

# Information Anxiety: Librarians Lend Lawyers a Hand

by C. Taylor Fitchett

Even this law librarian sometimes yearns for simpler days when legal research could be done in a collection of leather-bound books in a discrete location within a law school or a law firm. Frances Farmer, my predecessor at the University of Virginia law library, would not recognize her library today. A couple of decades ago, when she was librarian, there was no LexisNexis or Westlaw and no Internet—just books that numbered in the thousands rather than the hundreds of thousands. Independent publishers of U.S. legal materials thrived, and most of them actually resided in the United States. Document delivery took weeks instead of minutes, but when a document arrived you knew its point of origin and understood whether or not what you had in hand was authentic. When the clerk of court grudgingly meted out records at a dollar a page up-front, you were confident upon leaving the office that you had obtained most of the relevant materials you would need to proceed with your research. Today, with so much in publication and so many ways of obtaining it, a researcher is challenged to identify all that might be considered pertinent to the case at hand. Once identified, determining the best format for access and delivery is equally challenging.

Librarians are more at home in this information society than many. But we, too, are subject to the anxiety that comes with rapid change. We recognize that information technology brings with its advances a fair amount of confusion. In response to the complexities of doing legal research in today's highly diverse, often chaotic, information environment, my colleagues in law librarianship have assumed an active instructional role within the legal community. As we assist legal researchers, we share with them search techniques and point them in the direction of preferred sources. This includes leading them to Internet sites that are difficult to locate due to poor indexing or inadequate search engines. If you are sometimes unable to locate information that you know is on the Web, or if what you locate after all your effort is a dead link, you are not alone in your frustration. Most people are stumped if a simple *Google* search fails to pull up their document. A growing number of questions handled by law librarians concern the effective approach to electronic research.

Our participation in this issue of *Virginia Lawyer* is an opportunity for law librarians to offer assistance in understanding the dynamic information environment. I have invited authors to write in areas that I believe will be of interest to attorneys based on the questions that often arise in my discussions with them. In this issue, four librarians from academia—one from a law firm and one who works in legal publishing—pool their expertise to bring you a variety of topics that will enhance your access to and control of legal information.

Thanks to the authors for their contributions and to Kent Olson and Lyn Warmath for their editorial review.



I hope you benefit from this effort on the part of Virginia's law librarians. As the chair of the Publications Committee of the Virginia Association of Law Libraries, I invite you to send suggestions for future article topics to me at [tf2u@virginia.edu](mailto:tf2u@virginia.edu).

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