Intranets and the Legal Firm

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The idea is that the attorney comes to work on Monday morning, switches on his or her computer, and logs into the equivalent of "My Yahoo" and everything the attorney needs to do his or her job will be there.

Wilder et al., 1999

1. Introduction:

With this great change upon them, lawyers have a lot to do, both individually and as a profession, to adapt to the practice of law in the world economy of the twenty-first century. The legal profession, through its organizations, the judiciary and as individual firms, is beginning to recognize the challenge and need to identify the legal and business issues that resulted from the implementation of new technology and to create a legal infrastructure for borderless economies. Within the next five years, the practice of law will change even more than it has during the past five years, because of new developing information and communications technologies which will enable anyone to access any legal resource essentially for free, or at very low cost.

Richard Granat (ABA, 2000), has gathered examples of lawyers in USA who have already starting practicing law in cyberspace. With several sites surveyed, the task force members concluded that a key issue that will affect every lawyer is how the digitization of information is giving rise to an unbundling of legal services in many of these websites. This is manifested by the separation of the sale of legal information in product form from the delivery of the legal service itself, which raises ethical issues and goes to the heart of defining what is the practice of law. How the profession addresses this issue will play a central role in the reengineering of the legal profession.

The essential difference between the digital lawyer of the future, which may turn out to be the only kind of lawyer to thrive in the future, and today's lawyer, lies only partly in access to technology and in skill in using technology. Rather, the core change in the digital lawyer is an understanding of the value of information in an environment where new tools for processing and communicating information make adding value to information and using information to develop new relationships the central concern of the economic system. The digital lawyer knows that although the new media present opportunities to save time, the most novel characteristic of these technologies may be in how they operate on space and distance. The successful digital lawyer is one who knows that he or she is in the information business as much as in the legal business, and that while automation often means that "time is money" in law practice, the more important insight is that "information is money."

The convergence of the technologies provide the foundation for new legal information services that threaten and challenge the existing configuration of law practice. While lawyers computerize more and more of their work, the use of information technology in the delivery of legal services is not limited to existing law practice. The technology that is being used to automate law practice is about to escape out of the control of lawyers, not longer a servant, but an uncontrolled force in its own right. We are already seeing a proliferation of non-lawyer entities on the Net offering extensive legal information and guidance, the capacity to complete legal forms on-line, with step-by-step instructions on how to file them. The day when people can ask their computers an intelligent question and get a relevant answer at low cost from the convenience of their homes is the day that many lawyers will be looking for work.

All this necessitates a new approach, not only to the way firms sell their products, but also to how they manage their clients, collaborate with them, manage their internal firm knowledge and market themselves. Intranets are an important item in the tool box of the new law firm. This report looks at why and how should law firms implement intranets and how to use them to facilitate business processes.

2. Definitions

Gahtan (1996) provides one of the earliest definitions of Intranets as "an Internet-like system, incorporating World Wide Web technology, which is implemented internally by an organization. The technology is used to connect employees to each other and to internal resources rather than to external sites." Monk (1997) states that an intranet is service making use of the technologies of the world wide web (usually HTML over HTTP) to distribute information within a single organisation over it's internal network. Here the intranet is no longer the network itself, but a service run over it. They usually reside behind firewalls, for security, and are not limited by physical location—anyone around the world can be on the same intranet. Intranets also link users to the outside Internet, and with the proper security in place may use public networks to transfer data.

An intranet is an internal, proprietary knowledge network or web -- collections of intertwined electronic files and associated functionalities. Embedded or automatically generated hyperlinks hold everything together. Conceptually, they work like the World Wide Web does and use the same web browser software. Although a complete intranet can be set up on a single computer, the true power comes in easily sharing knowledge with others in the firm. The existing networking structure and file server arrangements can be used, with web server software and web-enabling protocols added to form a basic intranet (Pritchard, 1997).

