our customers across the entire business at all levels. Our founders and directors regularly meet clients; our heads of service and editorial team engage with clients daily and our highly responsive customer relations team is always at the end of the phone (or e-mail, or Twitter!). We also have an “Ask-the-team” function through which clients can ask our legal experts research and more substantive questions. We value these questions very highly because they allow us to shape our services in response.
- **Knowing our product.** Our content is produced in-house and all our staff are incentivised to know it well. Not only are the content authors or editors on hand to answer questions, we also have a dedicated training team to ensure clients can extract the greatest benefit from their subscription.
- **A positive ‘can-do’ attitude.** Our client relations team pride themselves on having a genuinely positive attitude and willingness to go out of the way to help.
- **What our customers say.** We are pleased to see evidence of our excellent customer service in responses to the BIALL survey. Each year we also survey subscribing key contacts to measure satisfaction ratings. Our 2010 survey asked contacts to rate their levels of satisfaction with our account management, customer service and training. Ninety-three per cent of those who responded rated us in the positive category range across all questions. When asked to rate which provider they considered highest in terms of customer service we far outstripped all other legal information providers.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** At Thomson Reuters Legal UK we put the customer at the heart of everything we do and believe that performance matters. These are the dual drivers of our vision for excellence in customer service.

Positioning the customer at the heart of our activities means working in partnership with them to ensure we are providing the products and services they require to meet their information needs.

Performance means accurate and reliable delivery to our customers and we work hard to get it right first time. If customers experience any problems, our internal customer service team works with them as a priority to put things right to their satisfaction.

We are clear about our goal of providing customers with the products they want at the time they want them and of maintaining open and relevant communication as a key element of our relationship. If, for whatever reasons,

customer requirements can't be met directly we strive to find a workable and equitable solution in order to meet their expectations.

### How do you go about understanding your customers' needs?

**7Side:** In many ways to include the following:

- Our account managers build good relationships and constantly react to customer requirements, in applying generic enhancements as well as client specific applications.
- Our department advisers and “coal face” staff formally feedback on a weekly basis articulated requests, challenges with internal processes and policies. Based on customer experience we try to identify solutions for both articulated and unarticulated needs.
- We collaborate with both competitors and relevant suppliers to understand what the current and future market needs are.
- We keep ahead of legislative, political and economic influences that affect the needs and ever changing practices of our customers.

#### **Ashgate:**

Building strong relationships with customers.

Providing customers with the appropriate contact details and, where possible, a dedicated contact. Maintaining up-to-date, accurate records of the customer account so that customer needs can be attended to quickly.

Attending international book fairs in order to meet and discuss customer needs and maintain relationships.

Visiting key customers in overseas territories;

Monitoring accounts on a regional as well as individual basis.

Special accounts database for specialist customers. Being informed about the industry and wider environment.

For end-users – meeting academics, corresponding with them and being attuned to developments within individual subject areas as well as the wider academic community.

**CUP:** Dialogue. Customer service surveys. Hosting customer visits and service focused visits to customers

**Edward Elgar:** We are an editorially led company and are in frequent contact with practitioners and academics. Our commissioning editors meet some 400 library users each month for an in depth conversation. This gives us some insight on the content required by

libraries. We also visit librarians to discuss our products (as Managing Director I met four librarians last month).

For instance, some libraries have told us that they do not want to manage an additional publisher's eBook platform and would like to purchase our eBook packages without the pain of reviewing a new legal agreement. This has led us to work with widely established eBook aggregators to deliver our eBook packages on a library's favourite eBook platform once we have made the sale.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Extensive market research, including focus groups, online and email surveys and telephone research. Also through ensuring key staff within our business are accessible to customers in order to capture customer opinions and suggestions.

**Hart:** We are in constant contact with them. This is a dialogue that is never-ending, and it occupies much of our working day in one way and another.

**LexisNexis:** LexisNexis places utmost importance on understanding our customers' needs. Decisions taken at every level of the company are based on fulfilling customer needs. In order to understand our customers' needs, we:

- Conduct customer satisfaction surveys throughout the year on our key products.
- Ask customers who have had an interaction with our staff what they thought of the service they were receiving.
- Hold user group meetings as well as Customer and Product Advisory Boards.
- Collate all feedback from sales meetings and respond if necessary. This feedback is held in a central repository so we can track trends.
- Conduct user testing on our new and existing products to understand how our customers use them and refine the design and content accordingly.

