

REFERENCE

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How many of you have been asked the question "But how do you know where to start?", with a reference query? Very many of you have I would suspect. I find this one of the hardest questions to answer, and am inclined to say that knowing where to go is to do with training for librarianship. The question is I think, a form of compliment, but how to explain the host of potential sources and strategies that flip through your head each time you are faced with a query? Sometimes we hit it first time and doesn't that feel good!

Librarians naturally think in categories, even in hierarchies, and if research is going nowhere within a category we can broaden or narrow the search to consider other options. This ability, plus a good working knowledge of our sources with their capabilities and drawbacks is a prerequisite for "knowing where to start". When we don't hit it first time, then we can be inventive in considering other sources and strategies.

The problem of knowing where to go is growing now that we have access to not only traditional hard copy sources but also online, CD-ROM and the Internet. Deciding which source could most easily and inexpensively answer a query, can be quite difficult.

When we come to electronic sources, the question is complicated by the problem of search strategy. This is something that I believe can best be learned by experience, preferably with the guidance of someone who understands the construction of the database and its coverage, as well as the language of the search engine and sometimes too, a knowledge of boolean search strategies.

Training

Training our clients on the use of both traditional and electronic sources is a part of our job. This becomes ever more difficult as the sources multiply. Lack of standardisation between different electronic sources is not helping either. This is especially relevant when the software is not as user-friendly as could be hoped for.

To train someone to be able to search efficiently and exhaustively is quite a challenge. Researching is also a continuously changing skill that needs to be practiced. Even so-called good users will still admit that they haven't found what they wanted because, for example, they searched only on Casebase. Finding out whether a 1900 case has been considered through just this database cannot be thorough. We who use source material every day are going to be so much more expert than even a heavy library user, that we should be shouting our skills out loud.

Networking

Some libraries are networking CD-ROMs. This must seem like the ideal to users who have access to information without leaving their offices. However, I wonder how many searchers are being satisfied with what they think is a complete search when in fact it is not so, either through lack of informed search strategies or from lack of coverage of the source. I know that I spend a significant portion of my day helping my clients to construct searches on the stand-alone PC in the library.

Many of the commercial database vendors are offering training either as a free part of the service or as an optional add-on. This training is often very professional and helpful to the end user. But when the trainers leave, and the questions start to arise, I would hope that the end user would approach the library staff for help and indeed, to recognise that they need help. Most users tend to favour a particular database and I admit to having my favourites too. The skills of librarians lie on recommending other access points and search strategies.

Internet

For these reasons I was amazed to hear at a recent talk that the speaker believed that the Internet would soon replace the traditional library, and by implication, the library staff. Leaving aside the problems of historical research on the Net, and of recency and coverage, I find it a little hard to believe that anyone can walk in and find whatever they need with a minimum of training. The Internet is, after all, a gigantic conglomerate of often questionable sources.

Some users will battle their way through all of these problems. But what is to happen when the database falls behind in currency, when your server is down, when you suffer the too-many-hits syndrome? I think the library will be around for quite a while yet!

Questions and Answers

Q What is a Bordereau Contract?

A Butterworths Unreported Judgments Disc 1 has numerous decisions citing this type of contract, and variously spelled as borderau, bordereaux etc. Examples of these types of contracts are also available on the Internet.

Q What are the Chatham House Rules?

A A type of gentlemen's agreement in which sensitive information is given, but on the understanding that it will be denied if cited to another person. Remind you of Sir Humphrey?

Q Where can I find Consumer Price Index figures for the capital cities of Australia?

A I have always found Australian Bureau of Statistics staff to be helpful in giving current information over the phone. Complete listings are available in CCH's *accounts preparation manual*, at the Year-End information tab, and also in Redfern & Cassidy *Australian tenancy law*.

Q Is there any legislation which regulates buskers in Rundle Mall, South Australia?

A I first checked the *Rundle Mall Act 1975 (SA)* and the *Local Government Act 1934 (SA)* with no success, so then phoned the Rundle Mall Management Committee who directed me to Council By-Law No. 8 which gives the City of Adelaide discretion to grant permission or not to people wishing to busk.

Q I need a copy of the multiplier table under s35A of the *Wrongs Act 1934 (SA)*.

A After much unsuccessful searching, we contacted the Compulsory Third Party Section of SGIC (State Government Insurance Commission), who provided us with a copy. The correct title is the *Wrongs Act Multiplier Chart*.

Q Is it possible to obtain a copy of an old ABC radio *Law Report* programme?

A On the ABC Internet site (<http://www.abc.net.au/>) under Radio National - *Latest programme news* is an index to all of the *Law Report* programmes and you can then print off transcripts of the relevant items. Details of how to purchase copies of broadcast tapes are also available.

Q I need a case: *Russell v Miller*; it is about Trade Practices.

A LBC Information Services has a book called the *Annotated Trade Practices Act* by R.V. Miller. (I suspect that this question is a bit apocryphal!)

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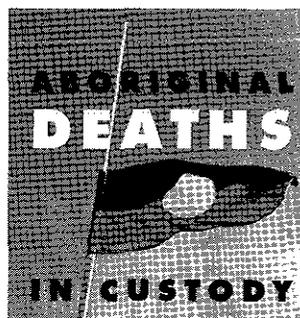
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