Granat & Levine (2000) define the intranet as "internal systems that are based on Internet technology that are designed to connect the members of a specific group of single organization."

An Intranet which is properly specified, constructed and managed can transform the way a business is run. It can be the central repository of the corporate memory, the vehicle for delivering news, precedents and information. They grow readily into Extranets - dedicated parts of the firm's own site for clients or industry sectors.

Intranets also raise unique issues. They are claimed (or disowned) equally by information staff and IT staff. There is greater scope for subjectivity (and therefore debate) about their scope, function, appearance and almost every other aspect. They can range from simple sets of pages linked together to sophisticated and heavily automated database applications.

3. Why an Intranet:

With the advent of intranet technology, collaborative law practices and law departments are able to share critical knowledge resources and practice more efficiently (Pritchard, 1997). The goal of a good legal intranet is to provide the knowledge you need, when you need it, to practice law most effectively. Lawson (1999: p.128) defines an Intranet as "a system that uses Internet-style technology for distributing information privately, as opposed to publicly...one of the hottest concepts in networked computing today." Accounting firms are way ahead of law firms on this front, having established Intranets years ago to jumpstart entry-level personnel to more experienced positions. By organizing key operations in easily retrievable systems, accounting firms found that new employees could be productive from their first days on the job. Additionally, Lawson (ibid.) states, "an Intranet may be the best step you can take toward significantly reducing the flow of paper through your law firm."

A good legal intranet site improves client service and provides faster turnaround, greater consistency, and twenty-four-hour-a-day access. It allows a company to use its legal resources more effectively: by giving clients training, access to standard forms, and answers to frequently-asked questions, the site can free attorneys to deal with more complex and specialized issues. The

architecture of a site can be as important as the content. If users get lost, they may give up and not return the next time they have legal questions. Elements which make a site easier to use include internal and external links, navigation buttons, site maps, introduction/summary screens, pop up details, and eye-friendly colors, typography and layout.

Currently, in most legal firms, documents are stored in a number of different places: individual PC hard drives, public and private network drives, disks, web servers, zip drives, paper documents in file cabinets, and more. This typical paradigm results in documents being stored in multiple places and islands of unorganized information that is difficult to manage. The result is being unable to find information, potentially using out of date or inaccurate information, and limiting the ability to leverage existing information. In addition, access control on regular file servers is typically administered only by an information technology department or help desk, thus resulting in an additional layer someone must go through in order to access the information they need in order to do their job.

Moreover, since we can now connect work groups and entire organizations, the goal is also to create a truly useful collective knowledge resource and alter lawyers' methods of delivering legal services to their clients. An organization's members can use such a resource in two interrelated capacities: first, as contributors of their own knowledge and, second, as consumers -- not only of the knowledge they have recorded earlier but also of the knowledge that others have recorded for them. The whole of a collaborative, knowledge-sharing organization will inevitably exceed the sum of the knowledge capabilities of its parts. Simply put, knowledge sharing and reuse throughout a knowledge-intensive organization leads to dramatic improvements in efficiency and effectiveness (Hokkannen, 1996). Lawyers increasingly are becoming electronically linked with each other, as well as with clients and others in the legal service process. In this age of advanced networking, lawyers stand to benefit by improving upon their skills of collaboration. By broadening their understanding of the process, they, and the firms that employ them, can achieve greater efficiencies and take full advantage of new and powerful technologies. For the legal profession, there are several actual and potential benefits to come from effective and innovative collaboration. First, clients perceive collaborative work as high in value. Therefore, collaborative hours with clients lead to higher levels of client satisfaction. Second, collaboration among attorneys within a practice produces more productive internal work. The benefits: lower costs and more timely and useful intra-office communication. Additional benefits include more rapid learning and innovation. Finally, a collaborate environment, in which everyone can have a voice that is listened to, attracts and retains the best people. In the brain-powered economy and society that dominates today, collaboration is not only desirable for the economic benefits it produces, it is critical for the long-term survival of a legal practice (Griggs, 1998)

Legal organizations that take advantage of better ways to manage and reuse knowledge they need to practice law will tangibly demonstrate that they provide enhanced value to their clients. They will attract and keep clients who value and understand their commitment to excellence, efficiency, and innovation. They will work faster, using leaner teams, to accomplish higher quality work with less effort than before. They will improve responsiveness. When clients call for information about their matters, a lawyer with a good intranet will often be able to give them immediate, authoritative answers rather than having to get back to them later.

