Increasing Your Visibility and Going Beyond Your Job Title: the Pros and Cons of Saying Yes to Everything

Abstract: This article by **Ian Hunter**, which has been adapted from his BIALL Conference presentation at the Belfast Europa Hotel, examines increasing the visibility of law firm library and information services in terms of what should be done and what should not be done. Or, as Ian puts it: "Is saying yes to everything really the right thing to do?"
Keywords: marketing; information professionals; law firms

Increasing visibility is an ongoing topic of discussion for law firm library and information services (LIS) and other business support teams. But what do we mean by this? Why might we want to increase visibility, and is saying 'yes' to everything the right way to go? I'm going to look at the advantages and disadvantages of saying yes to everything – or 'what should we be doing and what should we not be doing?' – in four key areas. I will also be looking at how to promote your service and measure your progress.

The idea for the subtitle of this article came from a chance conversation with a colleague at another law firm who told me she tries to get herself and her team involved in as much as possible, "I say yes to everything", and the idea has been at the back of my mind ever since. When the BIALL 2023 conference request for speakers arrived with the theme of 'Increasing your visibility and going beyond your job title' everything coalesced. So, this is what we're going to look at:

- Do we want to increase our visibility?

- Saying yes to everything: the advantages and disadvantages of diversifying

- What should we be doing and what should we not be doing?

- Promoting your service

- How to measure your achievements: market penetration

DO WE WANT TO INCREASE OUR VISIBILITY?

To get ahead in your career, it pays to be visible: "When people know who you are and what you can do, they're more likely to consider you for promotions or interesting assignments. And those who keep their head down often miss out, despite their hard work."[1]

This is all about profile raising: LIS are usually cost centres in a world of fee-earners. We don't want to be seen as just the place for books, passwords and journal articles.

This has become particularly important with remote working. During lockdown some management and business writers began talking about 'proximity bias': the psychological concept of instinctively favouring people closer to us in (physical) proximity. We can address aspects of this with some simple steps – for example, many writers suggest keeping your camera on in team meetings – but what about the longer term?

THE ADVANTAGES OF SAYING YES TO EVERYTHING

Saying yes to everything can lead to more prestigious, high-profile tasks, and can move the LIS towards becoming a revenue centre not a cost centre as some newer, 'non-core' tasks are more likely to be client billable. It can also lead to learning new skills and, for managers, keeping your team engaged. Possibly most importantly, this can lead to reaching new groups of users, or market penetration within the organisation. New 'non-core' tasks may also lead to the LIS becoming more embedded in your organisation's workflows, rather than a central but reactive service.

THE DISADVANTAGES OF SAYING YES TO EVERYTHING

The key potential disadvantage is workload, not just overall workload and team capacity but also the fact that some new tasks may take priority if they are client billable or come with fixed deadlines. This may be less of an issue if the team is already using service level definitions and is therefore used to formally prioritising in this way.

With any new task there is likely to be a need for upskilling, and this can lead to inconsistency across offices

(for multi-site firms) or even individuals. Also corporate culture differences between offices can mean some team members in other offices may be more or less willing to take on certain tasks.

And the opposite of upskilling is downskilling. Working on documents, presentations or spreadsheets as opposed to providing publications or raw data, which is often seen as the role of the LIS, may initially seem to be increased value-added work, but can become data entry or word processing. To put it another way, where does 'research' stop and where does copying and pasting from a website start? These tasks can result in teams spending more time on the layout and formatting of a document than finding or summarising the information.

WHAT SHOULD WE BE DOING AND WHAT SHOULD WE NOT BE DOING?

Marketing / BD work

There can be overlap between LIS and marketing teams – and lawyers don't always know which team to ask for help. This can lead to competition for prestigious tasks from partners or a reluctance to take on time consuming work, so clear guidelines are needed on who does what. A LIS geared up to handling a large number of quick requests may not be best suited to producing in-depth bespoke industry or company profiles, for example.