**OUP:** This is a key part of the publishing process and is invested in by all teams, including editorial, sales, marketing, and production. Uncovering and understanding customer needs should be the first task in any conversation in a product development or sales context, and will hopefully result in excellent resources and happy customers.

### PLC:

- **Ongoing engagement.** We maintain a very close level of engagement with law firms, companies and the public sector. Internally we call this "the virtuous circle" – ensuring our clients and users continually influence how PLC develops; ensuring our editorial team remain at the cutting edge of market developments and practice and ensuring that we continue to deliver a quality service that meets evolving needs.
- **Secondment.** A number of our legal experts have been seconded to subscriber firms and companies to

help both clients to improve their knowledge management practices and PLC to gain deep insight into customer needs.

- **Ask the team.** Our team of highly qualified ex-lawyers are also on hand to answer research and more substantive questions about our content. We answer, on average, over 560 "Ask the team" questions per month. We publish anonymised versions of the answers in "Ask the team articles", so that they feed directly back into our wider subscriber community.
- **Relationships with industry and government bodies.** We maintain close relationships with industry and government bodies.
- **Consultation Boards.** Each PLC practice area service is supported by a consultation board of leading practitioners, whose oversight helps shape our product in light of changing customer needs.
- **Training and events.** We host regular key client forums, briefings and industry events. Many of these are hosted in partnership with our customers and support their business and training requirements.
- **Surveys:** We regularly conduct industry surveys, such as the Professional Support survey, which capture and report on valuable industry benchmarking data.
- **Studies/audits:** We are also working closely with a management consultancy to develop a framework for a knowledge management audit process for firms.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** We have an extensive customer and market research programme, designed to ensure that we are well-informed in relation to the legal market generally and in relation to the requirements of our customers around specific product ideas. We conduct our own surveys, subscribe to independent surveys and undertake customer research and usability.

We were delighted with the comments from the BIAL Supplier Survey, acknowledging that we ask, and listen to, our customers when developing our products and services. We will continue to use this approach and thank all our customers for the input that they have given to date and hope that they will continue to provide input to shape the future development of our products and services.

## What data do you collect about your customers, and how do you utilise it?

### 7Side:

- Relevant contact details
- Client specific policies and requests to ensure we deliver best service

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- In addition to the information collected referred to in Question 3 above we basically use client feedback to continually improve every aspect of our service

**Ashgate:** Databases built up over years covering specific regions, and individual accounts. This tells us who the customer is; where they are; the territories they trade in; contact details; type of customer (library supplier/wholesaler/bookshop etc); shipping details (if non-UK); financial information, such as credit details; trade terms; record of information they have requested from us; history of our trade with the customer and details of any correspondence. These are reviewed and updated as necessary on an annual basis.

This information is used to help us provide the best possible service for our customers. It helps us identify the needs of our customers and enables us to respond effectively and efficiently. For example, if we notice that the sales pattern for an established customer changes, we can follow up on this to find out if there is a particular reason and if it is something that we need to address.

**CUP:** We deal mostly with intermediaries e.g. library suppliers. We hold order fulfilment data for individual customers, including order completion time and methods of ordering (e.g. electronic, email, fax etc)

**Edward Elgar:** We monitor sales closely to identify opportunities for future publications.

**Estates Gazette Group:** estatesgazette.com conforms with the Data Protection Act and, as such, collects information to enable the effective provision of services to customers.

**Hart:** We know who they are, where they are, what they buy, and when they bought it. We often know what subjects they are interested in. We use this information to target our marketing of new products and new editions.

**LexisNexis:** Where consented, LexisNexis UK manages client information for various specific purposes such as:

- Publishing: creating and publishing articles and related commentary, directories, catalogues, lists and bibliographies relating to information that is already in the public domain, or where a client has consented that the information may be placed into the public domain.
- Promotional: advertising goods, services and public relations in connection with business activities or goods and services sold. With permission, information may be shared with, sold to or purchased from third parties. This information would typically be personal data such as a client's name, (e-mail) address, telephone/fax numbers and product related preferences.
- Accounting: keeping client accounts related to purchases, sales and transactions. Making financial or management forecasts to assist clients with their business activities and conduct. Ensuring enquiries and complaints are effectively managed.

