Managing a law firm means worrying about everything — from the attorneys and their work, to profitability and expansion. Balancing all of these responsibilities isn’t easy.

Information is power in today’s changing legal environment. Hiring a law librarian to find and manage legal information is an important way for a firm to increase its competitive advantage.

Why and when does a firm need a professional librarian? Can’t a clerical employee keep information resources organized? The fact is, a professional law librarian’s skills go far beyond ordering materials and cataloging information. A law librarian is a firm’s information specialist — someone who puts the power of information to work for the firm and its clients.

Not only do professional law librarians conduct billable research on legal and non-legal topics, they may also check for conflicts or manage records. They understand information technology and have developed the skills to support marketing and new business development.

Whether you’re thinking of hiring your firm’s first librarian or replacing an already integral member of your staff, this Resource Guide will help you to:

- assess your firm’s needs and the appropriate role for a law librarian;
- determine the qualifications and skills best suited for the position;
- create a suitable compensation package to attract the best candidates;
- identify and advertise for candidates;
- ask the right questions during the interview; and
- maximize your investment by using all of the skills a professional librarian offers;
The decision

Hiring a Professional Librarian

It is important that everyone in the firm understand the significant difference between a professional law librarian and a clerical library assistant. Managing partners, in particular, must appreciate and support a new law librarian position and the opportunity it presents. Planning for the position well in advance helps build this support. Some other suggestions:

- Consider hiring a professional law librarian on a part-time or consulting basis first, then budget for a full-time salary a year or more in advance.
- Consider adding a law librarian as part of the firm’s long-range strategic plan — to help the firm adapt to a new computer system, or build a new practice area.
- Develop an appropriate job title, position description and salary requirements for review by firm management. For sample law librarian standards and job descriptions, visit: http://www.aallnet.org/products/pub_toolkit.html.
- Clarify who the librarian will report to, who will approve library activities, and what changes will be required in the firm’s practices once a librarian is added.

Creating the benefit

Once management decides to hire a professional librarian, it is important to make the most of the opportunity by using the law librarian’s skills most effectively. Some ways to ensure the greatest benefit:

- Before the librarian joins the firm, have firm leadership agree on expectations of the librarian and of attorneys working with him or her.
- Set realistic goals for the librarian to achieve, including how much, if any, time should be billed toward client research projects.
- Provide the librarian with the necessary tools to attain the goals, including necessary support personnel.
- Clearly communicate expectations and goals, and regularly evaluate progress.
- Discuss and communicate all of these issues with firm partners and managers before, during and after the law librarian starts in the new position.
Finding the right librarian begins with finding the right place to advertise the position. Depending on the scope of the search, you may consider advertising through:

- American Association of Law Libraries (312-939-4764) Jobline (http://www.aallnet.org ), AALL Telephone Career Hotline (312-939-7877);
- local AALL Chapters, many of which also have placement services (list available by fax-on-demand (908/544-5901) or at http://www.aallnet.org/chapters); and
- local legal newspapers. Some firms also have success working through recruiting firms specializing in library or records positions.

But when is the right time to hire a librarian, how can a firm fully benefit from the librarian’s expertise, or should an existing librarian’s role be expanded?

Deciding to add a librarian to the team requires a close look at the firm’s needs -- operations, culture, client base and long-term goals all should be considered. Use the Needs Assessment Checklist to see how your firm works.

As a rule, if most information-related functions are being handled by associates or partners, the firm could improve profitability and benefit from a law librarian’s expertise. If your firm’s “librarian” is not involved in these activities, perhaps he or she should be. Some other decision-making guidelines:

- Don’t evaluate your needs strictly based on the firm’s size, but focus on the value that could be added by someone with professional research and management skills. Check with attorneys who have worked with law librarians to learn what value they received.
- Consider quantifying the hours (and possible dollars) now being spent on information-related work.
- Talk with independent law librarians, publisher representatives or colleagues in other firms to find out how others handle their libraries.
- Contact the American Association of Law Libraries, http://www.aallnet.org, to identify a local contact who can help explore the firm’s options.

