The Library, the Desktop and the Library Technology Plan

Robyn Boydell
Librarian,
Allen, Allen and Hemsley

Writing a library technology plan these days is not simple There are so many options available from which to choose and technology is changing so quickly that it is almost impossible to predict what will happen over a twelve-month period, let alone 3 to 5 years My advice is, plan the change over well, don't rush in, consider all the options and then create an open ended system that is able to be refined as the technology changes Don't lock yourselves into systems which might have one brilliant innovative feature but do not conform to industry trends Find out what the mainstream is doing. Find out what has worked or is working for others Find out what your users' needs and expectations are. Find out what your budget is and then work within that to deliver the systems that best suit your needs

INTRODUCTION

This paper is a practical case study of writing a technology plan It is based on the experiences which Allen Allen & Hemsley ('Allens') are undergoing as they embark on a major overhaul of their computer technology It has become known as the IT strategy, and that is how it will be referred to in this paper. The library has been involved from the start in ensuring that there has been input, where needed, in the areas of information and legal research. This paper is not about writing a technology plan for a new library system. It is a few ideas and experiences put forward to help people when they are facing the dreaded future. It is also about the library's role in the re-engineering of the desk tops of the lawyers at Allens and providing them with first class information solutions

Allens is part of a Group known as the Allens Arthur Robinson Group ('the Group'), formerly the Australian Legal Group, which consists of 3 corporate and commercial law firms located in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide with branches in Brisbane, Perth, Canberra, Gold Coast, Port Moresby, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Bangkok, Singapore and affiliates in Indonesia and Japan The firms and branches are all involved in the IT strategy except for Finlaysons in Adelaide which has remained autonomous.

Strategic planning is "about managing It is about defining the business, developing an operating plan and managing the change process"[1] I would add that it also involves understanding the options and partnerships involved in this process. The first partnership was formed between Allens and another of the major players in the Group, Arthur Robinson & Hedderwicks ('ARH').

An analysis was undertaken, which involved a review of the business objectives, goals and key processes of the group and the individual firms Both major firms then realised that if

---

[1]   Kent. Philip G   Strategic planning: a theoretical overview' in Bridgland. Angela & Helen Hayes (eds) *Charting the future strategic planning in the Australasian library information industry*, Centre for Information Studies. Charles Sturt University, 1996 at p 4

they were to keep their position in the market place, they had to upgrade to cutting edge technology. Not only that, their clients, staff and prospective staff were demanding it.

DEVELOPING AN OPERATING PLAN

An external consultant was chosen to develop a document describing the IT needs of the Group. The purpose was to look at needs, the big picture, rather than a shopping list of hardware and software.

Various methods of gathering information for a needs assessment were used at different levels.

An important element in the development of this part of the strategy was to understand the effectiveness of the computing resources and support that was being provided at that time and the capability of the personnel in using computer tools and information technology.

A questionnaire, which consisted of three major sections, was disseminated to all staff.

It asked for information regarding how computers were being used for tasks. This included not only the software used, but also the level of comfort or expertise in using the computer resources available. A number of attributes, which were important to the quality of the computer support received, were described. From each attribute the consultants wanted to determine the extent to which needs were being met.

Another element in the project was the establishment of the Group's business objectives and the associated business processes that are required to achieve and support these objectives

Workshops were held with selected members of practice groups and were also attended by interested parties – e.g. library managers

Objectives of the workshops were to:

- develop an inventory of the major processes within and across departments;
- assess the "health" of each process from an efficiency and effectiveness perspective;
- identify problems and issues pertaining to each process;
- establish the current level and potential level of information technology support that is or could be applied to each process; and
- develop a list of improvement opportunities for each person

Another important part of the IT strategy review was to assess how well information technology supported current business operations and how this support could be improved. To obtain this information, interviews were held with directors in each support department

The information gathered by the consulting firm was then collated into a strategy document with a range of objectives translated into discreet projects e.g. branch offices, voice communication etc. Key priorities were then decided, an implementation schedule drafted and the budget finalised

Other aspects of the general strategy consisted of a comparative study of other law firms' practices

The main aim at this point was to set up the architecture for a new system, which would be open-ended enough to cope with a range of specifications in the future.