This can also present opportunities, however. At one firm I worked at a request for a regular current awareness bulletin came from a marketing director to the LIS, which became a prestigious high profile work product, sent to partners globally, and led to requests for more.

Again, there may be cultural differences between offices even within the same global team as to who should do what.

Legal tech / knowledge management

Many library and information services are already involved in this area, most commonly with adding or indexing internal know-how / precedents to a document management system or know-how database, but also with document automation (e.g. Contract Express), evaluating new legal tech tools (e.g. Structure Flow, SDL [translation]), closing sets and client fileshares: interacting with clients. In my anecdotal experience there can be a difference between LIS in UK and US law firms, with the former more commonly taking on responsibilities and the latter more likely to see it as outside their remit.

Document automation and closing sets are possibly the most fraught as they come with fixed deadlines agreed between the law firm and the client, and involve LIS staff members interacting directly with the client. Should we be interacting with clients? Are we trained for this? This is a great area to get involved in but as it usually comes with fixed deadlines it can take up a team member at short notice for a day at a time.

Procurement

Procurement of research tools is something many LIS are already doing, and while negotiating with vendors over pricing is not the reason most of us get into this job, it is an opportunity to demonstrate actual quantifiable achievements. Keep a list of price reductions on proposed price increases you've obtained to show senior management if the opportunity arises. As well as being a quantifiable contribution to the organisation, having closed a deal with someone high up at a major vendor brings a great sense of achievement.

Many LIS in large law firms will have access to a procurement team. While procurement teams are a definite help in reviewing contracts, and in some cases providing arguments against price increases, they may have different priorities. I prioritise three key points: the notice period to terminate; who can have access; and what can we do with the content? Whereas the procurement teams may be more concerned with standardising invoice payment terms (e.g. 30 days or 45 days) and worrying about indemnity clauses.

Other areas

In my experience LIS may be asked to take on any of the following: Anti-Money Laundering (AML) / New Business Intake (NBI) / conflict checking; Companies House filings or other regulatory filings; maintaining a record of practice certificates or professional development records; and document management (DM support) such as creating / permissioning folders.

Companies House and regulatory filings are likely to be client billable and highly valued by the lawyers but are often highly time sensitive and may be labour intensive, like closing sets. And again, is it just data entry? The debate as to whether LIS should bill all time internally and therefore be a revenue centre not a cost centre has been going on for decades, but making more of your time billable may be a useful goal.

HOW DO WE DIVERSIFY AND PROMOTE OURSELVES?

As well as the above there may be opportunities to take on ad hoc / organic development, e.g. taking advantage of a particular research request, being asked for one thing and offering another. For example, at one firm I worked at I took on a task involving in-depth research into the leveraged finance market, which I was reluctant to do at first, but as a result was eventually able to reposition the service as the go-to point for this type of research. In another example, my team was drafted in to provide a labour intensive daily Covid tracker but, as it involved liaising with colleagues around the world, and in other teams, I was able to write a blog for the International Legal Technology Association about it, which gave me the

opportunity to publicise the task externally, and this reflected well on the entire firm.

On a more day-to-day basis, consider an internal blog or internal newsletter. I used to include a market barometer in a quarterly newsletter with headline market totals for relevant sectors of the finance industry, showcasing our skills in this area. Also, try to attend practice group meetings as a way to promote your team.

Other events could be a supplier showcase – we held a mini trade exhibition in the office to which we invited around 10 key vendors; this requires a significant amount of time, office space and buy-in. Advertise internal training events from an external vendor not as 'Mergermarket refresher training' but 'market update' and try to get editors, not just trainers, from the vendor to attend. This works with news services and niche research tools such as covenant analysis tools in the leveraged finance space.

MARKET PENETRATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

The other aspect of promoting your service and increasing visibility is market penetration: we want to hear from all practice groups we serve. Market penetration is commonly shown in diagrammatic form, as shown in Figure 1.