Intranet-powered legal organizations will delegate more effectively. They will better control business risk and lower administrative costs. They will maximize the efficiency of hours their lawyers devote to practice building and practice management. They will assimilate new lawyers and staff more quickly and train personnel more efficiently. When a lawyer or key staff member departs, the organization will experience less disruption and loss of institutional capability. They will conduct litigation more efficiently. Most of the cost of litigation today is not in the courtroom but in knowledge acquisition, organization, retrieval, analysis, and disclosure.

Litigation lawyers using intranets will know their cases better. Case-specific intranets, loaded with information about witnesses, documents, discovery, timetables, legal issues, and team strategies,

represent a powerful new ally for litigation teams. While a litigation intranet cannot eliminate inherent litigation complexity, if it has been properly designed and is properly utilized, it can enable lawyers to manage their work and the litigation itself much more efficiently.

Intranets are forcing law firms to rethink the way information is distributed. The traditional methods of disseminating information usually depend upon numerous resources involved in time-consuming and costly processes. For example, a firm's phone directory is constantly changing as new hires are added and terminated employees are removed. Distributing a directory to each employee office and conference room in every location can take days and the cost of photocopying and resource time can become extensive. If the firm had an Intranet, the directory would be changed on-line and the changes would be immediately available to everyone within the firm from their desktop web browser. The same can be done for a firm's policies and procedures manual, benefits information, attorney biographical profiles, frequently asked questions (FAQs) about human resource issues or technology issues, and the many administrative forms used on a daily basis. Firms are using Intranets to organize the many on-line research materials available today, including those from Lexis, Westlaw, CD-Rom and Internet resources. The legal research section of an Intranet can be designed to group like resources together, making them available through one common interface. This decreases attorney time locating the various resources and training time learning how to navigate each resource (Don, 1998).

Overall, the potential for legal intranets is the leverage effect of giving already smart professionals much better tools than they have ever had. The key is to link Intranet applications to cost savings, increased productivity and gaining a competitive advantage. The ability to disseminate information once, in a timely, more accurate and cost effective manner across an organization can reduce administrative time and reproduction costs. Analysts estimate that 18% of a firm's printed materials become outdated within 30 days and it costs in excess of $10,000 per month to update those materials depending upon the firm's size.

A well-designed Intranet has the potential to improve workflow processes and reduce the time spent in processing routine transactions. If using an Intranet saves every employee in a 50-person law firm 10 minutes per day, the cumulative cost savings is enormous. Designed right, intranets/extranet are effective marketing tools to be used in client/co-counsel relations, as well as internally to communicate with firm members, etc. In many cases, the writers initial dealings consist of working with firm partners/MIS persons, whose input are very important in the process of intranet/extranet design. However, it is astonishing how few firms involve their marketing personnel. Perhaps these firms see a law office intranets/extranets as yet another software implementation, of which MIS has been handling for years? In reality, because the firm is now communicating with clients/co-counsel, it is marketing, and marketing experience is a necessary input.

