A well designed and executed intranet can be a powerful tool for knowledge sharing within a law firm. This information hub can allow easy access to electronic research resources, documents, communication about best research practices, training materials, and much more. It can drive attorneys and other firm staff to the library’s most authoritative electronic research materials and knowledge repositories, thereby allowing librarians to spend their time on other strategic and value-added projects. The following is an introduction to the role librarians are especially well suited to play in an intranet’s selection, design, content creation, and maintenance.
THE LIBRARY’S ROLE IN SELECTION AND DESIGN OF AN INTRANET

The threshold decision of whether a law firm utilizes a firm-wide intranet involves multiple administrative departments. Library staff can offer valuable input into a firm’s decision to create an intranet and assist in its design. Librarians, better than any other administrative group’s members, understand the research and business information needs of legal practice groups. They also understand how attorneys and staff utilize research tools to service clients. Librarians can provide support for the business case for an intranet, explaining how the ability to offer resources on an electronic platform can both increase timekeepers’ productivity and efficiency and free up librarians to provide additional, sophisticated services to a firm.

Being well versed in organizing and serving up information, librarians are well suited to design layout, analyze workflow, and select content for intranet sites. Further, many newer librarians have learned web design from classes taken while pursuing advanced degrees. Librarians are therefore ideal creators and curators of not only the library’s own intranet pages but also practice group and client pages.

A firm can build its own intranet by using existing in-house technology staff or by hiring temporary staff for this purpose. Alternatively, a firm can decide to purchase a product such as SharePoint. SharePoint is a web application platform developed by Microsoft and utilized primarily by medium-sized and larger firms. In the 2014 ILTA Legal Technology Survey, 44% of the responding law firms indicated they use SharePoint for their intranet and nearly 70% of firms with more than 150 attorneys have it.

Another option a firm can consider is using a consultant to assist with a portion of the intranet development project. Consultants can provide specific services such as designing a user interface or developing custom features or they can manage an overall intranet project and its deployment. The user experience and general design of an intranet are the foundations of a portal’s structure. It can be time consuming to finalize these items when focus groups and pilot groups are utilized for feedback. Often a third party, ideally with professional services industry experience, can coordinate meetings and summarize findings so an intranet project can move forward. Consultants can also pitch in if a firm needs help with a discrete piece of the project such as a custom feature or a specialized development.

WHO BUILDS AND DESIGNS AN INTRANET

CONSULTANTS

Acrowire
http://www.acrowire.com

http://www.incworx.com/Pag-es/home.aspx

Atrion
http://www.atrion.net/what/ai/Pages/default.aspx

Magenic
http://magenic.com/Services

Avpoint
http://www.avpoint.com/services/

Neudesic
http://www.neudesic.com

BrightStarr
http://www.brightstarr.com/microsoft-sharepoint-solutions

Rackspace
http://sharepoint.rackspace.com/consulting-services

Codesigned
http://www.codesigned.com/

Tallan
http://www.tallan.com/solutions/portals

eSentio
http://www.esentio.com

ThreeWill
http://www.threewill.com

Incworx
http://www.incworx.com/Pag-es/home.aspx

Atrion
http://www.atrion.net/what/ai/Pages/default.aspx

Magenic
http://magenic.com/Services

Neudesic
http://www.neudesic.com

Rackspace
http://sharepoint.rackspace.com/consulting-services

Tallan
http://www.tallan.com/solutions/portals

eSentio
http://www.esentio.com

ThreeWill
http://www.threewill.com
MAKING THE CASE TO MANAGEMENT FOR AN INTRANET

An information professional will need to provide a rationale for devoting staff time and resources to creating intranet pages. The following are some key points that can assist librarians in making the case for an intranet to firm management:

1. Having a centralized intranet benefits all law firm employees by putting access to resources directly in their hands on a 24/7/365 basis. An intranet also provides for mobile, anywhere, and anytime access and increases timekeepers’ efficiencies.

2. By providing easy and direct access to resources, librarians will have more time to work on value-added projects. This is especially helpful as the size of departments continues to decline and everyone is forced to do more work with fewer staff members.

3. By creating a resource listing or directory on an intranet, law librarians push their users to the most authoritative and applicable resources. Law firms spend quite a lot on subscription databases and other services, so a categorized, practice-focused directory can help ensure that the right information gets in the right hands at the right time.

4. Getting buy-in from firm leaders on what can help them practice or manage more efficiently and effectively will give librarians another opportunity to prove value within the organization. Curated library pages for each practice or administration group promote efficiency by showcasing the most relevant resources.