In Figure 1, Existing Products are the services that the LIS is known for (press searches, cases and legislation). New Products could be, for example, company profiles. Product Development may be presenting existing work product differently e.g. Word or PDF 'binder' format, and New Markets is achieving work requests from new practice groups.

Market penetration is measurable if the LIS keeps enquiry statistics identifying distinct users. To do this, divide the existing number of customers, e.g. 60 lawyers, by the target market size, so all lawyers, say 120, which
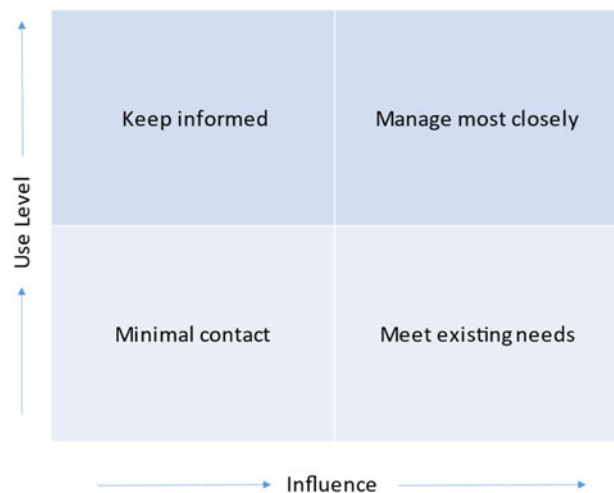
Figure 2: How to achieve market penetration

gives us 0.5, and multiplied by 100 gives us a market penetration of 50%. If the LIS does not identify enquiry statistics which can identify individual users then try the number of practice groups instead. Ideally, make a note of the market penetration rate and revisit it in six months' time.

Alternatively, look at your target market informally: are there any large and / or influential practice groups that you don't hear from? Then they are the target market segment to work on.

Figure 2 is about how to achieve more market penetration. In the top right we have the influential people who already use the LIS – partners and PSLs for example – and in the bottom left, less influential people who don't use our services. In the top left we have less influential people who already use the LIS – trainee solicitors. In the bottom right, partners and PSLs.

Figure 1: Market penetration shown in diagrammatic form

TAKEAWAYS

1) Use these charts to map your market penetration and how you might develop your market.
2) Think of three new tasks (or at least one!) you would be willing to take on, and three you would not.

CONCLUSION

So, should LIS increase their visibility, how can they promote their services to their internal clients, and what are the best things to say yes to? The short answer is that yes, we as information professionals should aim to increase our visibility and promote our services and this can be achieved through any opportunities that come to hand, particularly through the provision of current awareness bulletins, and anything that embeds team members into the wider organisational workflow, such as training or events. We should consider what might be the best tasks to enable us to this goal, and so of course anything which is client billable may seem to be just that, but remember that these types of tasks may have short deadlines which can be disruptive to other work. Other tasks involving summarising or analysing data (e.g. writing in-depth reports) may also be positive assignments to take on, though this type of work will usually require the need to create or edit documents which can be time consuming, compared with just supplying the raw data or downloading publications. Saying that, a short email with bullet points involves the same analysis and abstracting skills as an in-depth report would.

The less favourable tasks will be those mundane ones where you may be populating a spreadsheet with data, or copying and pasting text into a document, and which do not utilise our full skillset in managing information.

Promoting our services within the wider firm can provide us with opportunities to reach teams that may not have been aware of our services, while also helping us to achieve personal goals in relation to professional development.

Endnotes

[1] Mindtools <www.mindtools.com/arnmlep/increasing-your-visibility> Accessed 5 September 2023

Biography

Since qualifying in the early 1990s **Ian Hunter** has worked for law firms, investment banks and a university business school, and recently joined the marketing team at Covington and Burling LLP as Marketing Research Manager. Ian has published articles on the topics of information literacy, researching deals and markets and the use of free websites for legal and official information, and was a co-author of the third edition of *Legal Research: A Practitioner's Handbook* (2019).