On the Clock: Information Seeking Behavior of Lawyers in a Time-Constrained Environment

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Purpose of the Study:

To understand the information seeking patterns of attorneys in a legal information environment. A working model proposed by Chancellor (2011) will be explored to determine whether time constraint is a factor in how attorneys access and obtain legal information.
Importance of the Study:

- Improve the methods law librarians and other information professionals use in providing legal reference services

- Changing needs of 21st Century library users

- Impact of Technology
Lawyers as a User Group

• Information behavior of lawyers starts from the onset of their education in law school.

• Lawyers are consultants, judges, law librarians, teachers, etc.

• They have various practice areas:
  Business Law
  Litigation
  Trial…
Lawyers as a User Group (cont’d)

• Lawyers do not frequently use law libraries

• Legal research only comprises a small part of their actual information behavior

• Law is a process of construction and thus influences the way in which lawyers seek and use information
“Information workers consider information seeking as a necessity but preliminary activity, to the more significant endeavor of using information for constructing new knowledge.

– Kuhlthau and Tama (2001)
Information Seeking Research

• Started in 1940s with the work of scientists

• Studies in information studies about experts in technical fields like engineering

• Professionals can better help users with their information needs
Related Literature

- Modeling the Information Seeking of Professionals: A General Model Derived from Research on Engineers, Health Care Professionals, and Lawyers (Leckie, et. al.)
- ‘Just–For–Me’ Services during the ISP (Kuhlthau & Tama, 2001)
- Information Sources used by lawyers (Wilkinson, 2001)
- Legal information-seeking using digital libraries (Makri, Blandford & Cox, 2007)
- Legal Information Systems (Komlodi, 2003)
The Leckie et al. Model

A model of the information seeking of professional

- **Work Roles**
- **Tasks**
- **Characteristics of Information Needs**
  - **Sources of Information**
  - **Awareness of Information**

**Outcomes**
Methodology

- Survey – 132 Responses
- 18 Questions
- AALL Listserv (LawLib) and the LLSDC
- Interviews – (10 so far)
Research Questions

• What is the information seeking behavior of lawyers?

• What factors are involved when lawyers seek information?

• How does time factor in the legal information-seeking process?
Gender

- Female: 23%
- Male: 77%
Age

- 26-35: 30
- 36-45: 12
- 46-55: 24
- Over 55: 33
Educational Background

- MLIS: 61
- JD: 27
- Other Grad.: 9
- None: 3
Length of Time as Librarian?

- < 2 years: 5
- 2-5 years: 9
- 5-10 years: 22
- > 10 years: 65
Type of Law Library Work?

- Law Firm: 57
- Law School: 20
- Govt: 13
- Court: 4
- Other: 7
Years in Current Position?

- < 1 year: 11
- 1-3 years: 15
- > 5 years: 33
- > 10 years: 30
How Many Attorneys at Firm?

- 7 attorneys
- 93 attorneys
- 20-50 attorneys
- > 50 attorneys
Hours p/Week Conducting Reference?

- 54% None
- 19% 1-5 hours
- 24% 5-10 hours
- 3% 10-25 hours
Primary Library Users

- Attorneys: 70
- Faculty: 4
- Judges: 3
- Public: 6
- Other: 4
- Students: 13
Type of Reference Requests?

- 46 Ready Ref.
- 54 Research
How Are Reference Requests Received?

- Email
- Intranet
- In Person
- Telephone
When Do Users Prefer Information?

- 30 mins.: 33
- 1 hour: 25
- 2-5 hours: 12
- > 5 hours: 31
Is Time a Factor When Providing Reference Services?

- Yes
- No
Where is Time Most a Factor?

- Academic
- Agency
- Court
- Law Firm (highest)
- Public
Interview Questions for Participants

• Demographic
• How do you use Information?
• What are typical sources used? What are less–commonly used sources?
• Is time a factor when looking for/accessing information?
• What is the most difficult part of finding information?
• What do you do when you cannot find the information you need?
Preliminary Findings

• Time is a factor when providing reference services in most law library environments
• Technology is a key factor in how lawyers access information expediently
• Respondents opined that technologies made the information seeking and gathering process easier for them
Implications for Practice:

• Lawyers have very active information behavior

• Understanding the information seeking behavior patterns of lawyers would be valuable to librarians and beneficial to users

• Information professionals would be informed that time is a critical factor in helping law practitioners access information, and this can have a significant impact on how they perform reference services.
Thank You!

Comments & Questions