4. Content, Content, Content

In summary, an intranet should deliver the following functions:

- Improve **Service** to your internal customers

- Increase **Accuracy** of the information

- Increase **Speed** with which people can access the information

- Reduce **Cost** and **Effort** of providing/publishing this information (Daly, 2001[b])

An example of a simple legal intranet can be viewed at http://www.cyber-lawyer.co.uk/front.asp. Graham (n.d.) has compiled a list of what law firms place on their intranets. Among most commonly shared are:

- Administration--employee handbook, OPS Committee Update, Federal Express pickup schedule, Messenger Run Times, Phone Tips, Summary of Benefits, Litigation Procedures, Legal Assistant Handbook, Administrative Assistant Procedures, Word processing schedule, Employee

Telephone List, Employee Bios, practice area info, resumes, Employee manuals and benefits information, Employee Accomplishments, File Policy, Sandwich Orders, Employment opportunities and Classified Ads; Practice Teams; listing of teams and team members, team descriptions

- Marketing - Marketing Goals, Client Development, Firm Experience, Available Marketing Resources, Index of proposals, articles and speeches, Presentations to associates and partners, Tips on Marketing, "News" Announcements, press releases, big cases, awards, appointment, etc.; the firm's history; Marketing Calendar, marketing Q&A, articles on practice development, associate training; Client management databases

- Library Articles Library; published attorney articles for reference, legal research materials, case law, primary materials; Practice Area Newsletters; report on recent cases

- Professional Development - Practice Development; CLE Courses; available classes

- Communication - Bulletin board for posting of messages (kind of a mini list-serve)

- Technology--Pagers Directory, What we have right now, What's coming up, Tech Tips, Training - Schedules and Programs, E-mail Etiquette, Policies, Known Bugs, Home PC Purchase - Tips on buying a PC for home

Like so many new undertakings, implementing a firm-wide intranet represents an exciting challenge. Yet whether your investment in time and   money into this technology will be worthwhile depends on one thing - content. Content drives the Internet. If you visit a Web site that delivers no useful information, chances are you will never return - regardless of its aesthetics, graphics, or catchy writing. The same is true of your firm-wide intranet. If you focus too exclusively on the technology and design considerations, and not enough on the value of the information contained on it, all your work could be for naught. While static information, such as firm directories, brochures, and holiday schedules, is useful, it's not enough to keep users coming back for more. And if users won't come back, they may become soured to the technology before they've really had a chance to get something useful from it. Rather, the information must constantly be changing and relevant to what the attorney is doing at any given moment (Camacho, 1999). It sounds like a tall order, but it is not. Fortunately, the current state of technology gives you some very useful choices. It's just a matter of how you define "content."

Attorneys are constantly using information found in their desktop tools - document management, relationship management, etc. Because most software vendors have already identified the importance of the Internet and intranets to firms, many are making the information stored within their programs available as 'content' for use over the Internet or on your intranets. For instance, increasingly law firms are using relationship management tools to centralize information about their client relationships - contact data, notes, activities, who knows whom, marketing data, etc. Firm members are using this information constantly as an integral part of their daily 'workflow.' If the software tool you're using allows for this functionality, you can incorporate your relationship data into your firm intranet as "content." As a result, you've built information into your intranet that attorneys already find critical to their daily responsibilities, thus virtually guaranteeing high usage. Better yet, this is content that no individual has to worry about maintaining. Those systems were already set up when you purchased the relationship management tool in the first place. Most forward-thinking software vendors today are incorporating Internet and intranet functionality into their products. You just simply must expand your definitions of "content," and identify products available at your firm that not only provide desktop functionality, but also intranet functionality. Making this constantly changing data available over your intranet could very well transform a seldom used intranet, into a firm-wide nerve center.

5. Factors for Success:

The following are five factors that would make a law firm's intranet successful:

Business Relevance. Too many organizations delve into Intranet technology without a clear understanding of how it contributes to the core mission of the business (Duffy, 2001). For law firms, that means focusing on delivering immediate, discernible benefit to those practicing law, with resultant improved service to clients. Avoid the temptation to just do "easy" administrative solutions, like putting policy manuals or telephone listings on a Web page. While in some cases such solutions add value, they are hardly compelling and most certainly do not contribute to serving clients.

