

CURRENT TRENDS IN LAW LIBRARY MANAGEMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The choice of the topic “*Current Trends in Law Library Management*” with the theme “*Repositioning of Judicial Libraries to meet with the challenges of Administration of justice*” for the 2017 Biennial National Workshop for judicial Librarians is significant at this time.

Law library is important to all lawyers whether at the Bench or Bar because their level of accomplishment, may be directly linked to the quality of access and use of right legal information resources in their administration of justice. While librarianship has its primary duty of acquisition, preservation and dissemination of knowledge, law makes use of the preserved knowledge to promote justice for an orderly society. The special nature of law libraries therefore makes their management not only critical but imperative.

However, the information explosion of the 21st century which turned the society into a global village with its advancement on Information Communication Technology (ICT) has greatly influenced the hitherto library conventional/manual routines. And with the nature and volume of information presently generated, the previous manual library routines no doubt can no longer sustained same, hence the need for automation of the library system. To that effects, Dada (2011) remarked that this age is characterized by processing and conversion from the conventional formats to electronic and digital formats, necessitating some consequences and challenges.

NATURE OF LAW LIBRARIES

Law libraries are found within the courts (Judicial Libraries), Ministry of Justice, Law Faculties of Universities and law related agencies (NJI, NJC, etc).

They serve the Judges, Magistrates, law students, practicing lawyers and other law related institutions. Anaeme (2015) described judicial libraries as those found within the court premises. The basic function of the libraries is to acquire and provide basic law materials in print and non-print formats for research to enhance quick and efficient administration of justice.

LAW LIBRARY HOLDINGS

Law library holdings include the following;

- * Federal Legislations
- * Foreign Law Publications
- * Digest & Treatises
- * Law Journals
- * Textbooks, Dictionaries & Encyclopedias
- * Law Dictionaries
- * Law Encyclopedias
- * Newspapers & Magazines
- * Commonwealth Publications
- * Casebooks
- * Bibliographies
- * Directories
- * Indexing & Abstracting Materials, etc

To effectively maximize the contents of these collections in this Information age a lot of efforts in terms of human and technological skills and competence must be employed by the law libraries.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND LAW LIBRARIANSHIP

Information Technology (IT) refers to the Computer based system of information recording, processing, storage, retrieval and distribution. We may also refer Information Technology as method or device for collecting, organizing, storing, analyzing, retrieving and communicating knowledge (Alemika, 2004). Telecommunication facilitates exchange of information between computers. A good example is the internet through which our e-mails are sent and received, thus the e-mail is made possible by Computer and Telecommunication Technologies through the internet. The internet is made up millions of computers linked together around the world in a way that information can be sent from any computer to another within 24hours (Eyitayo, 2008).

Law Librarianship is the most dynamic and complex field due to the constant growth of information and the change in legal decision arising from the activities of Judges and law makers. Law Libraries and Librarianship must therefore capture, maintain, update and provide information and decisions that grow and changes at rapid rates. In view of this relationship, without the application of Information Technology, law Libraries may not effectively and efficiently access and provide these information and other relevant materials for the benefit of their clients: Judges, defense and prosecuting attorneys, arbitrators,

academic lawyers and members of the public. Dada (1989) noted that: Law libraries especially reference Libraries are expected to compile useful bibliographies, directories, manuals guides list of holdings and accessions. They should also render assistance in editing, indexing, access points and abstracting services. These tasks no doubts require the input of Law Librarian through the application of (IT). Information Technology facilitates access to Legal materials all over the world and also enhance the delivery of library services to the Judges, Lawyers, Law students and members of the public.

I.T APPLICATION INTO LAW LIBRARY ROUTINES

I.T will enhance efficiency of librarians in the following areas:

- a. Ordering and acquisition, cataloging and indexing
- b. Facilitating access to library resources by users
- c. Providing effective support for judges in their search
- d. Better production and distribution of decisions and judgment by Judges and general administration of personnel, finance and materials.

However, for the effective application of the ICT to achieve these, the following tasks according to Anyaegbu (2013) will be required

1. Assessment of Court Libraries to determine their needs in terms of personnel, training, hardware and software acquisition.
2. Provision of adequate office space
3. Training of the personnel for the operation and maintenance of equipment
4. Acquisition of computers and telecommunication equipment, hard and soft wares, air conditioning, reliable, effective and efficient source of electricity.
5. Provision of adequate fund for acquisition of equipment for conversion of existing printed materials into the electronic information system.
6. Continuous training of personnel to cope with the technological changes.
7. Recruiting highly qualified personnel and motivating them to remain on the job.

WHY JOINING IT

As a result of deficiencies of law books in Nigeria, there is a deliberate effort to de-emphasize the reliance on books and other printed materials (Dada 2011). Martins (1999) identified some over looked deficiencies of course books as follows:

- i. Books are costly to manufacture, ship and store, while CD Rom lasts longer, save space and easily accessible.
- ii. Books are static, while law is dynamic and currency in its practice
- iii. Books publishers configure to achieve an economy which is very costly.
- iv. Books are difficult to alter and modify its contents.
- v. Books are cumbersome and voluminous to use, get out off print and may not be available on request.

