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Conveying the Merits of Print Sources to the Google Generation

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One of the most gratifying parts of being an academic librarian is seeing the “light” come on when I explain an aspect of the legal research process to a student. However, getting concepts to resonate with students is often a challenge. This is especially true when I have tried to convey the importance of knowing how to research legal issues in print. The most common response I have received from students has been the question, “Why not just Google it?”

For a time, when put on the spot, I was not able to answer that question in an articulate way. I would give a response along the lines of, “You need to know how to do research in print to prepare for your career.” While the advice I gave was sound, it was often not enough to motivate students to take the time to become familiar with researching legal topics in print.

From what I have observed, law students will not spend time on information if it fails to provide an immediate answer to a question or a clear long-term benefit. When I recall my struggles as a law student, I can understand their reluctance. Keeping up with my classes, working at my internship, searching for a job and scrounging together a modicum of a social life was enough of a challenge. I did not have time to sleep, much less to spend on what I thought would be useless information.

I found myself needing a convincing argument to encourage students to use print sources as a vital part of their research strategy. I did not want to merely give a sales pitch. I wanted to present solid reasons and benefits that students could understand and take seriously. The inspiration for what would become my platform for advocating print sources came from one of our student library assistants. While helping the student find information about a particular wrinkle in Florida law, I used a volume from our Florida Statutes Annotated set. As we discussed the statute he was interested in, I pointed out the included citations to other sources that he could use to find more information.

The resulting conversation went along these lines:

“Sell it to me. . . . I don’t want fluff. I want to know how using the books can help me and why I should take time out of my day to learn how.”

“This makes finding cases that are on point a lot easier.”

“That is why I like researching for things using print,” I said. “I can find what I need fairly quickly and

it doesn’t feel as scattered as searching for things online. I might seem a bit old-fashioned, but I typically use online searches at the end of research to update the sources that I am relying on, rather than use them for the heavy lifting.”

“I can see why. I’ll have to try starting in print next time.”

“I wish I could convince other students to use the books instead of jumping online right away.”

The student crossed his arms and leaned back in his seat. “Sell it to me.”

“What?”

He waved his left hand in a circle, indicating for me to continue. “Sell it to me. Tell me why I should use the books instead of the Internet. I don’t want fluff. I want to know how using the books can help me and why I should take time out of my day to learn how.” He raised his hand and extended three fingers. “You have three minutes to give me three reasons why I should go to the books first.” He looked at his watch and said, “Starting . . . now.”

While I did not meet the requirements of the challenge (I ended up running over the allotted time limit), the exercise provided me with the framework that I needed.

Now, when helping a student with research, I present three points as to why they should utilize print sources along with online databases.

The first point that I introduce to students is that learning to use legal print sources requires a small investment of time that can potentially save them hours later. I point out that they are already familiar with the use of indexes, glossaries, and tables of contents and therefore have the majority of tools they need and they will not have to develop a wholly new set of skills. I also tell students that by becoming familiar with the indexing terms used by print sources to organize infor-

continued from page 17

Conveying the Merits of Print Sources

mation, they will be able to search for information online more efficiently since online databases use the same terms to organize their materials.

The second point I put forward is the wealth of essential legal and practical information available only in print. I stress to students that while searching for information online is necessary, especially to get the latest information on a subject, there are number of topical guides, form collections, bibliographic publications and skill enhancement books that can help them find information, hone their advocacy skills and prepare the documents they will need that cannot be found in any database.

The third and final point that I give to students is that learning how to research in print will allow them to find information on unfamiliar subjects more effi-

[T]ying them to a real-life research project . . . allows students to see how using print sources can help them in a tangible way.

ciently, which will be essential for their jobs. I explain that online searching does have an advantage when it comes to updating sources or finding materials in a narrow field; but that for gaining a broader overview of a topic and the sources that discuss it,

print is a much better medium because print sources tend to gather citations to related materials in a convenient package. I emphasize that being able to find information quickly and with the lowest cost to them and their client is pivotal no matter if they plan on going into practice for themselves or joining a practice, and that knowing how to research using print sources is a vital part of meeting those professional requirements.

While this three-point argument on its own often helps convince students of the merits of using print resources, I have found that it has its greatest impact when presented while I am helping students overcome research problems. Presenting these three points while tying them to a real-life research project takes the argument from the realm of the abstract and allows students to see how using print sources can help them in a tangible way.

Much like the decline of the art of tailoring due to the wide availability of off-the-rack clothing, the proliferation of online legal information seems to be diminishing the practice of researching legal matters in print. Due to the law's dependency on print materials, students have to be skilled in researching in print, but explaining that to them is often an uphill battle. I hope that by presenting my argument for using print sources to students, I can convince them that being able to research in print is a fundamental skill, and that by sharing my argument with my fellow librarians, they can use it to reach their students as well. ☺

continued from [page 16](#)

The Collaborative Law Librarian

ers are proving to be very popular; especially the ones for "Solos & Smalls," bringing isolated lawyers out to network with colleagues. We've also found that using the library as "party central" benefits us in more ways than one: it brings members into the Library, which luckily is a comfortable and elegant space; our only cost is for food and beverages (sometimes sponsored by a vendor); and facilitating these functions for our members increases their emotional investment in the association. It is great advertising for the Library, too.

Keeping our members informed, about their profession and their association, is one of the most important things we do. News of the association is sent out in a regular weekly email blast called the *TLA Update*. It covers announcements, both from us and from associations we work with, and includes features such as a Legislative Update, From Your Library column, and Did You Know column; the latter contains tidbits about benefits available to members that they often are not aware of, as we learned in the Membership Survey. *The Toronto Law Journal* is a juried periodical, published electronically nine times a year, comprised of legal articles, written by and for our members. To provide information of a timelier sort, we have partnered with a company called Multiview to produce a weekly e-digest of local legal news called the *TLA Weekly Verdict*. Finally, we publish a more association-centred quarterly e-zine called *The Mirror*, which includes updates from me as Director, our President, and our various committees as well as a couple of other more social, on-

continued on page 19