Information and Organization Mapping. Few companies or firms actually understand where the majority of the information they use comes from, where it goes within the organization, and how it flows out. Information is the life blood of an Intranet, and the Intranet must be designed to facilitate, even improve, the flow of information (Oxbrow, 1999). Coupled with understanding the information flow, it is vital to understand the networks of person-to-person interaction that exist outside of -- some might say in spite of -- the formal organizational structure. It is the informal networks of individual contacts that enable firms to get work done on a day-to-day basis. And it is precisely those kinds of person-to-person or team networks that an Intranet should support through collaboration, messaging, team Web sites, and other devices.

Process Reengineering. As firms contemplate Intranets, they would do well to evaluate their internal processes to determine if this new technology can make work more efficient or more effective (Scacchi and Noll, 1997). Process reengineering has gotten a bad name in some quarters, but the simple fact is that technology forces process change. Assuming that processes will be affected, and proactively addressing that situation prior to deploying an Intranet, will ensure maximum return on the firm's investment and will assure a smooth transition to the Intranet.

Education. It is never too early to begin educating partners, associates, legal assistants, administrative staff -- anyone and everyone who will have access to the Intranet. Not only does this enable the firm to manage expectations for the internal Web, it also gets everyone comfortable with the fact that this change is coming. And if new policies need to be put in place, such as an Internet access policy, the firm's management team has time to communicate these to everyone.

Preparation. To paraphrase a somewhat famous quote, a good plan poorly executed is still better than no plan at all. The bottom line is that introducing any technology requires weaving together many threads -- products, user training, information collection and formatting, process changes, scheduling, and so on. Properly scoping the effort, laying detailed plans, identifying risks and conducting risk mitigation planning, and tracking progress are vital to success.

6. Issues with Intranets

The intranet will always be a work in progress (Hodge, 2000). The individual needs of the end users can seamlessly and cost effectively be delivered via the intranet. The key again is for both the IS department and the research professionals to work together and contribute their respective expertise in the design and administration of the law firm's intranet. Obviously, the possibilities for page segmentation in a law firm portal are endless. The focus of the intranet should remain on the end users: partners, associates, legal assistants, research professionals, as well as support and administrative staff, and how they will benefit from the content.

6.1. Whose Responsibility is Content Management?

Daly defines content management (also known sometimes as document management) as "the way in which a business creates, revises, publishes, retains, and purges electronic information assets" (Daly, 2001) In her definition, information assets include "information assets to include any type of document that contains business critical information". In my opinion the main difference between the two terms "document management" and "content management" is that the first applies to pre-electronic materials, mostly in print format, while the latter applies to content of electronic documents, most of which will reside on some form of electronic storage medium: be it a desktop's

hard drive, an intranet server, or an extranet spanning a number of geographically dispersed servers (Leaman, 1998).

In the rush to add documents to an intranet, and to make sure that they are published at the earliest possible opportunity, little attention may be paid to what happens to documents that are now out-of-date. This can be of particular importance with staff policy manuals. For the sake of an illustration take the hypothetical case of a laboratory safety manual that had been converted to intranet delivery. A laboratory technician is injured, and claims that there were no guidelines in the safety manual about what they should have done in that particular situation. The current version does have clear guidelines, but the accident happened a few months ago. If this case comes to a tribunal are you in a position to show what the content of the manual was on the day in question, whether or not the technician had access to it, and had in fact read it. The situation can become more complicated when the virtual handbook is updated in sections, and considerable care needs to be taken to ensure that all the individual sections cross-reference to each other correctly, and that all users are aware of what sections are new or revised (White, 2001).

Some of the features a good Web Content Management System might provide:

• **Site Inventory, Indexing, Search** -- The ability to catalogue all the content on the firm's web, organize it intuitively and provide users with the means to easily find and retrieve the information they need.

• **Centralized Development** -- One and only one development platform available to all authors and developers.

