

PUBLISHERS LIAISON COLUMN

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In this issue we have letters from Nicholas Pengelley on the recent meeting with LEXIS/NEXIS, and Meredith McBratney representing the South Australian Law Librarians, seeking your views on the usefulness of a CD-ROM of South Australian legislation

Included, for information, is a list of the State representatives on the National Publishers Liaison Committee. They are your first port of call if there are issues concerning publishers or products which you would like addressed.

On quite another issue, while browsing *Online Currents* Vol 11(3) April 1996, I read some surprising comments about the possible liability of librarians in regard to Internet connections they make available in their libraries. There are two significant events which are occurring in the next few weeks which will make clearer the whole issue of Internet services. On 30 June the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) will be releasing a detailed report into online services including the net. The ABA has been engaged in preparing this report since last August and has received over 250 submissions from all parts of the industry and the community.

Further on 11 July the Standing Committee of Attorneys General will be meeting in Sydney to decide upon the offence provisions which will govern the transmission of objectionable material over the Internet. The NSW Attorney, Mr Shaw QC, has already announced that NSW will be legislating to keep objectionable material off the net. The meeting on 11 July of the State and Federal Attorneys will give a very clear indication of the legislative framework which will govern transmission over the net. Perhaps we should wait to see what legislative scheme is

proposed before implementing extreme preventative measures

I hope to be able to provide a much more detailed analysis of the legislation and its implications in the next issue.

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5th June 1996

Dear Ms Millgate,

Yesterday representatives of CAUL, CALD and CONZUL met in Sydney with representatives of LEXIS/NEXIS and Butterworths. I represented Australian and New Zealand university law librarians as well as Monash University Library.

This was a follow-up to an earlier meeting in April at ANU of representatives of university librarians and law deans with a LEXIS/NEXIS executive. At that meeting we discussed the problems caused by the major escalation in the costs of the database to educational institutions from 1 April this year, and put forward several proposals about charging and access to LEXIS/NEXIS.

Educational institutions have long had greatly discounted access to LEXIS/NEXIS and we were naturally very disappointed with the significant price increases. Increases of, on average several hundred percent to maintain the sort of access that we had previously. The old rates could not be maintained, according to LEXIS/NEXIS, as they were resulting in a loss to the company and, in many cases, no return to those who supply the individual files to LEXIS/NEXIS. The company acknowledged that the introduction of the new charges should have been handled much better. In particular there should have been much more warning and certainly consultation with the groups involved.

That said, we do appreciate the obvious commitment of LEXIS/NEXIS to now achieve the best possible solution for the parties involved - a commitment demonstrated by their willingness to fly senior executives from the US to Australia for a series of meetings. At a future point, the handling of academic accounts will be taken over by Butterworths and they have also signalled a strong commitment to improving access to LEXIS/NEXIS.

At yesterday's meeting LEXIS/NEXIS responded to the proposals we had put forward in Canberra and put forward some new options for our

consideration. Although there will be no return to the status quo ante there does appear to be a way forward to maintain reasonable access and down loading at an acceptable rate - if universities co-operate in a "consortium" arrangement in order to take advantages of group discounts and sharing of access ports.

I have drafted this letter on the plane returning to Melbourne and am not in a position to give further details at this point. By the time this letter appears in the Australian Law Librarian, that detail should have been finalised and circulated on the ANZ Law Librarians email discussion list. It is hoped that discussions will lead to establishment of an agreed position by all the constituencies involved at the ALTA Conference to be held in Adelaide in July and that a reply can be made to LEXIS/NEXIS as soon as possible thereafter.

I look forward to reporting positive progress on these discussions in a further letter.

Yours sincerely,

Nicholas Pengeley

Law Librarian

Convenor, ALTA Law Librarians Group

Dear Ms Millgate

Recently a small group of South Australian Law Librarians met with the Assistant Parliamentary Counsel to discuss the status of South Australian legislation. We have a very good reprint service and a very good fortnightly index to keep us up-to-date with recent changes to legislation, both in printed format, but have been waiting for an acceptable electronic format.

Parliamentary Counsel have been trying to work out the best format to produce this legislation and came up with the idea of multiple floppy discs and a searching system such as ISYS to be the answer. They are disappointed that to date they have very few subscribers to this service. The next step they had in mind was to put their legislation online, either through the Internet or

through SCALE but they have technical difficulties they have to sort through to get this into practice. Their concerns were that the legislation must be current, it must be as inexpensive as possible for users and the cost of production must be within their means bearing in mind the small market they believe they have. While they sort things out we all wait.

At the meeting we addressed the issues they felt were important. The problem of currency is one that all of us who work with databases make allowances for whatever the jurisdiction - the fact that a service is online does not mean it will necessarily be more up-to-date, it just means it may be easier for publishers to keep it so. We discussed the cost of CD-ROM versus online and it was agreed that despite the high price for CD-ROMs there is a hidden cost of online services which pushes up the cost of access. The other problems that they have been grappling with is the practical problem of producing the discs themselves.

The result of the meeting was positive in that we felt we still had open lines of communication and we each understood better the frustrations of the other. While most of us felt that the online access may be a good goal for the future the real issue was that we wanted it now. In general we felt that CD-ROM is a good format for the present which does not depend on the vagaries of the communication system. It was suggested that while they work out the problems of their online delivery it would be good to let commercial publishers produce our legislation in the CD-ROM format immediately.

A decision on this is not something that Parliamentary Counsel can set in motion so the Assistant Parliamentary Counsel suggested that we represent the wishes of our group as a whole to our Attorney-General. As the publishers liaison representative for SA, I am interested in hearing from other people who may be potential users of SA legislation on CD-ROM, as I believe the

market for SA legislation interstate may be greater than they imagine. Any weight we can lend to our argument would be appreciated. I can be contacted through the Internet at meadelib@minters.com.au or on Ph: (08) 233 5534.

Yours faithfully

Meredith McBratney
Minter Ellison Baker O'Loughlin

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