Cherish your law library...

Published on July 21, 2014 [Edit article](#) | [View stats](#)

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10 articles

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The main theme of the annual Law Library conference this year was "Beyond Borders." The conference focused on the numerous limitations placed on law libraries by their patrons, their processes, and their

institutions. Equally emphasized was the focus on how librarians are pushing the limits by using technology to deliver their resources and services to their patrons. Many librarians feel that their budgets are shrinking and that they are simply not appreciated because patrons are far more fascinated by the internet as their main source of information.

At meetings and workshops throughout the week, it became apparent that the librarians' concern of becoming irrelevant is unfounded because libraries are continually researching and discovering new methods of remaining pertinent. While it is true that some may close just as the video store and others did, many are fighting and succeeding in carving a niche for themselves just as specialized newspapers like the Wall Street Journal or NY Times have done. These organizations are finding ways to not only continue to exist, but to do so profitably.

The question arises, therefore, of how a law library makes itself vital and relevant? The answer is simple. In our technologically-advanced world (that barrels forward faster and faster down the road to success), we must

Messaging

on their home turf, namely through technology. Some libraries have good initiatives work in this manner by making their libraries comfortable places of congregation with multiple amenities making them more of a community center while other libraries have become a clearinghouse for families and users to exchange ideas and to fulfill an innate need for social interaction.

To truly succeed as a law library in this digital age, however, we must become all of these and more. We, the law librarians, are the guardians of democracy. The law library is and must continue to be the place where the ordinary person seeks access to information about protecting their rights and learning about their obligations. Misinformation about these areas abounds on the internet these days. Who better to filter the grapes, to separate the wheat from the chaff, than the law libraries?

Many librarians have expressed worry and concern that nobody will step up and speak for the libraries. That nobody will protect us, and that we will fade from existence. Some groups may fear being confused by our individual messengers. They may feel that there are conflicts of interest that they must steer clear of. They don't want to bite the hands that feed them. We can respect that; however, we cannot wait for someone to do it for us. We must speak up and let everyone know that without law libraries, they are vulnerable to for-profit corporations whose only purpose is to generate value for their shareholders. It is of the utmost importance that librarians stop worrying and start TAKING CHARGE. We cannot sit around waiting for someone else to defend the law library. We must lead the way and come up with open source, free law options that will make the general public clamor for more. We must not rest as merely the enforcer of overdue fines and food and drink policies. We must become the source of legal knowledge that people cannot find or understand. If we do not, they will not miss us until we are gone.

One particular law library that was came up on discussion thought of itself as Avant garde and ultramodern because they decided to focus

library does this, they basically lease the vehicle of information rather than owning it. When this happens, there are many more strict restrictions, the first sale doctrine does not apply, and fair use is limited. Even the ABA may become wary of its ability to protect its patrons with the robustness in collection choices and to support the educational purpose of a law school. This particular library is interested in self-preservation and seeks to protect its position as a requirement for accreditation, not as a valuable resource and a library has put itself against the ropes because it is now at the mercy of digital price increases from its vendors. We must not allow that to happen in other law libraries. We must create our own content, sources, and software applications.

Many law libraries already strive to accomplish these goals, but we do not have the marketing, the visibility, the funding, and the support that we so desperately need. We must collaborate with one another rather than following the mistake that many law students make when they compete savagely against one another for top of the class. By sharing materials that are particularly valuable to our institutions, we can build a network that enriches all cooperating libraries far beyond what any individual library can hope to achieve. Furthermore, we are not constrained by the licenses imposed by the vendors. Books are copyrighted, and so are databases, but not libraries. Our value lies within us. We are the ones who hold the knowledge. We must become much more engaged in teaching and writing. We must become louder and more powerful.

We cannot blame our schools, our government, and our patrons for using our libraries less and less. They simply are not aware that by doing so they are cutting their own noses and spitting in their own faces. They simply do not know that once the libraries are all closed or reduced, it will be too late. We are the corner store, the "mom & pop" shops. We are sitting back and letting big corporations take our jobs and raise the prices for everyone once the law libraries are gone. We will have no choice but to pay whatever they ask in order to find a statute or a case, and we will pay even more for a form or a "how to" book. Let us go on record

falling!"

The warning has been proclaimed for a long time now, but we have been more threatened as an institution than we are now. This must become savvier and more available. We must let everyone we are the source, the foundation block of legal knowledge, if people want to know the truth about law and legal subjects, we can ever hope to replace the law library unless it is a digital the law library.

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As recently as a couple of years ago, Berkeley County had a law library that was open to the public. Those who did not have access or couldn't afford or understand computerized research could rely on that library. They closed it, disposed of the books and now use the space for business court. <http://www.insurancejournal.com/news/southeast/2012/09/19/263467.htm>

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