• **Version Control and Change Management** -- Avoiding version conflicts and overwrites with a system of code check-out/in. Older versions archived and retrievable.

• **Content Aging Control** -- The means to identify and update old and obsolete content.

• **Workflow Management** -- Tools to manage the approval process.

• **Non-expert Authoring** -- Providing non-technical authors the ability to publish web content directly.

• **Standards Enforcement** -- Providing consistency of look, feel and navigation.

• **Small Applications** -- Easy development and management of simple forms-based applications, such as news releases, events calendars, RFPs and jobs listings, etc. (Blood, 2000)

For a basic site (non-application type pages), an internal or an external vendor can build the site. Updating information is crucial and maintenance of sites will be the responsibility of the department who "owns" the information (IT training must be provided to the person responsible for maintaining the website).

After determining who is the audience for the information and considering what they will be able to accomplish by using the site, contact should be established with the Webmaster(s) to determine if there is no duplication of effort and to discuss the best ways to accomplish the site's objectives.

In many firms, the misguided impression is that the whole responsibility for the intranet – including content management – rests with the technical staff. With technology racing beyond the static HTML pages, many administrators and content providers are feeling it "is just too much for them". Quite a number of firms would rather outsource the management of it content rather than give their employees time off to learn the basics. There are many applications that render the process quite simple, but there seems to be a mental block among the managing principals against technically upgrading their administrative or legal staff.

In my consulting I have also found that quite a number of legal firms are open to the idea of having a technically savvy librarian to manage the intranet content, as well as providing legal research to the firm.

It is my opinion that placing the responsibility for content management squarely in the hands of its owners empowers employees and adds to their value for the firm.

6.2. Killer Applications?

A document management system can coordinate the changes, access, and availability of business critical information on a global scale. People can share and leverage each other's work (permissions determine access). The most current version of any document is always the one that is presented so they know they are using the "right" document. In addition, a version history is available to provide access to previous versions from any point in time during the document life cycle as well provide for an audit trail. At any step of the process you can find out:

- Who made changes

- What changes were made and why

- When the changes were made

Also, it prevents two people from editing the same document simultaneously by "locking" the current document whenever someone has it checked out for editing. It even lists which user locked the document. With this type of system, a company can manage documents through the entire lifecycle from creation through disposal (and even use automated retention schedules to purge stuff no longer needed).

Searching for information you need when you need it can be a real challenge. A document management system can improve this as well. Every document has an associated document type. These types are standard and centrally managed in the corporation. Each type has a predefined set of attributes. These different types and attributes can then be used in search scenarios to refine your search to any combination of folders, document types, attributes and keywords.

Besides the benefits of regular document management, this type of system can make publishing to and maintaining an Intranet much easier. The technical web staff creates web pages that use code to query the document management system and publish the latest and greatest information. You can create programmatic links to specific documents, all documents in specific folders, all documents of a particular document type, or all documents with a particular attribute and value (for example, publish all documents where the attribute publish to the website equals True). This creates a more "hands-off" publishing scheme for the Intranet, as the technical staff does not need to be involved on a day-to-day basis. If users can be convinced (or coerced) to use the document management system in this way, it can create Intranet content that is much more dynamic, accurate, and up to date.

Among the firms that I have consulted with, the perception is that one needs some maverick software that does everything at the click of the button, while costing the business an arm and a leg (see, for example, Hokkanen, 1997). They are pleasantly surprised when I suggest they start by upgrading themselves to MS Office 2000, install NT Server on one computer, and learn how to use their Outlook to the best of its productivity. Although hundreds of companies are marketing their peer-to-peer, groupware and content management applications, the fact is that you don't really need all this in a firm run by a principal solicitor with 25 to 50 staff.

6.3. End Users: Dragging the Horse to the River

One of the best ways of driving traffic to your site is putting something employees absolutely need on the site and making that the only way they can get it. Liebowitz (n.d.) has advised that the best way to ensure Intranet usability by the staff is to "ask your lawyers what they'd like to see on the intranet." She then ads:

"1.Let the library staff handle it: If it's research-oriented, it makes sense to have the expert researchers--the law librarians--take control.

