

# ASK YOUR FRIENDLY LIBRARY CHATBOT

BY ROBERT BRAMMER & SASKIA MEHLHORN

How to create  
and build your own  
law library  
chatbot for your  
organization.

## Chatbots provide information professionals with a new tool to do what we do best, organize and deliver information.

Just as businesses hurried to create an app to take advantage of the ubiquity of smartphones in the early 2000s, businesses—including law firms—are now creating chatbots to take advantage of the popularity of instant messaging platforms.

“Given a choice, 70 percent of customers today prefer messaging over voice for customer support,” says author Chris Vennard in his article “The Future of Call Centers and Customer Service Is Being Shaped by AI.” (Read the article at [bit.ly/MJ19IBM](http://bit.ly/MJ19IBM).) Further, in a July 2018 study, Verto Analytics reported that Facebook Messenger is now the third most popular mobile social networking app in the United States. (Learn more at [bit.ly/MJ19Statista](http://bit.ly/MJ19Statista).)

Chatbots provide lawyers with an opportunity to address the frequent criticism that their websites are often nothing more than static advertisements for potential clients to call them. However, lawyers must be vigilant to provide only legal information, and not legal advice, through their chatbots to avoid any ethical dilemmas.

### What Is a Chatbot?

One of the first chatbots in the legal domain to gain media attention was a parking ticket bot called DoNotPay. Designed by Joshua Browder, an undergraduate student at Stanford, this bot allowed the user to generate a form letter to appeal a New York City

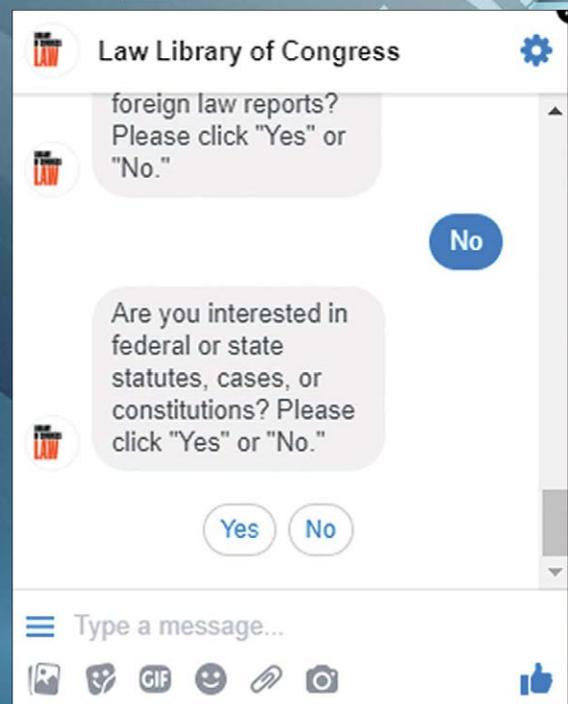
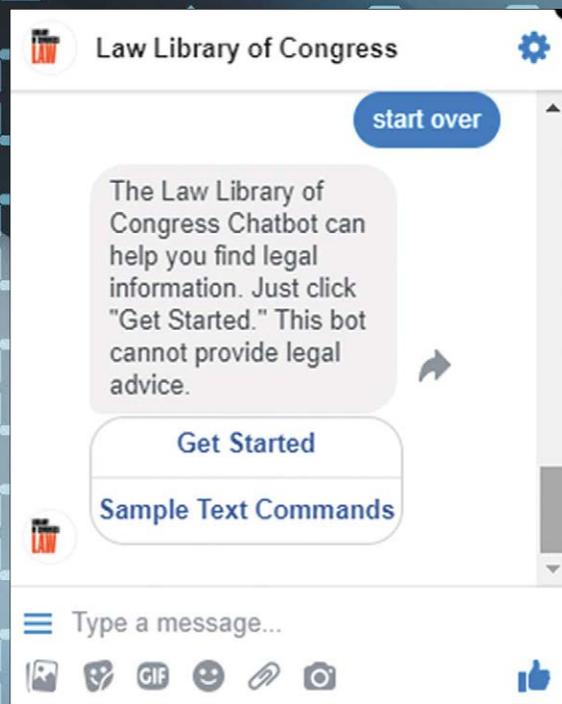
or London parking ticket. It has since expanded to other cities. Users input their name, address, and other standard information, and then choose from a series of excuses or justifications, drawn from the municipal code, that indicate why they should not have received a parking ticket. They can then elaborate on that excuse. For example, they may pick the excuse that the No Parking sign was obscured. They can then attach a photo or a text description supporting that excuse. The user then copies and pastes the appeal into an online form or prints out the appeal and mails it in.

The initial version of DoNotPay was very basic. You could only click on prompts in a web browser, and it didn’t support any natural language input. Even so, this simple bot managed to overturn \$13 million dollars in parking tickets in the U.S. and the UK as of April 2018.

“Lawyer bots take the hassle out of fighting parking tickets and property taxes—and could cost local governments real revenue,” says Teke Wiggin in an article published in *Recode*. (Read the article at [bit.ly/MJ19Recode](http://bit.ly/MJ19Recode).) The DoNotPay bot was so successful that the company has since launched one that allows users to sue in any small claims court; additional consumer protection-focused bots are planned for the future.

