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Law Library Audits

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In his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People*, Stephen Covey advises readers to "begin with the end in mind." This is especially good advice to remember when conducting a library audit. Doing so will allow the firm to save money, streamline the collection, and ensure that the users will have the resources that they truly need. A library audit can be conducted by the law librarian, an outside agency, or even by the attorneys themselves, but regardless of who actually performs the task I would propose that it encompass the following eight steps.

1). Ensure that the company/firm is getting the best deals from the publishers and vendors. It is often effective to call every publisher and vendor, tell them which company you are calling from and ask directly if your firm is getting the best possible price. Quite often publishers will offer 10-30% off the contract price, just by asking. They may also extend the discount to new offers, and or offer free trial periods for online services or treatises. In some cases they will give the online version of their publication either for free or at an introductory rate if the library already gets a printed copy. Unless there is centralized ordering of all publications, it is highly recommended that the "auditor" compare the rates different departments in the company are being charged. It's quite possible that the corporate library is paying a different price than the legal library, so check that out. It may be possible to combine duplicate titles to receive a discount for the firm as a whole.

2). Request a current standing order list from each publisher. Such a list is important because sometimes attorneys and staff have left the firm and taken books with them. It is also important because more and more often the publishers are sending out books to the firm that no one ever ordered. After reviewing the list and double-checking with the firm, ask the publishers to stop sending unsolicited books. Try to initiate a policy that asks attorneys and staff to place their orders through the library. This will cut down on multiple orders for the same book. Finally, having a standing-order list helps answer the question about whether a particular book is needed. Perhaps the attorney(s) who ordered the book are no longer at the firm, yet these old orders continue to stay on standing order. Once it is determined that an item is no longer needed, communicate that to the vendor.

3). Negotiate with the online vendors. Clean up user lists so that the firm is maximizing flat rate contracts. I recently checked a Lexis password list for a client and found that twelve of the users on the current active password list no longer worked there but that some of them were still using the service. I also recommend that you track your online usage. Most vendors offer this service free of charge. You can then communicate with individuals about effective search techniques if the online services are not being used in a cost-effective manner and suggest additional training sessions that can be crafted and offered. Furthermore, monitor whether client-matter numbers are being correctly entered, so that the online research costs may be passed on to clients.

4). Try to ensure that library resources are current, as this can potentially be a liability issue. If books are seriously out of date, but people still want to keep them with the collection, add labels to the book spines indicating that a particular series is no longer being updated. This could prevent an attorney from providing a client with obsolete information and incorrect advice.

5). It is important to implement good record-keeping measures that ensure that the library actually receives what was ordered. This can be done by cross checking against line items in your budget or, if there is no formal library budget in place, cross checking against the publisher invoices. Finally, if there are no publisher invoices available, one can cross check against the lists from the publishers.

6). A thorough library audit will help you make recommendations for new purchases and/or contracts by allowing you to determine if there are there any holes in the library collection. Talk to some of the firm's library users and get recommendations and comments about titles from them as well.

7). Encourage training for the online resources and confirm what training is included in the firm contract. Negotiate to have unlimited training included in your contract. Give the vendors your "wish list" of classes and request that there be one hour classes that will enable the attorneys to also get MCLE credit. Promote any classes and drop in hours that your firm library offers.

8). Solicit concerns, comments, kudos, and wish lists from the attorneys, paralegals and staff. Ask them what they would like to see added to the collection, what can be deleted, what they can’t live without, and what they can handle accessing online. Be aware of any pending moves for the library and factor that into the library audit. If your library is looking at substantially less square footage in the near future, then moving some of the resources to online may be an easier sell. Following these eight steps should result in a successful library audit. Good luck, and let me know how it goes.