2. Let the techies handle it: It's important that the intranet fit within the firm's overall technology plan. Channel everything through the tech staff.

3. Let every practice area have its own section and set them free." The practice area pages should contain links to research content for materials that specifically assist the attorney in relation to client questions. Once the pages are created, make sure that a mechanism is created to capture requests by attorneys for URL suggestions, and feedback for the type of information they would like to see on their practice area page. The more ownership the attorneys have for the page, the more traffic will be generated (DiMattia, 2002).

A few techniques to guarantee repeat Intranet users:

- **Include Links to Daily News and Periodicals**

This page will be especially helpful on days when breaking news is occurring that could impact clients of the firm. Numerous publications are available on Web sites and commercial vendors to post on intranets, either for free or at a nominal monthly charge. The advantage is providing publications to all attorneys simultaneously, rather than relying on routing lists that make take several days for the publication to work its way through the list of recipients.

- **Track their Clients**

Since driving traffic to the intranet is a primary goal, one of the best applications that can be included is a client tracking daily alert. Since attorneys are eager to know what is happening to their clients prior to receiving a call from that client, this type of data becomes invaluable. The value here is that a string of clients can be included in a single search with only the most important ones distinguished with a separate URL as a subset on the intranet.

- **Implement Push and Current Awareness Software**

Similar to the client tracking and periodicals functions, another application that can be included is a current awareness electronic search. Since it is important that attorneys remain current in their respective fields, this type of tool could augment their current set of resources. There are some Web portal tracking tools from Yahoo or Excite that can develop and deliver customized practice area searches to deliver practice specific current awareness information. The value here is delivering the latest information on the issues your attorneys care most about today, through the intranet.

- **Publish a monthly newsletter:**

A great way of keeping in touch with your Intranet users, a monthly newsletter will keep repeat traffic coming to your Intranet. Newsletters are ideal for keeping in touch with users and informing them about additions and changes to the Intranet. The newsletter has to be of REAL value to the users, otherwise they will perceive it as more spam.

- **Add a Quick Poll**

These polls attract users and enable them to provide input on issues relevant to your Intranet. Users will check back on a regular basis to view the poll results. Depending on the Intranet traffic, change the poll on a regular basis and post the results of the previous polls on your Intranet for public viewing. An additional feature would be to allow users to signup using their email address to receive the results of the poll.

- **Ask them to Bookmark**

This is the simplest techniques of getting repeat users. An action message like "Bookmark this page NOW for great content" will help. Many users simply forget that they don't have to see your entire Intranet in one visit. Remind them to use the bookmark feature in their browser.

- **Produce Regular Content**

Several Intranet owners make the mistake of publishing a lot of content when going live and not updating it for months. Do not fall into this trap. Make sure you update your content on a regular basis. Make a schedule and stick to it. Let you users know this schedule so they know when to come back.

- **Add a Discussion Board**

Add a moderated discussion board to your Intranet. This will provide users a forum for expressing their opinion and networking with other users to your Intranet. Imagine a common area where your users can share ideas, exchange tips, and post questions and find other people with similar interests. This will surely make them come back to check for postings and responses to their postings. This is usually a good reason for repeat visits.

And last, but not least

- **Market the Intranet:**

The more information that's published on the intranet, the more necessary it is for employees to use it to get the information they want, whether it's about policies on vacation time or to research a legal issue. The more those employees turn to the intranet and find what they need, the more they'll come back. Marketing effort involves subtly nudging people toward the intranet. If someone asks a question, answer it, but then say, 'Did you know you can find this on the intranet?' Make repeat visits to group and department meetings, host scavenger hunts, hold contests, send e-mails, written articles for the firm's weekly newsletter, and feature individuals in articles in the library newsletter to show that you look to contributors throughout the firm to provide the Intranet content.