5. Including quotes or feedback received on what people like or dislike about any existing intranet offerings supports the case for continuing or changing those practices. Highlighting the demand for centralized, organized, and useful pages will also support the library’s involvement in any project.

6. Offering cohesion and consistency within an organization by having one place to turn for assistance, whether it is regarding billing, IDs/passwords, or types of research skills available, leads to a more informed and productive law firm. It also provides for a bird’s-eye-view of the firm or organization, especially if enterprise search is utilized. Curating intranet content or using it as a way to collect information can lead to tacit knowledge being available to a wider audience and allows librarians to share information across all the firm’s offices.

7. Emphasizing that software developers and programmers are not needed to create web parts, lists, and content within an intranet bolsters the case for librarians’ involvement as designers and content curators. For tech-savvy individuals, much of the functionality within a web design program will be easy to grasp and learn in a short amount of time. It is possible that you already have library staff members willing and able to help with any intranet project.
THE LIBRARY’S ROLE IN CONTENT CREATION

Librarians can quickly learn to create content in a web design program, especially if one of the team members has an MIS degree or other experience in web development.

The library should have an individual or team dedicated to developing and maintaining the library’s intranet content. Librarians can quickly learn to create content in a web design program, especially if one of the team members has an MIS degree or other experience in web development. However, a background in web design is not needed to create intranet features and content. Even absent web design experience, it is relatively easy to learn to create webparts/lists and maintain content within a program such as SharePoint.

Microsoft itself offers online SharePoint courses, videos, and tutorials. It and other organizations also offer more advanced training opportunities:

- Critical Path
- Microsoft Virtual Academy:
  http://www.microsoftvirtualacademy.com/product-training/sharepoint
- New Horizons:
- Premier Point:
  http://premierpointsolutions.com/Pages/default.aspx

WHAT TO INCLUDE IN THE LIBRARY’S PORTION OF THE INTRANET

Library intranet pages available to the entire firm should guide attorneys, paralegals, and other staff to the most authoritative, cost-effective research resources. They should contain general information about the library, its staff, and best contact methods. They should show users both how to obtain research assistance and how to conduct research without assistance. The library can also have inward-facing intranet pages with content for team collaborations regarding project management, a wiki, statistics, and competitive intelligence.

General Library Information

- Staff list with locations and contact information, possibly with areas of expertise
- FAQs with contact info (who to call for passwords, routing lists, acquisitions, etc.)
- Online research request form
- Policies/procedures/forms

| Library catalog |
| Training guides (both vendor and firm specific), videos, calendar, etc. |
| Copyright compliance guidelines |
| Case studies or testimonial pages |
| Suggestion box |
Research and Practice Information

- **Practice Area Content**
  - Firm-wide and practice group specific tools, resources, and forms
- **Current Awareness**
  - News and alerts delivered by an RSS feed or Google alert
- **Monitoring and Tracking**
  - New case filings, legislation, etc.

Content for Internal Library Use

- **Project Management**
  - streamline daily work processes with consistency and uniformity with a single point of access
  - monitor staff progress
  - obtain a strategic view across departments or teams
  - create project specific sites, e.g., a library management system upgrade to track documentation, milestones, contacts, calendar dates, etc.
  - access alerting functionality for tasking of projects with reminders to complete deadlines
- **Collaboration**
  - wiki for knowledge sharing, e.g., expertise, vendor contacts, new databases, helpful hints and links, lessons learned, canned responses to requests
  - document repository for forms/templates to share across teams and geographic locations
- **Statistics: Reporting and Analysis**
  - capture department trends by office, practice, etc.
  - get access to granular tracking and searching with easy-to-generate charts
- **Competitive Intelligence**
  - capture geographic and industry trends; track new business and ROI

SHAREPOINT PARTS/WEBPARTS AND HOW THEY CAN BE UTILIZED

- List for research projects
- List of collection development projects
- List of interlibrary loans
- List to monitor cases, news, legislation, etc.
- Teamsite documentation of large projects
- Wiki for department procedure manual
- Blog for breaking news and alert resources
HOW TO DELIVER CONTENT WITHOUT A FIRMWIDE INTRANET

A smaller firm without the financial resources to purchase an enterprise license to a web design product still has options available to it for offering content to attorneys, facilitating internal team communications, and managing subscription purchases.

