Biography

Matthew Leopold is Head of Brand and Communications at LexisNexis. Matthew is a strategic marketer – specialising in technology marketing for B2B and B2C blue-chip corporates. He has been involved in shaping and implementing brand strategies for most of his career. He has driven brand marketing for FTSE 100 and NYSE listed businesses in the UK, USA and in a number of countries around the world. As a strategist, Matthew always has an eye on the trends and opportunities of a market. He loves bringing professional services to life, showcasing not just how tech is revolutionising the market – but explaining why and painting a compelling picture of the future. Matthew is a non-Executive Director of the European Sponsorship Association, a Charity Trustee and a committed volunteer with St John Ambulance and the London Ambulance Service.

Global Perspectives: Thoughts on the Ever-changing Landscape of International Legal Research

Abstract: This article, by Jas Breslin, is a summary of a panel discussion held at the BIALL Conference in July 2022, an in-depth and absorbing debate with a focus on the changes in legal research across the globe over the last decade. Entitled 'Thoughts on the ever-changing landscape of international legal research', the discussion saw four panellists from different working environments explain exactly what international legal research meant to them, and what significant transformations they have witnessed in recent years. Interestingly, some universal key themes emerged during the discussion, regardless of the jurisdiction or sector the speaker worked in.

Keywords: international legal research

INTRODUCTION

Masoud Gerami of vLex chaired the session and made the interesting observation that until recently the legal information sector had been lagging behind the science and technology sectors in terms of processing information and producing analytics. However, our sector has been catching up and data analytics has now become a more discussed and popular subject in articles and conferences. With this in mind, the task of this panel was to focus on the changes specific to global legal research, which had perhaps not been discussed as thoroughly previously.

A VIEW FROM BARBADOS

The first panellist introduced was Junior Browne, who provides content for CariLaw and is also Law Librarian in the Faculty of Law at the University of the West Indies, based in Barbados. Browne began by describing his patrons of CariLaw (a subscription database of Commonwealth Caribbean primary legal materials) and at the University of the West Indies – these being students, academics, and government agencies.

Barbados is a Commonwealth jurisdiction, based on UK law for the most part, although the law in other Commonwealth jurisdictions also have importance and weight, of course, and many of these are also covered by the CariLaw platform. For instance, family law is borrowed from Australia; while corporate, commercial, and insurance law is borrowed – heavily – from Canada. This means that at Browne's law school there is an emphasis on teaching comparative law research methods and, indeed, students at the University of the West Indies are taught that they should always be aware of developments in other Caribbean and Commonwealth jurisdictions.

Independence was gained in Barbados in 1966, at a time when other nearby countries were also becoming self-governing, and the divergence of Caribbean law from UK law has been increasing since that time. Interestingly, many in the audience from the UK saw parallels in how UK law and EU law are slowly but surely diverging, too.

Browne went on to describe two of the more significant changes he has seen in the last few years. Firstly, he has witnessed the positive changes that technology has made in facilitating access to the law. Previously, being able to provide legal services in Barbados and other nearby jurisdictions meant having access to printed law reports. Printed resources would be posted out and copies could take a long time to arrive at law libraries. The step change in recent years has been the arrival of technology that has facilitated access to more law reports and unreported cases, and there has been a fundamental shift in how much material can be accessed digitally, not just by legal professionals but also by students and citizens.

A second transformation that is starting to affect the need for non-usual jurisdictional legal information has been the impact and importance of trade between the Caribbean nations and Latin America and Africa, which is driving a requirement to understand the legal materials from these countries, too, and also for law libraries to provide access to them. CariLaw is already looking at methods to procure more legal materials from outside the Caribbean, and Browne predicts that this will be a substantial project for the future.

PERSPECTIVES FROM WOLTERS KLUWER

The second speaker was David Bartolone, who shared his experiences of international law at Wolters Kluwer and contextualised these within the world of legal information publishing. On a practical level, the aim of the products and platforms that Wolters Kluwer develops is to focus on commercial transactions and support access to the law in multiple jurisdictions. Content is not aggregated on a case law basis, for example, but rather materials are pulled together to be practical for the end user. The aim is not to be comprehensive; material is selective and curated for the end user working on a specific transaction or case.

Bartolone described the recent changes he has seen in the legal landscape, where the pandemic has accelerated the modernisation of many court systems, which in turn has given legal publishers more access to information and data for legal research.

Meanwhile, market dynamics have been internationalised through, for example, the global impact of environmental issues, the Metaverse and data privacy, and this is having a profound effect on individual jurisdictions and how their law is shaped.