### The ChatFuel Platform

Building a chatbot can be as simple or as complicated as you want,



The Law Library of Congress chatbot provides access to primary sources of law and legal research guides through menu and text-based commands.

depending on the platform used. The chatbot discussed in this article, the Law Library of Congress's chatbot is built in ChatFuel. While there are other platforms, such as WhatsApp, Slack, etc., we used ChatFuel because Facebook is the most popular messenger app for the intended audience. Also, ChatFuel is free (unless you have an excessive number of users), it doesn't require you to set up a development environment for programming, and once you waded through the documentation, it's easy to use. If you want to explore other platforms and see a comparison, take a look at *Chatbots Journal's* article titled "25 Chatbot Platforms," which provides a detailed comparison of the available chatbot platforms. (Read the article at [bit.ly/MJ19ChatJ](http://bit.ly/MJ19ChatJ).)

#### How to Build a Chatbot

Following is a how-to guide for creating a chatbot using ChatFuel as an

example. One thing to note is that you need a Facebook Business account if you actually want to deploy your bot. If you do not have a Facebook Business account, you can still follow along and build one with a basic Facebook account, you just will not be able to deploy it.

**First, visit ChatFuel.com.** You must log in with your Facebook account in order to see the dashboard.

**Click "create from template."** This is a new feature that wasn't previously available, and allows you to share templates for chatbots for common business types.

**Go ahead and click "blank bot."** Now you're back at your dashboard. Click on your new blank bot.

**Next, let's define the welcome message.** Leave the first sentence

intact and delete the rest of the default text. Provide a welcome sentence, such as “Welcome to the Law Library.” The sentence after that should tell the user what the bot does. For example, “I can help you find information about the library and research guides.” Add a sentence describing how they can interact with the bot. For example, click “Get Started” or type “List of Commands.” And, finally, add a sentence that indicates that the bot cannot provide legal advice. The “List of Commands” button should point to a URL that provides example commands.

**Add your first button.** Click “add button” and type “Get Started.” Leave the space below it blank for now.

**Add additional text blocks and buttons.** Now you’re going to add another block of text. Under “add blocks here” on the left, click the “plus” symbol and name the block “research guides or operating hours.” Add text, such as “Are you interested in research guides or operating hours? Please choose an option below.”

Add a button to this block and name it “Research Guides.” In the research guides button, you probably want to point it to a URL. For our example, we pointed to an index for Law Library of Congress research guides. One thing to note is that, ideally, you want to point to URLs for pages that use responsive web design, since you may receive traffic from a number of different devices (see example at [bit.ly/MJ19LOCguides](http://bit.ly/MJ19LOCguides)).

Add another button to this block and name it “Operating Hours,” then click the URL field and point it to your page for operating hours. (For example, see [bit.ly/MJ19LOChours](http://bit.ly/MJ19LOChours).)

**Finally, add another button to return to the main menu.** Title it “Main Menu,” but in the field you won’t point to a URL this time. Instead, you’ll point back to the welcome message block.

**Now we need to define a default answer.** This is the answer that is triggered if the user types something the chatbot doesn’t understand. Ideally, this would point to a phone number, a

chat service, or Ask a Librarian so that the user can receive assistance from a librarian. Click on “default answer.” Next, delete the default text. Replace that text with, “I’m sorry. I didn’t understand that command. If you would like to talk to a human, please click Ask A Librarian. You can also browse our site index or return to the main menu.”

You might provide three buttons here—one that allows users to contact a human, one that points to a site index, and one that points to the main menu. Add one button that points to Ask a Librarian and then add one that points to your website’s site index. Finally, add a URL that points to the main menu block, the welcome message.

**Set up text triggers.** Now you have defined some basic functions that you can add to later. But what about text inputs to trigger those functions? Click on “Set up AI” on the left, then “Add AI Rule.” ChatFuel prefers complete sentences, as they work better than simple phrases in terms of recognition. Start by defining inputs that will take them to the hours card. You might enter: “Are you open on Saturday”; “Are you open on Sunday”; “Hours”; “What are your hours”; and “When are you open.” Next, choose the block that responds to the input. Click on “text” and select “block” and choose the “research guides or operating hours” block.

Next, add another input for research guides by adding another AI rule. You might type “research guides” or “research help” and then point it toward the “research guides or operating hours” block.

Finally, let’s go back to the welcome block and point the “Get Started” button to the “research guides or operating hours” block.

**Congratulations!** You have created a very basic chatbot that you can add more content to in order to suit your particular needs. To deploy your chatbot, you’ll need a Facebook Business account, but you can test your chatbot without one by clicking “Test This

Chatbot” at the top and then clicking “View on Messenger.com.” It will take a minute or so to give you a prompt to continue to Messenger. The test space is kind of slow, so bear with it.

### Get Excited!

While this emerging technology may seem intimidating or inaccessible at first glance, we hope this article has demonstrated that you don’t need to be a coder to build your own chatbot. There are many platforms that make chatbots accessible to non-programmers, all you need is a willingness to experiment with this new technology. The application of artificial intelligence to information processing is powerful, so get in on the ground floor of this exciting new technology—just have fun and give it a try. ■

#### AALL2go EXTRA

Listen to the 2018 AALL Annual Meeting Program “From Concept to Deliverable: Build Your Own Law Library Chatbot,” at [bit.ly/AM18Chatbot](http://bit.ly/AM18Chatbot).

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**ROBERT BRAMMER**  
SENIOR LEGAL INFORMATION  
SPECIALIST  
Law Library of Congress  
Washington, DC  
[rbram@loc.gov](mailto:rbram@loc.gov)

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**SASKIA MEHLHORN**  
US DIRECTOR, KNOWLEDGE  
SERVICES  
Norton Rose Fulbright US LLP  
Houston, TX  
[saskia.mehlhorn@nortonrosefulbright.com](mailto:saskia.mehlhorn@nortonrosefulbright.com)

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