

THERE'S A BUZZ IN THE LIBRARY

The new Meyer Vandenberg Library, as seen from the MV café.

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Developed in conjunction with an office relocation, a new library opened in April 2015 at Meyer Vandenberg Lawyers in Canberra. ALISON JONES and GERALDINE MCDONAGH reflect on how a changed workspace has enabled their thriving library service to engage with the firm in new ways and how the new space demonstrates that the library service is valued within Meyer Vandenberg and gives them the chance to further evolve their relationship with their users.

In the lead-up to the move, a conversation between library staff, management and the architect saw the development of the firm's first customised library space. It is centrally located, open plan and situated right next to the in-house MV Café.

In the previous premises, people had to track us down as we were located in two separate offices, three floors up from a small room of books. Our workstations are now located in the new library, so we are able to catch up with staff each morning as they wander past to get their coffee.

As a result, staff know we exist and we are receiving reference questions from teams that previously rarely used the library service. Our central location has also led to us being regarded as the natural go-to people for information, so we are also fielding more questions on wider issues such as how to best utilise Excel or who might be the office expert on conducting title searches.

While our previous book room had no space for staff to browse or read, the inviting furniture and open plan of our new library encourages staff to wander in regularly. A recent count of visitors to our library demonstrated that the equivalent of over half the firm visited the library in one week. These visits are on top of enquiries via telephone or email, which remain the most popular way to get in touch with us and which have not decreased since the move.

In some respects, the library space is being used differently from how we anticipated. To create a welcoming and appealing zone, we included comfortable chairs so staff could browse the collection at their leisure. However, most opt to stand and quickly skim books at our large newspaper stand, in order to select the most appropriate titles to check out and take back to their office for in-depth reading.

At the same time, the location of the library has had an impact on circulation and borrowing practices. Staff used to hoard collections of regularly used books in their offices, but now

because most pass the library many times a day, they have taken to only checking out books as needed, or consulting items briefly within the library.

Before we moved in, we were concerned about the potential impact of noise levels on our work, particularly given our location next to the café. It has been a pleasant surprise to find that there is a great buzz around the area, thanks to the ever-changing interactions in the café and the library. This environment enables us to more easily chat with other staff, to find out what they are currently working on and the issues they are facing. We are able to proactively offer our suggestions to assist them with their work.

An unexpected consequence of our central location is that the library is featured when lawyers tour the firm's clients around the office. Conversations between lawyers and their clients have provided enlightening insights into how both our staff and the firm's clients perceive the library service. Through this experience we have come to better understand aspects of the library service which are not fully appreciated by staff. We now target information on library usage, backed up with statistics, to particular staff members and teams. This has changed their perception of the library, leading to a more positive portrayal of the library to visitors and the occasional in-depth conversation directly between us and the firm's clients.

We are very proud of our new library space. It's a beautiful place to work in – bright and inviting – but more importantly it's an enabler of new interactions, connections and understandings with our library users, the staff at Meyer Vandenberg. 🙌

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Geraldine McDonagh (left) and Alison Jones

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