

## Keeping Your Law Library Relevant In The Age Of Google

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In less than 20 years, Google has transformed everything from advertising to workplace collaboration. But undoubtedly its most notable impact has been on how people find information. Google processes over 3.5 billion searches per day and over 2 trillion searches per year worldwide, according to the most recent estimates. The phrase 'Google it' has become an everyday verb, synonymous with finding answers online.

Google's status as a go-to research tool has transformed legal research habits and the traditional law firm library. Our own market research found 88 percent of attorneys now go to Google first when conducting research. Yet, at the same time, law firms are still spending millions of dollars on third-party research resources.

This disparity feeds into critics' perceptions that law libraries are cost centers and is fueling the debate over how to effectively manage law libraries in the digital age.



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### The Google Effect

Google's self-service model and instant access to information has created both positive changes and a host of challenges for law firms. For starters, Google's intuitive and smart search functionality has made it easier for internet users to conduct searches quickly, creating an expectation among attorneys that legal research interfaces should be simple and intuitive. In response, nearly every research vendor has refined their search functionality to be more user-friendly, creating a sense of uniformity. This has alleviated the burden of having to conduct user training on various research tools.

In more recent years, Google has led the use of machine learning to process search inquiries and field more accurate results. Similarly, other research vendors are using artificial intelligence (AI) to curate content, and guide and support attorneys through the search process. And like Google, many of these vendors have made their research more visually appetizing and intuitive. As a result, even the busiest attorneys can find useful, relevant information online.

While the Google era has brought some helpful changes to the legal industry, it has also created and amplified challenges related to law library management. For instance, with more attorneys seeking out information on Google Scholar and government sites, law librarians have lost insight into how attorneys are finding information. A lack of visibility into attorneys' search habits and preferences makes it more

difficult for librarians to assist in the research process and certify the information attorneys are using in their cases.

The millennial generation grew up with full access to Google, and as a result, tend to be less likely to conduct in-depth research than their older counterparts. For this reason, many librarians are cognizant of how search habits have changed and have become self-motivated to retrain attorneys on conducting research in the Google era. This typically means reiterating the need for patience in research and reminding attorneys that they may need to look past the first page of Google to find the right answer.

While many law firms continue to pay for research tools from well-known and respected providers, librarians often worry these expensive tools are going unused. Additionally, most clients are no longer willing to pay law firms for research costs, which is adding to firms' cost recovery concerns.

#### **4 Ways to Increase the Value of Your Law Library**

Fortunately, innovative firms are finding ways to create meaningful efficiencies that improve library services and further demonstrate the value of the law library in the era of Google.

Below are steps that law firms should consider to increase value for their firms:

*Implement training.* Nearly half of law firm library leaders are already strategically investing in areas that will improve services for their clients, according to HBR Consulting's 2016 Evolving Libraries Survey. This includes firm-wide communication strategies to educate users on the library's capabilities, as well as the exploration of new models for service delivery.

A key part of this initiative should include training attorneys on how to properly conduct research. Librarians need to reiterate research best practices and demonstrate how attorneys can most effectively use the tools available to them. Keep in mind, training should be structured in a way that it is not time or resource intensive. In fact, it can be often be as simple as directing attorneys to vendor training resources that they did not know were available.

*Provide easy access.* Remembering the logins and passwords for each online resource is cumbersome and often deters users from logging in to preferred research tools. Law firms can simplify the login process by implementing single sign-on, a service that permits a user to login to various resources with one set of credentials (i.e., username and password), across their entire digital library.

In the same vein, librarians should centralize their online resources to make it easier for employees to know where to start the research process. However, it is important to continuously re-examine how the tools are promoted on intranet pages and work to identify other ways to engage attorneys. Ultimately, research tools and processes should support attorney workflows and efficiency — not inhibit them.

*Do not focus on cost recovery.* Law firm clients are often reluctant to pay for research costs, deterring attorneys from using paid library tools. However, this can lead to inefficient or careless research practices. When firms put less emphasis on cost-recovery, it encourages attorneys to use the valuable tools at their disposal, resulting in better research practices.

*Leverage data analytics.* Investing in a robust business intelligence solution that connects financial data, contracts and user data will allow firms to understand the value of their current research tools and prepare for contract renewals. To start, firms should look for a dashboard that makes it easy to monitor

content and evaluate whether the needs of all practice groups, even niche practices that required expert curation, are being met.

From there, firms can remove duplicate content, determine valuable content replacement sources, and negotiate for better prices and services. Librarians can also leverage data to show leadership how they are elevating attorneys, practice areas and the overall business.

The digitization of information has created an opportunity to turn the library into a competitive advantage. By embracing research tools that mimic the Google user-experience, educating staff on their available resources and using data to manage costs efficiently, law firms can position their library as a valuable asset for many years to come.

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