For a library’s purposes, an integrated library system (ILS) such as EOS.Web Legal and SydneyPLUS Lucidea can perform many of the tasks of SharePoint, in addition to complementing it. Librarians can create dynamic research guides and link to their entries in the firm’s document management system through an online public access catalog record. For example, instead of providing links to BNA products in an intranet, a librarian can insert them into a catalog record; a firmwide Pacer username and password that would have been posted on a litigation group portal page can instead be added to a Pacer catalog record, along with Pacer pricing information.

In choosing an ILS, librarians should consider not just the current features of the product they evaluate, but its track record of customer support, its future vision, and its hidden costs. It is also helpful to collaborate with resident technology staff for their feedback on server/network configurations, potential data integrations, and other firm wide implications.

It is important to remember that ongoing upkeep is required for your portal. Links need to be maintained to ensure that resources can be accessed without issue. Any firm-wide passwords or access instructions should routinely be checked for accuracy. If your portal has an announcements or news section, highlight new content, functionality, or resources here. By continuing to offer fresh and accurate information, you will keep users coming back for more.

YOU THINK YOU’RE DONE (THOUGH YOU NEVER REALLY ARE) – NOW WHAT?

After you have successfully developed, implemented, and rolled out your intranet, it is crucial that you continue to promote your new intranet and educate your users. You do not want for there to be a lull in interest regarding your newly created intranet; therefore, there are a few things you can do to keep your users engaged and interested.

1. Treat the intranet as a work in progress. Keep staff lists and resource links current.

2. Send targeted emails to certain users, such as practice groups or administrative groups.

3. Solicit invitations to practice group meetings and highlight relevant content during them.

4. Have news items about the library on the firm’s general intranet pages.

5. Include a column in the firm’s internal newsletter with updates or highlights about new resources.

6. Incorporate an intranet overview into your orientation for new hires and summer associates so all new employees are aware of resources available to them upon joining the firm.

7. Embrace teachable moments. If an attorney asks for a document or how to access a resource, point them to where it can be found on the intranet. Send a link to the appropriate page in your reply e-mail.
**CONCLUSION**

A law firm intranet can increase productivity and efficiencies of a firm’s attorneys, paralegals, librarians, and other staff members by providing information on a constant basis and improving communications across a firm. As information professionals with the most knowledge of legal research tools and how they are used, law librarians can greatly benefit their organizations by playing a significant role in an intranet’s implementation, content development, and subsequent maintenance.

**EXTRANETS**

Extranets are beyond the scope of this publication but merit a brief reference because the role librarians can play in their creation is analogous to creating intranet web parts, lists, and content. Extranets can provide a valuable opportunity for a firm to engage in ongoing communications with clients regarding litigation or transactions. The oversight of creation and development of client extranets varies from firm to firm. Often paralegals and junior associates are tasked with organizing and creating content, but library professionals may be involved as well. Librarians have a number of skill sets that make them ideally suited to contribute in a number of ways. They can organize web parts or content, create a foldering structure for documents, or compile news regarding legal issues, industry trends, etc., for dashboards.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- **Conferences**
  - AllM Conference
    - www.allmconference.com
  - Critical Path Training
    - www.criticalpathtraining.com
  - ILTA Annual Conference
    - http://www.iltacon.org
  - ILTA Annual SharePoint Symposium:
    - http://sharepoint.iltanet.org
  - MindSharp
    - www.mindsharp.com

- **Websites & Blogs**
  - Librarian Living in a SharePoint World
    - http://blog.splibrarian.com
  - SharePoint-Videos.com
    - Created and maintained by one of the leaders in “No-Code” development. Both free and subscription-based content.
    - www.sharepoint-videos.com

- **Books**
  - NothingButSharePoint
    - Well known developer-to-developer resources on the Web.
    - www.nothingbutsharepoint.com
  - Microsoft SharePoint Website
    - Introductory information and links to resources for additional learning.
    - http://sharepoint.microsoft.com
  - Professional SharePoint 2010 Branding and User Interface Design
    - A useful book of tips.
    - http://lccn.loc.gov/2010932458
  - SharePoint 2013 Demos
    - Microsoft-provided demos.
  - SharePoint in the Cloud = Office 365
    - Information about SharePoint in the cloud.
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Law Firm Library
Intranets

PLLIP
Private Law Librarians &
Information Professionals SIS
http://www.aallnet.org/sections/pllip

To access additional resource guides, please visit
https://pllresourceguides.wordpress.com/guides

American Association of
Law Libraries