The final report was submitted and the following recommendations made:

- replace the existing office systems in all offices with a new standardised structure based on networked PCs and Microsoft Office software;
- secure communication and document exchange with clients utilising the Internet and other communications networks;
- development of a range of databases, bulletin boards and groupware applications based on Internet technologies to increase both the range of information available and the degree of interaction between system users;
- access to networked CD-ROM based research material from the desktop; and
- standardisation of IT architecture across all ARH and Allens offices to facilitate inter-office and inter-firm collaboration.

"Implementation of the programme is expected to increase the firm's ability to provide consistently high service levels to its clients whilst increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of the firm's internal processes" (Managing Partner in memo dated 2/6/98)

The next step in the process of upgrading involved the preparation of a detailed specification of requirements, issue of a Request for Tender (RFT) to suppliers and evaluation of competing bids.

A partners' IT Working Group was formed to assist in the specification, selection and installation of the new systems.

The group's brief was to:

- provide a forum for the expression of business unit requirements for development and implementation of the new systems;
- provide a focus for those who wish to contribute to the development of the firm's information systems by seeking contributions from all partners and staff with views to express on the development of systems which are relevant to business needs;
- provide feedback to Information Systems, management and system integrators on proposed system functionality, change management plan, impact on business operations of system implementation plans and any other aspect of the programme which affects business units;
- review IT Programme activity; and
- promote IT solutions to business requirements within the firm.

An international technology consulting firm was appointed to assist in the selection of a systems integrator. The integrator would be responsible for the installation of the various hardware, software and communications components which go together to make up the new systems.

The systems integrator was then chosen to create a working model and take the strategy forward to the proof of concept (POC) stage. Representative groups of Allens staff were invited to attend workshops and to assist the integrator to identify the functionality required in the new systems and determine the preferred products which most closely meet the business needs.

IN THE MEANTIME WHAT IS THE LIBRARY DOING?

The library at Allens has 3 branches in Sydney, Brisbane and the Gold Coast, and 11 full time staff. It has a client base of approximately 500 lawyers and runs a library management system known as BRS/LOIS

Library staff have been involved at all levels of the IT strategy process ensuring that people understand the role the library can play in the re-engineering of the desk tops. The library must also understand where it sits in the whole process and what changes will take place in library practice after roll-out.

Some of these changes became clear in the initial workshops and are included in the final recommendations

Listed below are the legal staff requirements expressed in the workshops, and the corresponding IT requirements suggested by the library

The solutions offered in the IT strategy are as follows:

* office systems to have a standardised structure based on networked PCs and Microsoft Office software;
* web browser interface for all desktops;
* Intranet to be set up with each work area responsible for the design of its site;
* access to the Internet from all desktops;
* access to CD-ROM network from all desktops; and
* search and editing access to all databases within the library structure at all locations.

Legal staff requirements	IT requirements by the library
Do own research from the desk top.	Provide desktop (PCs) access to research tools Provide one access point to all of the firm's information resources
Be familiar with searching	Provide one simple-to-use way of searching, browsing, printing - ie a standard searching interface for all applications Provide training courses on all electronic systems for new staff and refreshers for existing staff.
Have electronic transferability of information.	Provide a system which can support cutting and pasting of documents from/to WP and databases; Internet mail attachments to SP, system databases and our mail system.
Be kept up-to-date with what's new in the law.	Provide fast delivery of current awareness information. Electronic delivery of press releases, ministerial statements and speeches. Documents to be scanned or downloaded from the Internet or other online services, repackaged and emailed to practice groups or individual solicitors.