- Data banking: securely managing documents and data on behalf of a client for specific purposes such as risk management, insurance, etc, as a data processor.

**PLC:** We collect usage statistics. We use these to help ensure customers are getting the most of their subscription. We log all communications to ensure we are delivering the best customer service to our customers.

We collect information such as areas of specialisation so we can ensure that clients receive the information most relevant to them.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** As part of the process of building lasting relationships with our customers we collect information about them that helps us increase our knowledge of their businesses, their individual requirements and their product and service preferences. This builds understanding and enables us to work in partnership with customers, providing products and services that match their specific needs.

The Westlaw and Lawtel services provide us with usage information, recording who is using the content and in what way, for example, usage information covers what content has been searched, viewed or printed/saved/e-mailed at a database level. Usage information also plays an important role in our product development activities, helping to inform our decision-making.

We welcome suggestions and comments from our customers as these help us develop and expand our products and services. The accuracy, integrity and security of our data is very important to us. We continually check and maintain customer details in order to ensure reliable delivery of products and services as well as accurate invoicing and billing.

We do not sell or share our customer data with any other organisation.

### Is it easy to find out from your website what is included in a subscription package?

**7Side:** The only subscription service we offer is access to Companies House Direct and the terms and package are clearly communicated on our main web site. Our main web site also displays a comprehensive list of our other services and all are supplied on a 'pay as you go' model with no contractual tie in or minimum spend commitment. Rates and timescales are clearly defined.

Each regular client uses a customised order site with clearly displayed costs and delivery times for each single product ordered. Basically there are no hidden surprises on content costs or delivery times.

**CUP:** Yes, we are completely transparent.

**Edward Elgar:** The *Journal of Human Rights and the Environment* [www.e-elgar.co.uk/jhre](http://www.e-elgar.co.uk/jhre) was launched in 2010. Our new eBook packages will be publicised on our new website when they formally launch, although we would



encourage libraries to tell us what subjects are of most interest so we can create a tailored package.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Yes

**Hart:** Yes, very.

**LexisNexis:** Yes, we think it is very important that customers know what content to expect when they subscribe to our services. Customers can search from the front of our corporate website [www.lexisnexis.co.uk](http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk) for the services they are interested in purchasing, or already subscribe to, and within a few clicks will have a list of the content available as part of that service. Alternatively they can contact Customer Service or their account manager.

**OUP:** We hope so, although we are always trying to improve and are open to suggestions.

**PLC:** Full descriptions of all our services are available on our website.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** There is extensive information for our online subscription services on our Sweet & Maxwell ([www.sweetandmaxwell.co.uk](http://www.sweetandmaxwell.co.uk)), Lawtel ([www.lawtel.com](http://www.lawtel.com)) and Westlaw UK ([www.westlaw.co.uk](http://www.westlaw.co.uk)) web sites including online demos. Our account managers are able to provide detailed content and coverage and user guides.

Our online catalogue provides details of the price, subscription period, the number of releases and the dates of the last and next release for all print subscription services.

### Do you always supply explanations for price increases?

**7Side:** We have not applied a price increase since May 2009. The increase was a maximum of 5% on some services. We have a policy of always giving customers due notice and a valid explanation in the event of any fees increase.

**Ashgate:** Generally not. Most customers know that prices are reviewed annually. It would not be possible to notify customers of individual title price changes. However, a record of pricing history is maintained for each title.

**CUP:** Annual price increases are the norm in industry and we are happy to explain on request.

**Edward Elgar:** I expect this question refers to content packages sold on subscription and so does not apply to our products. We from time to time increase book prices in line with inflation and would be happy to explain this if asked.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Yes

**Hart:** No. We do not broadcast the reasons for price increases, but then we have only ever increased prices in line with inflation – in fact usually slightly below inflation. If customers ask, we happily tell them about our pricing policy.

**LexisNexis:** LexisNexis supplies an extensive range of information services to a variety of clients, price change communications and justifications are supplied and reviewed with our clients on an account by account basis.

**OUP:** OUP's mission is to further the University of Oxford's objective of excellence in research, scholarship and education by publishing worldwide. As such, we price very competitively. We are happy to discuss price increases on an individual customer basis.

