

# A librarian by another name...



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An information professional can have many faces — mine is the manager of the Data Management Services ('DMS') division in the Adelaide office of Minter Ellison Lawyers.

DMS is encompassed within the firm's litigation section but is responsible for non-litigious matters as well as litigation support. Essentially, DMS is responsible for the re-engineering of legal service delivery through information technology, with services ranging from the design and operation of information management systems for internal purposes, relations to legal matters, including major litigation and due diligence reviews. This can entail the physical organisation of paper files (indexing, coding, summarising, pagination), the imaging and referencing of legal documents on electronic databases, and developing searching facilities for legal documents on a full-text retrieval database (for example, court transcripts, pleadings). Affidavits, appeal/court books, chronologies and witness statements are all prepared easily and efficiently through the use of electronic and manual methods, helping the lawyers to manage their paper more effectively.

Litigation support reared its head in the litigation boom of the early 1980s, where librarians and other information professionals were found to hold the vital skills and knowledge necessary to organise and manage this rapid growth of information. Now, most law firms have legal support services in one way or another — labelled as 'legal technology', 'legal data management', 'document management', and so on.

DMS was established primarily for a large litigation matter in the 1990s and has flourished ever since, taking on more information management projects which has seen the division become one of the most important services to internal and external clientele of the firm. Since I took over the position as manager in December 1999, DMS has taken on a new persona and has proved to be a fantastic career path for a law librarian-lawyer. Having the technical knowledge and skills from being a librarian, as well as the legal knowledge from a law degree, has enabled me to offer a more intelligent and practical service to clientele in structuring and managing their information.

Law librarians have played a vital role in information management partly through educating lawyers in the technology — how and when to use it. More and more law firms are recognising that being technologically

advanced in office practices and the management of cases provides them with a competitive advantage in the legal marketplace. Using technology in a constructive way has been where librarians have contributed no end in helping them manage the change and to see it as an opportunity rather than a hindrance. This is where librarians working within litigation support assist, by ensuring lawyers utilise and understand the technology so as not to appear obtuse to their competitors and colleagues. This may prove to be a challenging and sometimes disheartening career move, but continually educating and enlightening the clientele as to these methods of information management ensures it is nevertheless very exciting!

As an overview of my experience, I completed a BA/LLB at the University of Tasmania in 1997 (where I was a casual shelver at the main library), and left for Melbourne to embark on the Graduate Diploma of Information Management (Librarianship) at Monash University, part-time. Two and a half years later, I had been fortunate to have worked in the library of Blake Dawson Waldron Lawyers as a library assistant with Moyra McAllister, and moved to Adelaide to be the assistant librarian at Minter Ellison with Barbara Coat for a few months, before moving to DMS. Part of the reason I applied for my current position was that one of my librarianship assignments required me to pick an advertisement for a position which an information management professional could apply for. After working through each position description and requirement, I realised that I *did* have the skills and knowledge to perform these tasks — and so I applied!

I discovered that being a librarian creates a certain mindset and determination which many professions lack — logic, creativity, complex organisational skills and passion. I recall at a Grade 12 careers night that I heard a woman speak about how much she loved her job and what a variety of career opportunities she had because of it. She was a legal information consultant. She told me that if I had a law degree, a librarianship degree, computer skills and some creativity, I could do whatever I wanted and name my salary. I decided that I had always loved being a librarian (since being library monitor in primary school!) and I loved studying law, and I assumed I could easily acquire the computing skills, so I set about seeing myself as a small business and acquired the necessary skills and knowledge.

Here I am — in a niche market! ■

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