

Vendor Relations

Guest Editorial

Vendor: “a person or company offering something for sale.”

Relations: “the way in which two or more people or groups feel about and behave towards each other.”

These definitions come from the eleventh edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, published in 2004.

As the Chair of BIALL’s Legal Information Group, I might be expected to have more to say on the subject of vendor relations. So what does LIG do? We complain when BIALL members raise issues with us, of course, but that only has a chance of working if we show that the relationship has two sides. We collect feedback which the suppliers might not otherwise have access to, help with setting up focus groups and try to advise based on the knowledge that we have built up about the attitudes of the profession.

The area of vendor relations is about paying invoices, claiming missing issues and ringing the support line when the database is inaccessible. But, if it is a relationship, that means working together so that both parties benefit. A good account manager system helps with this, but so does being a good customer, aware of the needs of the organisation, willing and able to communicate those needs to the suppliers, especially when they are changing. I am sure that there will be many opportunities for information professionals and information suppliers to work together in the future, both on an individual level and through LIG.

The breadth of possible interpretations of vendor relations is matched by the subjects of the articles in this issue, which range from the very practical to the more philosophical. Those who attended Fiona Fogden’s session at last year’s BIALL Conference in Brighton will remember the various clauses which she suggested might be included in contracts with vendors. Fiona has kindly agreed to make those clauses available to a wider audience here.

The 2010 Conference also saw the presentation of the first BIALL Supplier of the Year Award. The very popular winners were the booksellers and publishers Wildy and Sons Ltd and the award was accepted on their behalf by John Sinkins, the Managing Director. We include two articles about the award: Susan Scorey’s interview with John and my article explaining the background to the new award.

Jas Breslin discusses the best ways to utilise the law librarianship email forums to solve difficulties with vendors. In contrast, Julie Kitchen has been looking back over her career as a law firm librarian and shares her experiences in dealing with vendors in that time.

I am particularly pleased that we have received contributions from AALL and CALL. Many of the same issues affect law librarians in America and Canada, and these

articles tell us how the equivalents of the Legal Information Group approach many of them. Finally, it is only fair to consider the other side of the relationship as well. We sent a list of questions to a range of vendors and have collated the responses that we received into a survey article.

David Percik

Chair - BIALL Legal Information Group

Editor’s Note

Vendor Relations

I am indebted to David Percik and the BIALL Legal Information Group for not only Guest Editing, but also for contributing so much information to this special theme on vendor relations.

Accessing Historical Legal Records

Three articles have been contributed on this topic. Caroline Shenton describes the fascinating work undertaken in the archive of records relating to the judicial function of the House of Lords from the sixteenth century to the present. Anthony Smith writes about the work of the British Records Association in respect of legal documents and Peter Clinch covers access to court documents in England and Wales, again from the past to the present.

Current Topics

Our Current Topics section is short as we have so much material to include on vendor relations. We welcome back two of our regular contributors. Lesley Dingle of the Squire Law Library has conducted another Eminent Scholar interview, this time with Stephen Schwebel, an international jurist and former judge at the International Court of Justice at the Hague. He spent a small but very formative period at Cambridge University. Peter Clinch provides an update on recent work carried out on the FLAG database. Our third contributor is Rosemary Shakespeare who attended the Second ALLA/NZLA Joint Conference in Melbourne, Australia in Autumn 2010. Rosemary reports back on a useful session on digitisation projects in law libraries, with particular emphasis on the work in the US of the Law Library Microform Consortium.

Subject Resource Guides

Jas Breslin has produced a very clear and readable account of the type of work undertaken by corporate lawyers and the resources they need. This article should be helpful for librarians in both large and small law libraries.

Practical Matters

At the Conference last June, Keri Weekes gave a very practical presentation on how to prepare for interviews. Her article is packed with extremely useful tips for all those of us who might be job searching in these recessionary times.

Editorial Board

Michelle Celik, who has been a stalwart member of the Board for some years, has now decided to step down following her move into freelance work. I personally am

extremely grateful for all her support: she has always produced exemplary minutes of all meetings very quickly and I have relied heavily on her to come up with ideas and contacts for articles. The Board wish her well in her new position and will miss her contributions.

I shall be retiring as Editor in March 2011. I have had two stints as Editor – from 1990-1995 and from 2002 to date and have thoroughly enjoyed the work. It is now time for the younger generation to take over. I am sure the journal will benefit from a new perspective and I have every faith that it will be in safe hands!

Christine Miskin

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Any Answers? Questions for Suppliers

Abstract: Because the focus of most of the themed articles in this issue of LIM is vendor relations from the point of view of the customer, it seemed sensible to allow the legal publishers to present their own views of relations with their customers to the readership, via a short survey carried out by BIALL's Legal Information Group.

Keywords: vendor relations; surveys; legal publishing; online services

Introduction

This short survey was conducted specifically for the vendor relations theme in this issue of Legal Information Management. It was devised and sent out after the first BIALL Supplier Survey which resulted in the Supplier of the Year Award was completed. David Percik, Chair of BIALL's Legal Information Group, devised a list of appropriate questions in consultation with the LIM Editorial Board. The questions were sent to a range of publishers and the answers received are presented below.

What is your reaction to your performance in the first BIALL Supplier Survey?

CUP: We would like to have more customers!

Hart: We were delighted to have had an "honourable mention".

OUP: The results sounded positive, but we could always do better. Next time I would really like more detail regarding how we fared against our competitors, so we can further improve our publishing and customer service.

PLC: Overall, it is extremely gratifying to see the results of the first BIALL Supplier Survey. This is a strong endorsement of our commitment to, and investment in, product excellence and reflects the importance we place as a business on first rate customer service.

The top ranking for product conveyed in the BIALL survey illustrates what PLC delivers. That is, a unique service which genuinely delivers value to the end user, the front line lawyer, and to the organisation as a whole. We believe our lower ranking in relation to pricing may stem partly from respondents looking at the question of pricing in isolation to the services that are being paid for.

We understand that there is more we can do to work alongside our library colleagues to improve the way PLC's true value is communicated throughout the firm. We also now run audit programmes, free as part of the