The Budget

Be sure to plan for the following elements when hiring a law librarian:

- Consulting services to develop/evaluate the position
- Advertising for candidates
- Necessary testing, medical and other new employee costs
- Salary and bonuses commensurate with experience
- Vacation
- Health, life and disability insurance
- Continuing education time off and expenses
- Retirement fund
- Profit-sharing
- Administrative staff person (at least 1/2-time person)

The Budget

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Assessment

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Keeping pace with changing legal information requires frequent, careful attention to the resources that best support a firm’s practice. The law librarian, and/or the law firm manager, must carefully analyze what’s happening inside and outside the firm, determine attorneys’ information needs and ensure the librarian’s skills are being fully utilized. When a law librarian leaves the firm, it’s a perfect time to reevaluate the role, look at the firm’s future plans and revise the position as appropriate. Some steps to take before replacing a law librarian:

1) Survey library users to gauge what support they need and what changes, if any, should be made so the library can provide it.

2) Compare the firm’s use of a librarian with that of competitors of similar size and practice area.

3) Consider attorneys’ expectations of the law librarian — are they being met, and if not, why not? Are the expectations reasonable? Are there sufficient financial and personnel resources to support the demands on the library?

4) Look at how the librarian’s skills are being utilized. What information services can the firm use, and does the librarian have the skills and resources to provide them? Could the librarian be responsible for other information-related tasks? Does the firm’s culture encourage the librarian’s participation, or might attorneys need to find ways to better utilize the librarian’s expertise?
The fact is, many professional law librarians have skills that not only are valuable in the library, but can directly impact the firm’s bottom line. Consider the following possible ways a law librarian can benefit the firm and its clients:

- **$\$ = directly billable to client**
- **$ = has significant impact on the firm’s “bottom-line”**

### Research Services:
- Customized reference services on law-related topics ($$)
- Non-legal research including business and industry background for attorneys and clients ($$)
- Investigative research to locate witnesses and expert witnesses, skip-tracing ($$)
- Assist attorneys and paralegals with legal research using print and electronic sources ($)
- Access outside collections and databases appropriate for the firm’s needs and budget ($)
- Make informed decisions about information providers ($) 

### Marketing
- Help develop/conduct business seminars on behalf of the firm ($)  
- Investigative research to locate background information on potential or target clients ($) 

### Budgetary
- Select, supervise, evaluate and develop library personnel ($)  
- Evaluate collections ($) 
- Evaluate the quality, authenticity and accuracy of print and electronic resources, and integrate them to the needs of the firm ($)  
- Monitor changes in specific legal fields, and the resources and vendors that address them  
- Select and purchase software and hardware necessary to access electronic information ($)  
- Analyze needs, measure and evaluate the quality of firm library services 
- Develop collections and policies appropriate to the firm’s needs and budget ($)  

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### Qualifications - Skills

### Who Qualifies and Why?

Knowing the firm’s needs, expectations and job description sets the stage for hiring a law librarian. To find the right person, you must next identify the qualifications needed to do the job. You’ll find guidance for this in AALL’s Core Competencies for Law Librarians, [http://www.aallnet.org/sis/plsis/Toolkit/ToolkitCoreCompetencies.pdf](http://www.aallnet.org/sis/plsis/Toolkit/ToolkitCoreCompetencies.pdf) or [http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp](http://www.aallnet.org/prodev/competencies.asp). The right person will have a combination of academic credentials, career experience and personality traits that suit the organization.

### Academic Qualifications

**MLS: Masters of Library Science**

A professional librarian will have a graduate degree in library or information science, which covers library procedures and all aspects of obtaining, organizing, storing and accessing information in various formats. Some programs title their degrees differently, using names such as Masters of Science in Information Services (MSIS) or Masters of Library and Information Sciences (MLIS). Masters coursework includes helping patrons obtain desired information (research) and facilitating access by cataloging and classifying information, and compiling and organizing metadata (technical services).