**PLC:** We do explain our price increases whenever asked to by our subscribers.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** For Westlaw and Lawtel, we highlight the extra value we have added to the services in the previous 12 months and our plans for the following 12 months. For print we provide information on the service coverage we plan for the next 12 months, and any service enhancements during that period.

### How do you communicate important changes to your customers?

**7Side:** We have a list of contacts for every key account that we can quickly advise of any issues or urgent /important news. We obviously prefer to communicate news face to face through our account managers – but if it is mass news that has to be given quickly then we use a combination of the following methods:

- We have notices attached to completed instructions that advise clients of significant events/news.
- Important announcements and news are displayed in our news section on our web site.
- Any news relevant to Companies House or other products are displayed on the relevant order pages relating to a product.

**Ashgate:** Generally by email and post. However, it may also be face-to-face if circumstances allow. Very important changes might also be announced in *The Bookseller* e.g. relocation.

**CUP:** Via an individual customer's account manager.

**Edward Elgar:** Our new titles and other products are publicised in a number of ways to libraries and booksellers, including 100,000 law catalogues distributed annually. Customers can also provide their details and specific subjects they are interested in for email alerts.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Through a combination of face-to-face discussions, telephone calls, on-site marketing and email communications.

**Hart:** E-mail, website, phone, mail.

**LexisNexis:** This varies, depending on the customer. If the customer is in regular contact with their account manager this is usually the preferred method, either via a phone call, face-to-face visit or an email. If this is not the

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case, we will e-mail or write to them in most situations. We record wherever possible customers' preferred medium for communication and will always do our best to communicate by that method.

**OUP:** A considerable amount of time and effort is spent discussing and planning the communication of important changes. We try to be personal where possible, whilst also ensuring that all customers receive the essential communication via the appropriate channel.

**PLC:** We communicate through a number of channels:

- By e-mail to key contacts before any change.
- On our site where appropriate.
- Within our service emails that go directly to end-users of the service.
- At our key client forums.
- Through our dedicated account management team.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** We keep customers up to date with new products through our marketing and sales channels. All members of our sales team are fully briefed about enhancements to our services and new additions to our product range. Our website is continually updated across the full product range.

We know our customers are busy people and we are careful not to over-communicate with them. We have taken on board their preference to be informed of a service change only when it affects them. For example, the recent change to our returns procedure is important but customers only want to be informed of the detail at the time when they wish to act on it and return goods to us. This is part of our policy to keep complexity in-house and make it as easy as possible for customers to deal with us.

### How do you retain customers in an environment of budget cuts?

**7Side:** Our "Pay as you go model" with cost recovery facilitators is of great benefit to our clients in that no "up front" budget is required to be allocated to access to our services.

The fact that users can call on our services on an "as you need" basis supports our customer retention.

Most significantly we retain customers as a result of the level of customer service, the quality of our products and the invaluable support on which our customers rely.

**Ashgate:**

Try to stay in as close contact with the customer as possible.

Possibly negotiate revised credit terms.

Possibility of joint promotions.

Monitoring of accounts so that we can identify where there are potential problems and contact the customer as early as possible.

**CUP:** By offering strong products which the customer wants to renew.

**Edward Elgar:** We focus on publishing good books that people need for their professional work/academic research.

We are also seeking to offer greater value to libraries through our eBook packages. These can be tailored to libraries' needs, legal subjects, publication years and maximum budgets.

**Estates Gazette Group:** Through the provision of market-leading products and services.

**Hart:** The six-million dollar question! By concentrating on publishing excellent works, at reasonable prices. This policy has always stood us in good stead in the past.

**LexisNexis:** We believe the key to retaining customers is to provide value through our products and services. The current environment has shown the need to provide increased value to our customers, which we often do through the breadth of our offerings, enabling firms to take legal research, practical guidance, learning/CPD and applications through one integrated service as this case study illustrates - [http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/pdf/case-studies/LexisPSL\\_%20Wortley\\_Byers.pdf](http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/pdf/case-studies/LexisPSL_%20Wortley_Byers.pdf)

**OUP:** First, we listen and react where possible to what customers say. Furthermore, and as discussed above, as OUP's mission is to further the University of Oxford's objective of excellence in research, scholarship and education by publishing worldwide, we price very competitively and always try to provide the best possible value for money on all our resources.