Legal staff requirements	*IT requirements by the library*
Have flexibility in functionality of applications	Integrated information management system, mail, WP, database management System which is user friendly and supports data in various formats
Other offices such as Brisbane, Canberra, Gold Coast and overseas to have access to Sydney library resources Litigators in court have access to caselaw, digests, etc	Provide access to Sydney library catalogue and other databases Provide access to CD-ROM network

DEFINING THE LIBRARY BUSINESS PLAN

The library chose to do the following:

An information audit

The information audit examined three components: the library mission (how the work done in the library connects to the firm's mission), the deliverables (the information products and services provided by the library) and the information customers

A SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis was undertaken to determine our:

> *Strengths*: what are our core skills and competencies that cannot be imitated or outsourced?
> *Weaknesses*: are we reprocessing information? is the techological structure adequate?
> *Opportunities*: new services; more involvement in firm's information management; new technology and added value; self-service
> *Threats*: major changes that could impact on the service; competitors - who are they and do they do it more cost effectively?

Find out what the other firms are doing

Attend professional association meetings
Attend technology and online seminars and network while there
Use your own network of colleagues
Visit other sites
Use phone surveys as an option

Find out what is happening in the market place - industry trends

Interview publishers
Read industry related journals and conference papers

Read extensively on the subject

Some titles: *Ascent Technology Magazine*
                  Australian Net Guide
                  On-line Currents
                  Law Librarian
                  Journal of Law and Information Science
                  Internet Australia

Having completed the information audit, and assessed the customers' needs, completed the SWOT analysis to determine the library's position, examined what is happening in other firms, established what the industry trends are, discovered what is available and formulated the major business strategies, we are now able to formulate an operating plan

DEVELOPING AN OPERATING PLAN

Introduction

At Allens we have discovered from our audit that the customers are generally pleased with the standard of library service The main issues emanating from the audit were delivery, accessibility and currency of the information provided. These were all technology related as were the weaknesses identified by the library staff in the SWOT analysis

Reasons for change

With the introduction of the new technology, the methods of organising, retrieving and delivering information is about to change, consequently, the library's clients' needs and attitudes are changing. Knowledge and information are now being viewed as key business assets which can increase competitive advantage The library needs to be a key player in helping the clients cope with this change, and adapt work practices to take full advantage of the changes

Now we must examine the library's core functions and services and measure these against the audit to assess whether or not they are meeting the users' needs (See diagram – Library Core Functions)

Why do we change?

The major reasons driving the need for change at Allens are these:

- the introduction of the new technology;
- the re-engineering of the desk top;
- demands from both lawyers and clients;
- pressures from competitors; and
- risk management issues

Like the firm and the group, the library discovered that it has no option but to change as well We now know why we are changing The next question to look at is, what do we change?

What Do We Change?

To assess this we must take each function separately and test existing and future services against the following criteria:

* is a major change expected which could impact on the service within the next three years?
* where is the added value in this service?
* do we need to do it ourselves?
* what level of skill is required to provide the service?
* do we want to provide the service? Will our reputation be affected if we don't?
* is there a spin off to other library services?

The next question is - how much do we change? At this point I have not mentioned library management systems. At the moment we will continue to adapt our present operations to the new environment as best we can and then gradually introduce innovations which will improve our overall operation.

How Do We Change?

To assess this we must look at each requirement and ask the question, how best can this service be delivered to meet the needs of the users?

We must test each service and its method of delivery against the following criteria:

* will existing technology or delivery suffice?
* is the service best delivered by internal sources or external sources?
* what technology is needed to best deliver this service – push or pull, for example?
* are the staffing levels sufficient to deliver this service?
* what training is involved in delivery? Who delivers? Library, IT or both?
* are we able to provide the user with what they want within our budget?
* what are industry trends? Are we locking ourselves into technology that will soon be outdated?