Note: Accreditation by the American Library Association indicates that a graduate program provides comprehensive, quality instruction that meets national standards. Candidates with degrees from accredited institutions should have the fundamental skills required for any library position. For a complete list of accredited library schools, call the American Library Association at 312-944-6780 or visit their Web site: [http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/accreditation/index.cfm](http://www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/accreditation/index.cfm)
Hiring the first law librarian

Technology

Because librarians are also “information navigators,” most graduate programs today focus on technology’s role in storing and accessing information, or offer extensive coursework in understanding and utilizing the latest technology. If library candidates have not had exposure to the latest technologies in their academic careers, it is very important that they have had access in their professional careers.

Law-specific training

A number of graduate library programs offer additional law librarianship courses or concentrations, including joint MLS/JD degrees. These focus specifically on legal information, including basic and advanced legal reference, cataloging and classification of legal materials, etc.

Most experienced law librarians have enough legal knowledge to direct their patrons to the correct resources. Twenty-nine percent of all law librarians have JD degrees in addition to graduate library degrees, although the librarians’ code of ethics precludes them from practicing law or giving legal advice. Having a dual degree is a requirement for some academic law librarians, who teach legal research and may be law school professors in addition to their library responsibilities. Whether a dual degree is important in the law firm setting is an organizational decision that depends on the firm’s specific needs and attorney preferences.

Professional Experience

Professional law librarians have experience in legal research and subject specialties that they have acquired on the job — whether at law firms, corporate or public law libraries, or academic institutions. A candidate’s experience should be appropriate to the firm’s needs and the requirements of the position. For example:

- A firm’s first librarian, or a solo law librarian, should have at least two years’ law library experience, preferably in a law firm environment — the library can’t stop to adapt to someone’s learning curve.
- If legal research skills are important, hire someone who has specific experience in law librarianship (vs. a person with a MLS degree and no legal experience); experience may be more important than the degree in some settings.
- The law librarian should understand the information resources relating to the firm’s specialty practice area(s). The ideal candidate may bring significant subject specialty expertise from a previous job.
- Anyone in charge of a library, even if they work alone, should have the budget management experience necessary to handle the significant financial responsibility involved.

Remember that when hiring a law librarian, as with any profession, candidates at various levels offer different benefits and require varying support:

- Beginning librarians (0-2 years’ experience) will need time to learn the world of law and legal research and to build personnel, management and marketing skills
- Mid-level librarians (3-10 years’ experience) have experience in various areas, especially research, and can quickly provide value-added service to the organization.
- Advanced librarians (10+ years’ experience) typically supervise personnel, are conversant on technology and interact with fellow department managers. In addition to these administrative roles, they provide higher levels of research and training.

Personality – the firm and the candidate

Every firm has a personality – and it’s best to hire a candidate that fits comfortably into the company culture. People make a greater contribution if they feel encouraged and comfortable, so if your firm has a distinct style, make it known from the start.

Explain in interviews that it’s a “fast-paced environment;” or advertise for an “aggressive self-starter.” Describe the ideal candidate as someone who is politically savvy and willing to “do what it takes to get the job done.” Pose questions in the interviews that highlight the types of personalities at play in the firm and the possible situations they might encounter. Better yet, have the most demanding attorneys actually interview the top law librarian candidates and hire accordingly.

Compensation

The decision is made, the qualifications are decided, now how much is this going to cost and how can the firm achieve maximum benefit?

Salary

Any professional position requires salary commensurate with experience, and a law librarian’s salary should suit the job description and expectations for the position. When setting the salary range, be sure to consider the cost of attorneys’ time now spent on library matters, and recognize that much of that time will be available for billable projects once a professional librarian is hired. A library consultant or member of the local AALL Chapter might be helpful in clarifying an appropriate salary range for the job. (see footnote 2)

Benefits

Like any other professional, the law librarian should receive a competitive compensation package with paid vacation, retirement benefits, health insurance and other employee benefits such as bonuses. AALL’s 2009 Salary Survey found that as many as 84 % of law librarians receive some cash bonuses. Benefit levels depend on the law librarian’s responsibilities, educational background and experience, but it’s a good rule to provide professional librarians with benefits comparable to those of attorneys with the same number of years’ work experience.
Hiring the first law librarian

Continuing Education

Just as attorneys must stay abreast of changes in the law, librarians provide the most value if they are up-to-date in their field. Staying current in the field of legal information, especially as it relates to information technology, is critical to their effectiveness. Continuing education should be provided to all law firm librarians, so the firm can receive the following benefits:

