n the late 1970s, shortly after the Library of Congress began distributing cataloging information in a new format known as Machine Readable Cataloging (MARC), Bob Fleming, who was then working at Trinity University’s computing center in San Antonio, Texas, produced a card catalog electronically for an area librarian who’d approached him to ask if that might be possible.

Once other local librarians heard what Fleming had done, they too began hiring him to create cards digitally for their libraries. Fleming, realizing his system could be spun off into a full-fledged business, left his university job and incorporated MARCIVE, Inc. in 1981.

The company no longer produces catalog cards; between mailing and paper costs, the expense became too prohibitive. It does, however, sell card images to customers who’d like to print their own—and provides catalog classification, MARC record enrichment, and other services.

AALL Spectrum recently spoke with MARCIVE Director of Marketing and Sales Joan Chapa about work the company performs for law libraries, how data storage has evolved, and the ways technology could change how we collect and access legal information in the years to come.

**Who is MARCIVE’s main user group?**
We have all kinds. There are a number of private law firm library customers; we also have some academic law library customers, and state legislative bureaus use us for any number of services. Our biggest base is probably the academic libraries, but we also have a lot of big and small public libraries, school libraries, military libraries (they make up a big part of our business), and church and synagogue libraries—you name it.

**Do you have any clients outside of the U.S.?**
We do—Canadian libraries, UK libraries, and one in Egypt. We are excited to
welcome some brand-new Australian customers.

**What value proposition do you offer customers?**

We make libraries’ collections more visible by making their catalog more useful. When we go to the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Annual Meeting, there are some very small local government libraries with solo librarians attending—they may have some volunteers, but basically they do everything—and some big academic law libraries are there, as well. Most people want to hear how they can make their catalog better. They say, “It’s messy; I’ve taken it over from somebody else, and it’s been neglected.” We can provide database clean-up and authority work.

**How have the MARCIVE services law libraries use changed since the company’s launch?**

MARCIVE’s first clients were catalog card users, and often microfiche catalog users. Of course, at that time, all systems were on mainframes, and everything was output and delivered on those great big round magnetic tapes. Things began to evolve, and some libraries were backing up systems on CDs. We had a number of law libraries that were customers—mostly corporate ones. Since law libraries don’t add a lot of volume to their catalog very often, it was a good solution for a long time. We even put expert witnesses on CDs. That was considered sensitive information we had to make sure we didn’t share with anybody.

Things continued to change, and libraries stopped getting catalog cards and moved record storage to web-based systems. The biggest service offering since then has been database cleanup, because libraries have been using various systems over the years. A lot of early systems were not MARC-based and often would strip out everything in cataloging records that made it easily searchable and detailed because data storage was an issue. A service we offer for a lot of law libraries is taking skeletal or minimal data and fleshing it out. If they have a skeletal record, we find a better one; if they don’t have good access points, we make it more useful for them.

**What other services have you introduced over the years?**

We’ve done a number of things for law libraries, such as adding a table of contents to their cataloging records. The titles of many law books are very generic, and often the subject headings are, too. The more sophisticated library management platforms index the table of contents because keyword searches can find valuable terms in chapter headings, leading a researcher to the most crucial part of the work.

The other thing we’ve done for law libraries involves depository libraries. A number of academic law libraries are repositories for federal government documents that are distributed by the Government Publishing Office (GPO), usually a selection of what the government produces. More frequently now, government publications are only available on the internet. We have a service called Documents Without Shelves that can be utilized by any type of library; you don’t have to be a depository. A user may be interested in information on how to start a small business, for example. Searching the catalog for a keyword will hit on an appropriate title; there’s a persistent URL (PURL) in the record and once clicked, it will open a government document that provides the needed information.
What is the newest feature or product you’ve introduced?

In the last five to six years, there’s been an overhaul in cataloging rules, and the newest one is called RDA (Resource Description and Access). Cataloging is not just about books anymore; it’s about different formats such as streaming video and online resources that aren’t physical.

When libraries acquire new resources, they catalog them in RDA or purchase records for those things that are in RDA format. Their legacy data is in an older format, and so their catalog represents a mix of cataloging rules. Often, a library catalog system has difficulty with this because of the difference in describing resources—so it helps to bring everything up to one standard. You do that through RDA conversion. Our RDA Conversion Service (RDACS) is very popular right now.

Have law librarians been involved in developing the services you offer in any way?

Our law library version of Documents Without Shelves was created by law librarians to represent their interest in government documents—mostly the Department of Justice, congressional hearings, public laws; things that law libraries like to collect. They built the criteria for that. There are new records every month that are loaded into the catalog, so it’s very current.

We’ve sent everything over the internet since the late 1990s; some of the smaller libraries still have problems with that, if they don’t have an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) client associated with their system. We have five or six librarians on staff presently and have a very savvy IT group that can shepherd people through different scenarios.

Are there any other challenges that the legal research community is currently facing?

You have to meet certain goals, especially academic libraries, for accreditation, and it’s gotten difficult, for example, to count the number of volumes or resources you have, because it’s not, “We have X number of books.” They have all these different resources and access to databases, some of which they own, some of which they don’t.

There are a lot of issues with copyright. More libraries are hiring people who deal with that. Copyright is a big issue because of the internet. It’s an essential tool that promotes more resource sharing, and people that didn’t have access to collections who’d have to travel to use them can now just get access, or instead have password access for certain databases. But there are lot of problems with misuse and copyright violations where there wasn’t an issue before. Younger library users tend to believe that everything you can find in print in a book or journal is not as valuable or as useful as what’s on the internet, and that’s just not true, especially when it comes to research.

Is MARCIVE planning to alter or create any services to help the industry meet current or future challenges it may encounter?

We’d like to be able to reach more international libraries, and with the changes to the format for MARC records, we think that’s possible.

A lot of it is happening right now, with people being able to have entryways to fantastic resources they never had access to before across the globe. A library could have access to a legal collection in a UK library mainly because people are digitizing at a pace that is unprecedented.

With older collections, such as rare book collections that are very fragile, you had to make an appointment and prove you’re a scholar and get a pass to use them. Now companies serving law libraries are buying a lot of those older collections, digitizing them, and providing metadata to describe those collections. The problem is the metadata for them is not that good. That’s our business—so we’re working with them to make the collections more useful.

Researchers are excited as these resources come to light with the use of newer technology. We thought streaming video was new technology; now it’s old hat. There’s always going to be something new you haven’t heard of just around the corner, and libraries are going to collect items in whatever format they’re in. You must have ways to describe the content so people can find what they’re looking for—when that needs to happen, we’ll be there to help them with it.

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**MARCIVE FAST FACTS**

- **Year Founded:** 1981
- **Headquarters:** San Antonio, Texas
- **Number of employees:** Approximately 20
- **Services Offered:** Authorities and database remediation and maintenance; cataloging; MARC record enrichment to strengthen search capabilities; LC reclassification; access to online versions of microfiche ERIC MARC records; access to legal and other government depository materials; and search capabilities for government publications.
- **Most Unique Collection the Company Has Worked With:** Descriptions of books, manuscripts, letters, diaries, maps, and interesting non-print items from George Washington`s Mount Vernon Library that MARCIVE generated metadata for so the collection could be added to the Founding Fathers Library Consortium.