Having established all of this, we must now manage the change process carefully

Managing the Change Process

> *Come to the edge he said*
> *we are afraid they said*
> *Come to the edge he said*
> *they came*
> *he pushed them and they flew*
> Guillaume Appollinaire

I wish it were so easy This is perhaps the most difficult of all processes to manage This is something that must be led from the top If the leaders of the change process are enthusiastic and recognise the exciting challenge facing them then this enthusiasm will be absorbed by everyone

The main issues which arise in the change process are two-fold:

Library staff

- staffing levels - are they adequate to cope with the new situation? (See diagram – Information Solutions Centre)
- do staff have the skills required or do they need to be retrained?
- are we adequately resourced to provide training for users?
- how do we introduce our new model to an entrenched library staff?

Library clients

- areas of responsibility- who trains in which area?
- where is the training to take place?
- whom do we target?
- do we do the training or do we outsource?

Our plan is still not complete, because it never will be. We must be adaptable and flexible in this process and we must listen to our clients.

CONCLUSION

We must plan for change because our clients are demanding it. Either that, or down size our operation and outsource most of the services the library offers. Perhaps this would be a more viable option. However, indications are that the lawyers at Allens value the library services and consider the library a key business asset. We must ensure that we are delivering what the lawyers need in an accurate and timely way. No longer are we confined to the four walls of the library and no longer are we on our own. With "knowledge management" the buzz word at the moment, we must develop a firm wide knowledge management policy so that our clients can take advantage of one of our most valuable resources, our intellectual capital. We must be proactive in the design of the desktop and in the design of the Intranet. The library must be flexible and innovative and lead the change in information delivery. I would like to think that the library, as well as still being a library, is also a dynamic information consultancy within the firm delivering 'world class' information solutions to our clients and using the technology as a means to an end not as an end in itself. That is our vision.

LIBRARY - CORE FUNCTIONS

1. Acquisitions policy

- renewals
- liaison with publishers
- reviewing promotional material
- seminars – new products
- balancing hard copy/online resources
- external bibliographical resources

2. Online services/technology

- online management
- new dbs/technology
- CD-ROM management
- liaise with IT on updates/equipment etc
- liaise with suppliers
- evaluation of software
- management/design of Intranet
- management/design of Internet used in legal research

3. Financial management

- budget
- invoice processing/approval
- licence negotiation
- annual report audit

4. Marketing/Promotions

- consulting with practice groups
- branch office liaison
- desk top publishing
- marketing activities

5. Personnel Managment

- staff counselling
- professional development
- staff meetings
- conflict resolution
- communicatons
- leave

6. Research services

- research projects
- company research and analysis

7. Communications/alert function

- Legal literature update
- LawWatch
- Emails and updating services
- Task manager/report

8. Training

- Legal research all levels
- practice group
- CD-ROM & database training
- training library staff on dbs
- user education - library based
- developing guides and training material

9. Technical services

- short reference enquiries
- telephone – 'help desk'
- serials management
- classification
- cataloguing
- ordering
- barcoding
- shelving
- circulation management
- interlibrary loans

10 AAR Group

- significant amount of borrowing and lending of material
- group orders liaison
- group licences – online services
- library guides
- yearly meeting
- Internet/Intranet

INFORMATION SOLUTIONS CENTRE

DIRECTOR

MANAGER
Core functions: 3,5,10,4

CORE BUSINESS UNITS

TECHNOLOGY/DIGITAL

Core Functions: 2, 8, 7
Support Functions: 1, 9, 4

Staffing:
1 Technology librarian
2 Technology assistants (Library technicians)

Support

RESEARCH/INFORMATION DELIVERY

Core Functions: 6,8
Support Functions : 2, 1, 7

Staffing:
1 Research librarian (Law)
1 Research librarian
3 days equivalent f/t paralegals (Syd) 1 day f/t equivalent paralegals (Bri)
Function: Laterally devise solutions tailored to the particular needs of the library's clients
Time: billable

Support

TECHNICAL SERVICES
Core Functions: 9, 4, 7
Support Functions: 7
Staffing:
2 Supervisors (Library Technicians)
3 Library assistants
1 Library technician p/t 2 days per week (Brisbane)
Some income generation and disbursements