The end goal for Wolters Kluwer is not to bundle and aggregate content by category, but rather to look at the question that needs to be answered and curate content intelligently using AI tools, and then create actionable analytics.

A LAW FIRM VIEW

Sarah Kennedy, from UK law firm Mishcon de Reya, was next up, and she described her experience of international legal research. As a knowledge manager, Kennedy has seen an increase in enquiries related to non-UK jurisdictions in the last 15 years, and this in turn has led to a need for a wider range of databases providing litigation and news from those countries. This demand for access to more information has subsequently put pressure on publishers to find ways to make content more accessible.

In addition, Kennedy has seen a rise in an expectation that information professionals are experts in searching across an increasing breadth of information – be that case law, legislation, company information or news sources. There are also user expectations that all the types of data that are available in the UK are also available from other countries, which is not always the case.

On the positive side, end users who previously may not have even approached the research team for assistance now do so, chiefly because Kennedy's team are experts in evaluating sources. Also, the team provides training to others so that they can then use reliable resources for research which might have previously been outside of their comfort zone.

THOUGHTS FROM VLEX

Lastly, we heard from vLex's Robin Chesterman, a regular conference presenter, who described the vLex vision, which is to have material from all common law systems available through one platform. Currently there is a 250-year archive of case law, and that is growing by the day, so clearly there is a requirement to make this information easier to find and access.

With the above in mind, the vLex platform has a sophisticated citation recognition engine which can map connections between documents and can create reports on what use domestic courts have made of international law. For example, the data shows that the Australian courts use international law the most, followed by Canada, and on the flip side the USA is isolated in not using international law much at all in the domestic courts. The UK is the most cited jurisdiction, producing what are known as 'super authorities'.

Recently vLex launched Vincent, its AI tool, which is capable of retrieving similar documents based on semantic content, thus allowing users to surface relevant content more easily.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The overarching impression gained from this enlightening discussion is that two factors have significantly, and positively, impacted on access to international legal information in the last decade. The first is the advance of technology in smaller jurisdictions, allowing information to be disseminated more widely. The second is the growing interest and need of users to have access to this type of international

content, these needs relentlessly driven by economic and market dynamics – in short, globalisation.

Panellists:
Junior Browne, content provider for CariLaw and Law Librarian at the Faculty of Law, University of the West Indies.

David Bartolone, Vice President and General Manager, Wolters Kluwer.
Sarah Kennedy, Knowledge Manager, Mishcon de Reya.
Robin Chesterman, Head of Product, vLex.
Chair:
Masoud Gerami, vLex

Biography

Jas Breslin is the Research & Information Services Manager at city law firm Charles Russell Speechlys LLP, where she has worked since 2015. She has over 25 years of experience working in the law firm sector and is an active member of the legal information community. Jas is a co-owner of the LIS-LAW listserv; and served as BIALL President in 2013/2014.

Gaining an Insight into the User Experience by Becoming a User

Abstract: In this article, based on his presentation at the BIALL Annual Conference in July 2022, the author Greg Bennett, a law librarian, discusses the insights he gained by becoming a student of law, and so, a user of a law library.

Keywords: law libraries; law librarians; library management; universities; teaching methods

INTRODUCTION

Like many law librarians, I have developed a broad knowledge of law as a subject, but that broad knowledge is also relatively shallow. This broad but shallow knowledge is probably fairly common for librarians in general. However, having learnt to enjoy law as a subject, I decided to try and gain a deeper knowledge – at least in some areas of law – and so I chose to study an LLM CPE in Law by distance learning at the University of Wolverhampton. In addition to gaining a deeper understanding of the law, studying law gave me some excellent insights into being on the receiving end of a law library service, ie being a user, rather than a provider of such a service. So, what did I learn that I didn't know before?

REFERENCE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

For a start, I gained some important practical skills. One of those skills was how to use reference management software. Like many academic librarians, I had previously taught students how to use software like EndNote, Zotero and Mendeley to manage their references. However, I hadn't really used any of these tools for my own writing. So, I only really knew enough about these tools so that I could teach students the basics, but beyond that my knowledge was limited. Having to write many essays using OSCOLA meant that I had to learn more about using reference management tools (or I could have produced my bibliographies by myself without software, but this didn't seem like a sensible option – I knew that reference management software made the essay-writer's life easier, I just wasn't especially experienced at using it for myself).

It seemed clear to me quite quickly that Zotero was the tool that was most compatible with OSCOLA. And, in fact, even though there is a version of Zotero – called Juris-M – that is supposed to work particularly well with legal references, I found that the main version of Zotero worked better than Juris-M with OSCOLA – Juris-M has more of an international focus than I needed, ie it is very

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