



AALL DIGITAL WHITE PAPER

DEFINING ROI

LAW LIBRARY
BEST PRACTICES

This is the proverbial best of times and worst of times. The great economic meltdown of 2008 triggered a tsunami of changes in the legal profession that has reverberated through every type of legal organization. The law firm market was catapulted into an altered world where technology, client pricing pressures, and globalization have generated a truly “disrupted market.” As law firms retrenched, their hiring of new associates was reduced. This in turn drove down law school enrollments as college graduates faced dwindling job prospects and high student loan debt. Budgets

for law libraries supported by federal, state, and local taxes are shrinking. Virtual law firms, offshore lawyers, and low-cost administrative centers are redefining the contours and professional trajectories of lawyers and legal support professionals. Globally, libraries as “places” are shrinking. Google and artificial intelligence technologies such as IBM Watson are casually assumed to be poised to replace both research librarians and lawyers alike.

In this endlessly mutating environment, librarians must face the challenge of identifying,



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measuring, and communicating the benchmarks and metrics of value.

The role of the legal information professional has never been more critical to the institutions they support, and it has also never been more at risk. The success of both lawyers and law firms hinges on access to the right mix of precedent and predictive insights. Information professionals act as connectors—digital cartographers

who help law students, judges, and lawyers surface and synthesize both precedents and predictive indicators. Today, information is so ubiquitous and information professionals deliver it so seamlessly that the complexity of balancing the budgets, the workflows, the technologies, the formats, and the user preferences is often invisible to our organizations. Librarians must track and evaluate a flood of emerging technologies and select and configure tools that change workflow and research methods, while also supporting the existing infrastructure. More than ever before, librarians need the right tools and methods for monitoring the pulse of their constituencies while carefully selecting and managing complex changes in platforms, learning styles, client expectations, and budget constraints.

This American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) white paper is being written to encourage all AALL members to take on the “value challenge.” This project is a journey, not a destination. Law librarianship cannot expect to survive as a profession if members do not engage in honest reassessments of the types of professional skills they need to learn, and the platforms and services they should provide. They must embrace the need to continuously reassess and recalibrate services to optimize value at the highest strategic level, all while maintaining an eye on the bottom line. Measuring value across each environment will not be easy, but it is a task we must all undertake.

Contributors include thought leaders from across the AALL spectrum, who have mined their own experience and share their measures of success.

There are numerous individuals to thank for this white paper. The genesis for this undertaking came from AALL past president Holly Riccio, who sought to continue the work the Economic Value of Law Libraries Special Committee started under Steven Anderson’s term as AALL president. Riccio convened an ad hoc team of thought leaders to identify topics and recruit authors. Thanks are also owed to the contributors, who took time from their busy schedules to write for this publication, sharing their impressive breadth of experience and insights. The authors have created engaging and practical guides that draw from renowned historical sources such as the *Five Laws of Library Science* by S. R. Ranganathan and also highlight the contemporary wisdom of Don Draper, the iconic fictional ’60s ad man from the TV show *Mad Men*. These varied approaches to this topic are illustrative of the myriad of approaches to demonstrating value. We hope that seeing what someone else has done can spark more creativity and innovation for measuring value within the profession.

EDITORS

Gregory R. Lambert
Jean P. O’Grady
Holly Riccio



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