7. Intranets and Legal Information: Where the Library Comes In

Intranets allow law firms (and other organizations) to provide employees with access to documents and information in a centralized location and user-friendly format. They also present a new opportunity to law firm libraries--a new avenue through which the library can advertise its resources and services to the firm. The idea of remote access to library resources is not a new one (Adourian & Schweyer, 1997). Attorneys are accustomed to having desktop access to CD-ROMs, online databases, and the Internet. Intranets improve upon the idea of a networked environment by providing a centralized access point and uniform navigational tools for these resources that use different applications. An intranet can serve as a new kind of ultra-flexible desktop, one which allows the designer to include as much explanatory material as necessary and to group resources in a way most useful to the firm.

Well-designed intranets simplify access to resources. Electronic resources no longer have to be grouped according to medium. On an intranet page, a link to an Internet site can be followed in a list by a link that will open a CD-ROM application (attorneys will still need to know what type of source they are using, so they know if and how they are incurring costs). Intranets make it easier for librarians to put together customized packages of resources for each target audience.

One of the greatest advantages of intranets is that they reach across geographic boundaries (Fishenden, 1997). Librarians in law firms with several offices struggle to provide services to the branch locations. An intranet page provides access in a central location where employees in outer offices can access resources as easily as can employees just down the hall. If access to a firm's intranet page is controlled by means of a password, attorneys may be able to access it from home or from wherever they have Internet access. This expands the accessibility of the library even further. Moreover, there are great advantages to having this extra avenue of two-way communication between librarians and patrons. Reference requests can be submitted electronically directly from the intranet page and the library can invite feedback via a comments box. Intranets can also provide feedback to the library if they are equipped with counters that measure the number of times a page is visited. Librarians can monitor how heavily sources are used. If help

documents for a particular source are being frequently accessed, this may be an indication that a refresher workshop is needed.

While intranets provide great opportunities, there are issues that law firm librarians should consider before providing unlimited access to resources via the intranet. The most serious is the issue of copyright and license compliance. Since so many electronic resources are currently priced according to how many people are going to access them, librarians will want to check their contracts before providing access for everyone in the firm. Access to sources with license restrictions can be controlled by means of passwords. Additionally, there must be a clear procedure for getting updates executed quickly and easily. An intranet is a dynamic tool that can support the changing needs of the library and the firm. However, if the information on the intranet becomes outdated or static, attorneys will lose interest and stop visiting. This is just one reason why librarians should be involved in the planning and administration of the firm's intranet.

8. Conclusion:

It would be fair to conclude that paying attention to the Internet and related technologies and what IT has to offer is the key to practicing law in the years ahead. It will become increasingly difficult to describe the digital practice of law to lawyers who refuse to surf the web or let others do it for them. Internet technologies are becoming the great equalizer between solo and small firms and large firm practitioners. Just as prospective clients will have access to an infinite amount of information about law on the Internet, so will all lawyers.

We are still the profession that has been trained to apply the rule of law in society, and that holds attorney-client privilege to protect communication between lawyer and client. As the twenty-first century dawns, the only way that lawyers will keep our unique role in society is to get on to the web, be where the clients are, and learn how to practice law in the digital age.

It is often the scenario that after the company has implemented an intranet, the staff does not use it, or uses it to dump documents and files onto it. No one wants to claim responsibility for updating or owning the site. A solution we suggest to the firms we consult is to provide incentives for the best site on the intranet, measured by the number of hits generated over a certain period of time.

Another problem with intranets is the unwillingness of people to share what they want. Any intranet venture should not be limited solely to IT, but also to changing cultural perceptions. Knowledge is power, and people are afraid that by sharing it they may lose their competitive advantage over other staff. This is especially true in legal firms, where associates get paid on commission basis. Our suggestion is to change the perception of knowledge sharing from losing competitive edge to being seen as an expert.

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