

The Gifts That Keeps on Giving: Matching Library Resources to Attorney Needs -- with a Healthy Dose of Enthusiasm!

One evening in 1987, Marjorie Garson Leary was having drinks after work with three of her librarian colleagues. They were all just out of Library Science school, and were chatting about how they would like to have a chance to talk with even one of the librarian luminaries in the legal community of Washington, D.C. They were not looking for a leg up, they just wanted to learn how to better do their jobs from these wiser, more seasoned colleagues.

One of the young librarians in the group was an Iranian woman who happened to be in the middle of her own personal writing project, doing oral histories of people who left Iran during fall of the Shah. She suggested they do an oral history with these wise librarians' words. So, it was decided in one casual evening: they would do a book. Tape recorders were bought, transcribers hired, and they embarked on a very exciting series of two-on-one interviews. Their wishes came true, and very soon the project became so big that they ended up getting a grant from the AALL to interview librarians around the country. The book entitled "*Reflections on Law Librarianship: a Collection of Interviews*" was published by F.B. Rothman in 1988, and hundreds of other young law librarians across the U.S. were able to benefit from their research.

Sharing the Resources: Sharing the Passion

Marjorie is now the Head Librarian at Winston & Strawn's Los Angeles office and her passion for sharing is still coursing through her veins as rapidly as it was back then. One of her greatest joys is getting attorneys connected with the resources that are going to make their research more fulfilling and easy. Out of library school, Marjorie chose the law firm library because of two things: 1) a chance to master the body of a collection and 2) the ability to build a collection that makes a tangible difference in the practitioner's work flow.

Getting an attorney to even look at a resource, let alone use it or get trained on it, is obviously a challenge. One thing that delights Marjorie is matching up attorneys with the perfect resources for their practice. She says "There are amazing resources and people ought to know about them. I always think when they *do* know about them they'll be as *excited* as I am."

Yes, I can name that Amazon.com Tune!

Marjorie, of course, loves it when attorneys come to her library and asks what they have on a certain subject. She says "It challenges me to know the collection - in print and electronic. I wish people would ask me more often, of course. For those who don't ask, it's crucial that our online catalogue is easy to use."

Attorneys often forward pages from amazon.com with the question “Does our library have this?” She and her colleagues at Winston understand how easy amazon.com is to use and are striving to have their collection be as visually and organizationally compelling - particularly for the attorneys who don’t take time to visit the library, or read the library emails. To that end, they are using SirsiDynix, the same software that the LA Pubic Library uses, which has a more Amazon-like feel, and is very easy to use, so people can “virtually” check out the library’s vast resources.

Conquering the Google Generation: The Good Old Fashioned TELEPHONE!

Sometimes, though, getting attorneys to even look at the online catalogue is a struggle. Posted behind Marjorie’s desk is the cover of the Atlantic Monthly July/August 2008 issue featuring the article “Is Google Making Us Stupid?¹,” which speaks to our growing mastery of the art of skimming. Marjorie is concerned about this tendency in herself as well as the attorneys she is trying to inspire with emails, newsletters, etc. She was discussing the issue with her Los Angeles librarian colleague, Nan Hoskins of Bingham McCutchen. Nan said “Law librarians have at least 10 years on the Google generation!” Nan, Marjorie and law librarians far and wide have had to master the art of skimming for a long time.

The question then becomes “How can we expect them to read all the way to the end of a newsletter where we announce a new resource?” Marjorie says “I am less dismayed by the lack of response, because I see how I filter what I read.”

Marjorie started looking at her own reactions to email invitations and announcements. She noticed that emails were not consistently highly motivating for her. She also saw that she nearly always responded positively to pleas or follow-ups made via telephone. So, she uses this technique with the attorneys too. She says “A phone call humanizes things to some extent.” She is able to tell the attorneys why she thinks the resources will be good for them, and share a little of her enthusiasm that may get lost in an email communication.

Phone calls don’t work with all lawyers, of course. Many work at home, in cafes, etc. and email is sometimes the only way to communicate. In these cases, she often follows up emails with a voicemail message, and this too seems to increase her chances of getting a response because it lends the personal touch.

¹ <http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200807/google>

Over the years Marjorie has embraced new technologies, and has been particularly excited about the growth of integrated libraries. She is thrilled by the idea of providing access to a whole universe of knowledge from a single point of entry. And, while Marjorie has entered the electronic age gracefully, and actively uses it to her advantage, she always takes time to pick up the phone to share her library's gifts and her own enthusiasm one-on-one.