- Well-trained staff members who know the latest information technology and keep their professional skills sharp;
- Increased access to institutions (local and national) that have information or contacts the firm may need;
- Experience with colleagues and firms in other jurisdictions that may provide insight for future client referrals;
- Previews and professional insights into the latest materials and electronic resources available, their quality and usefulness;
- Industry intelligence, obtained through networking, about other firms and how they are using information resources; and
- Increased exposure to information vendors, their products and staff, and opportunities to interact and discuss firm needs;

A law firm librarian should receive financial support to advance their skills through the following:

- Membership in the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL), devoted exclusively to the needs and interests of law libraries, which includes a professional monthly magazine, regional and national educational programs, opportunities for local Chapter networking and ongoing contact with more than 5,000 colleagues; also participation in the Private Law Library section of AALL;
- Attendance at the AALL annual meeting, a 5-day conference held each July, at which law librarians hear speakers at the cutting edge of technology and the law, view exhibits of the latest legal resources available, and network with colleagues from across the nation;
- Participation in regional and local conferences on law librarianship; and
- Participation at AALL teleconferences.

The interview

When interviewing for a professional librarian, remember the firm is hiring someone to manage a small business inside a larger one. Management should be well-informed about the responsibilities for which this individual will be accountable, and look for a person with the skills and experiences most valuable to the firm.
Hiring the first law librarian

To effectively evaluate a candidate, be sure to cover the following:

- What skill and experience do they have, particularly with similar clients or legal specialties?
- What are their prior experiences with budgeting, personnel, technology and space planning?
- What have they done to ensure continued professional development?
- How do they ensure that lawyers are not inundated with material, but have just what is useful?
- What do they like doing best? least?
- How have they had direct impact on winning client loyalty in prior positions?
- How do they work in a team environment?
- Which communications styles do they prefer? dislike?
- What are their likes and dislikes about working alone?
- What types of company cultures have they previously worked in? Were they compatible?

You also should:

- explain the firm, its culture and the expectations of the position;
- find out how the person would respond to scenarios likely to happen within the firm related to research, personnel, management, library, training and technology demands that might be part of the job. Be sure to highlight possible personalities, deadlines and other culture-specific situations that would characterize the firm’s library work;
- take each applicant for a tour of the firm and library, which provides a better perspective on the person, allowing more personal conversation and a chance to see what the person is like in a more casual setting; and
- check references and be sure candidates demonstrated the desired level of expertise and professionalism in prior positions.

Beware of:

- an applicant who doesn’t have questions other than what the benefits are; or
- a librarian who isn’t curious about how the firm operates its library.

And don’t forget the “Gut check”—honestly answer the following questions about the candidates:

- Which individual will best fit the firm’s culture?
- Which person will have the best chance of being treated as a professional by the lawyers?
- Whose personality style best matches the firm’s?
- Which person has the aggressiveness and leadership skills critical for a senior management position?
Maximizing your investment

Staff Support
Using personnel resources effectively is the key to profitability in any law firm. As information experts, law librarians are generally recognized as the firm’s best researchers for online and manual legal research, as well as non-legal business research. Because most librarians bill at a lower rate than attorneys, and know how to find the right information quickly and cost effectively, clients are often very willing to pay for librarians to handle their research projects.

At the same time, many of the non-billable tasks required to run a library — such as reshelving books, processing new volumes, handling mail and invoices — can be assumed by an administrative staff member, thereby freeing up the librarian’s time for client-billable projects. Some strategies for making the most of your librarian’s talents:

- Set goals for the librarian’s client-billable time and evaluate them regularly.
- Promote the librarian’s specialized information knowledge and encourage attorneys to use it.
- Encourage the librarian to market his/her skills within the firm.
- Involve the librarian in management briefings and litigation strategy sessions to guarantee the firm’s best information expertise is contributed in all areas.
- Delegate non-billable library tasks to an administrative assistant or library clerk under the direction of the law librarian.