Quality is also often the key to retention. For example, the University controls the policy of Oxford University Press through a group of Delegates appointed from the academic staff of the University. They are actively involved in the publishing programme: all books are referred to them for approval and individual Delegates maintain a dialogue with editors in their specialist subject areas. This results in OUP only publishing works of the very highest standard.

**PLC:** We retain customers by delivering a superior product that allows our customers to drive greater efficiencies in their business.

We work closely with our library partners to champion the cause for not reducing budget.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** With Westlaw, Lawtel and Localaw we offer multi-year deals and smaller price rises.

With print we offer a variety of rewards for customer loyalty in these difficult times.

### How do you approach negotiating with your own suppliers?

**7Side:** We expect a fair deal based on the value of a service and continually review and bench mark their fees and quality. It is particularly critical that we seek best

overall value in order for us to keep realistic overheads and to give our end customers best value for those services that we re-sell and we are relied upon to source on behalf of our customers.

**CUP:** By building strong relationships.

**Edward Elgar:** As a family business we have long term relationships with all our major suppliers. This ensures we can provide a more reliable service to authors and customers.

**Hart:** We have an annual price discussion with three or four of our major suppliers, but we are in constant discussion with them about prices throughout the year.

**LexisNexis:** LexisNexis work with a broad range of suppliers across the business. LexisNexis have long and partnership-based relationships with key suppliers and work actively with them to ensure we get the best for our customers and treat them with respect. We employ procurement professionals to work alongside key purchasers within the business to ensure consistency and parity of treatment for suppliers.

LexisNexis use as a model the principles of the Prompt Payment Code when dealing with suppliers.

<http://www.promptpaymentcode.org.uk/>

**PLC:** Our content and core technology infrastructure are delivered in-house and we work hard and on an ongoing basis to ensure that they are delivered in the most streamlined and cost-effective way possible.

We demand quality product and service from our suppliers and work hard to avoid duplication in suppliers. We look to those who provide value through economy of scale.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** At Sweet & Maxwell we place a great deal of emphasis on building long-term relationships with our suppliers and most can be traced back over the last decade or more. Building long-term relationships enables our suppliers to invest in new technology and staff, and we rarely need to enter into negotiations regarding the quality and service of the products manufactured.

Strong relationships ensure excellent communication between our production teams and suppliers. High levels of confidence and ongoing feedback between the individuals who actually do the work means that any problems are anticipated well in advance and negotiations about turnaround times and delivery dates can be undertaken informally on a day-to-day basis.

Inevitably, negotiations about price must have a greater degree of formality and long-term contracts provide security for both parties, enabling our

suppliers to confidently grow their businesses in partnership with us. However, it still remains the responsibility of the production department to regularly benchmark pricing within the industry ensuring that when contracts are renegotiated, pricing remains both competitive but realistic for both parties in the current economic climate.

### Is it true that the customer is always right?

**7Side:** It is our culture at 7Side to assume that the client is always right.

Our approach is to ensure that clear lines of communication always exist and realistic expectation levels set, but if any customer has a complaint or is dissatisfied and in their perception they are right, then we take an empathetic view of this.

We ensure that we understand the issue and change anything within any limitations we encounter and offer solutions and/or alternatives.

**Ashgate:** In practice, it is not as clear cut as that. Where there is disagreement it is generally resolved by discussion, negotiation and sometimes compromise.

**CUP:** In this world nobody is right all the time, neither supplier nor customer, which is why we come back to dialogue to resolve issues with our customers which we always aim to resolve to their satisfaction.

**Edward Elgar:** No, but we are pragmatic!

**Hart:** No. But their perspective is a very important one in our business.

**LexisNexis:** We always believe that we need to listen to our customers and understand their perspective on our situation. This often results in us either modifying what we do or working harder to provide clarity on why we have taken a specific course of action.

**OUP:** We aim for a realistic, pragmatic partnership, which means that both parties have equal standing in any discussion.

**PLC:** No, we do not think that anyone is always right. However, we believe it is crucial to listen to our customers and understand their perspective.

**Sweet & Maxwell:** No one is *always* right, however, we value our customers' opinions and listen when they tell us their needs and express their preferences. We aim to always put our customers at the heart of everything we do because without them we would not be here.