Ensuring success
Once a law librarian is hired, his or her success depends on clear direction and support from firm management that demonstrates the positive impact expected in the firm. This essential support is evident in:

- salary and position title appropriate to the expertise required for the librarian position;
- respectful attitudes from management and attorneys reflecting the professionalism of the position;
- appropriate office space for the law librarian;
- expectations for law librarians to be involved early-on, as integral parts of the client service team, so the firm consistently applies the best information resources; and
- law librarian participation in senior-level teams, including firm management, practice area, committee and departmental meetings.

We hope this guide proves to be a useful tool for law firm managers who want to harness the power of information for their organizations and clients. A law firm that invests in a professional law librarian can:

- find and efficiently manage the vast array of available information;
- seize the opportunities presented by information technology;
- gain the edge in a competitive marketplace;
- operate more profitably by effectively utilizing personnel resources; and
- provide exceptional service to clients.
For more information

For more information on law libraries and professional law librarians, contact the American Association of Law Libraries and look for subsequent AALL Resource Guides. 415-979-2619

Salary Information

A salary range is usually developed with reliable data from a variety of sources — including national salary figures and, ideally, those of comparable positions at local competitors. Salary surveys are often quite useful as a starting point for determining appropriate salary range for a law librarian. The most comprehensive and authoritative salary survey is the one conducted biennially by the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL). The survey contains:

- customized information unique to the needs of private law libraries;
- data for nine geographical regions and most large cities; and
- data based on level of experience and type of work.

The survey publication is available from AALL, (312) 939-4764, at a cost of $75 for members, $115 for non-members. Other surveys available include those from:

- Association of Legal Administrators;
- Special Library Association; and
- Altman Weil Pensa.

Note: Be sure that any survey instrument you use clearly defines the terms it is based upon, and examine data critically to avoid misleading information. Vague language in some survey instruments leads to respondents including salary information for clerks or secretaries handling library tasks, rather than the true cost of an individual with a Masters Degree in Library Science and legal research experience.

Needs Assessment Checklist

Review the following questions to evaluate how your firm currently operates, noting which staff members (e.g., partners, associates, interns, paralegals, administrative staff) are involved with each task.

- Who explores new reference material media options?
- Who ensures the space used for housing research materials is maximized?
- How are critical research materials obtained when they are not in the firm’s collection?
- Who is responsible for purchasing research material?
- How does the firm minimize purchases of duplicate Material?
- How does the firm recycle internally created research material, DMS or intranet/portal?
- Who negotiates with library or information vendors?
- Who organizes the firm’s collection?
- Who is the firm’s expert in non-legal research sources?
- How does the firm gather client- or industry-specific information?
- How does the firm gather information about potential clients or niche markets?
- Who handles research required to develop firm responses to requests for proposals from potential clients?
- Who handles research necessary to support marketing efforts and new business presentations?

If the answer to most of these questions is that an associate or partner is charged with these tasks, the firm’s bottom line is being negatively impacted. Keep reading for further guidance on hiring and effectively utilizing a professional law librarian.

The Real World: Expanding a Law Librarian’s Role

The Legal Affairs department of Metlife in New York City upgraded its law librarian position in 1997 to prepare for an office move and create a new high-tech direction for the law library. Expanding the position meant reworking the job description and increasing the salary several grade levels. Today, besides managing research services and library resources for 200 attorneys, the law librarian oversees the department’s new records management program and supervises six support staff. Amy Comeau, the new Manager, Legal Information Resources, demonstrated her ability to handle a fast-paced environment when she interviewed with several attorneys as part of the recruitment process. Says V.P. of Administration Debbie Krauthiem:

“Technology is where the future is. To access all that’s available on the Internet now, you need a strong person who understands technology and keeps on top of what’s going on. Our goal was to bring in someone who would have ideas, be creative and understand what the lawyers need, and work with them as a respected peer. All I’ve heard is positive feedback.”

Contributors:

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Reference Librarian
Wachtell, Lipton, Rosen & Katz

Lynn Connor Merring
Library Manager
Stradling, Yocca, Carlson & Rauth

Patti Schminke
Law Librarian
Hunter, Maclean, Exley & Dunn
How to hire a Law librarian

For more information visit the Private Law Libraries Special Interest Section web site
http://www.aallnet.org/sis/pllsis/