OBJECTIVES OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Dada (2011) identified the following as the objectives of Information Technology

- To facilitate the storage, retrieval, and dissemination of vital legal information
- To enhance the performance of routine process like law amendments (Noter- up), indexing and abstracting services
- Serve as a link among legal institutions and facilitate intellectual resource governing and sharing
- To facilitate legal studies syllabi that will be universally acceptable
- To permit instant access to current information on a large scale
- To support learning and teaching in specialized area of video conferencing, teleconferencing, group discussions, questions and answers sessions and Moot Court trials
- To enhance networking of various legal training institutions for the purpose of cross fertilization of knowledge
- To enable large number of students have access to case law and other legal materials with ease than queue up for access to a limited number of books in the shelf.
- To facilitate communication between teacher and student in distant learning and continuing education programmes

SOCIAL MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES

Social media tools are web based and mobile technologies that can be used to turn communication into interactive dialogue. They include Wikis, Blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Ipad, Iphone, IPod, YouTube, 2go etc.

Germain (2007) identified some applications used in law libraries as law blogs, collaborative encyclopedias, Free Access to Law Movement and Government Policies. Law blog is a website made up of posts, arranged chronologically, by date and category. Blogs provide useful updating materials for various legal specialties. Blogs have acquired a certain status as is being cited by court decisions and in law reviews.

Collaborative Encyclopedia

Wikipedia is the best example where everyone can freely contribute and edit. Wikipedia is one of the most visited web sites worldwide.

RSS (Really Simple Syndication) is a format developed by Net Scape in 1999 which is popular for getting relevant content and notify a user automatically when new content arrives.

ROLE OF LAW LIBRARIANS IN INFORMATION AGE

Technology no matter how viable cannot replace human expertise because it must need the input, operation and maintenance of humans. A library in the present sense is more than a building. Presently a library is where people are served, encouraged to interact, helped and guided to conduct their research. Leither (2007) outlines the roles of a law Librarian in electronic environment to include:

- **Evaluate the quality of print and electronic information** - advise on accuracy and authenticity of the source of information
- **Teach legal research methodology** - provide appropriate textbook and how to go about them.
- **Be seen as core participants in the objectives of their institutions** – must be proactive and reach out to the users instead of waiting to be begged.

This, no doubt is a tall order.

Librarians must keep pace with the astronomical speed of emerging technologies and adjust to new research needs and information behaviours of the judges, lawyers, faculty members, students and members of the public.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SKILL NECESSARY FOR ALL LIBRARIANS

T.H.E journal (2005) indicated the following:

- Word processing skills,
- Spread sheet skills
- Electronic presentation skills
- Web navigation skills
- Web site design skills
- Email management skills
- Digital camera
- Data base skills
- File management and window explorer
- Downloading software from the web(including e-books)
- Installing Computer software into computer system
- Computer related storage devices (disks, USB devices, Zip disk etc)
- Scanner knowledge
- Deep web knowledge
- Computer security knowledge
- Blogs knowledge
- Wikis knowledge
- Audio e-Books knowledge
- IM knowledge
- RSS knowledge
- Education copyright knowledge, etc.

CHALLENGES OF THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TO THE LAW LIBRARIAN

✓ **Reliability of internet source:**

Most of the information is raw and unfiltered. It is difficult to know if the numerous information accessed is accurate, authoritative and relevant. So it is important to use reputable web sites such as Findlaw, LexisOne, Westlaw, Law.com e.t.c. Some authoritative research guides in the web include:

- Global Legal Information Network (GLIN)
- Law Library of Congress Guide to Law Online, etc.

✓ **Problems of Fragility and Rapid Technological Obsolesce:**

The life span of a CD or disk is about 10 – 30 years and this is also limited by the hardware and software required to read same. Information on website can also vanish over night hence the need to cite date of retrieval.

✓ **Authenticity of Official Legal Digital Sources**

Some digital media are prone to errors in management, control, corruption and tampering countries like Brazil, France, US and others have taken safeguard.

✓ **Poor Local Content**

Nigeria and other African countries have problem of poor local content in their digital information because they have few websites on the internet. Most Nigerian laws and law reports cannot be accessed online

✓ **Constraints in the use of ICT in law libraries**

Many Nigerians and their institutions are not ICT compliant. This is as a result of the following:

- a. Poor electricity supply
- b. Poor telecommunication facilities
- c. Poor awareness and education in information technology as computer literacy is urban oriented
- d. ICT still less developed in the education sector
- e. Corruption of Nigeria leaders
- f. Lack of policy guideline to sustain same
- g. Paucity of funds for the acquisition and maintenance
- h. Economic recession leading to decline in revenue of institutions

SUGGESTION FOR IMPROVEMENT

Enhanced Funding:

Through increased and granting of a degree of autonomy to law libraries in the management of their votes.

ICT infrastructure:

This should be part of the capital budget of the law library parent body for the acquisition, installation and maintenance of the equipments.

Manpower Training

Training and re-skilling of law library manpower is a *sine qua non* for an updated staff if new soft/hard wares are to be effectively maximized.

Consortium Building

Very essential that library resources are pulled together through consortia arrangement. That can be utilized through the NALL Forum, because it reduces costs, risks, and make the resources available and easily accessible.

Electricity supply

IT compliant Nations do not suffer the power outage as we experience in Nigeria. Reforms in the power sector should provide for alternative power supply such as the solar energy for law libraries.

Subscription to online Data Base

Law libraries in developed countries subscribe to LexisNexis and Westlaw for learning, teaching and research. Adequate funding and courage is required to hook on and sustained the legal data bases.

Enriching our local content

Law librarians should be involved in the creation and maintenance of more web sites in law as only few exist for Nigeria.

Mass Digitizing Of Law Materials

Since most information resources in Nigeria are still imprint, law librarians should engage in mass digitization of their print resources.

Open Access legislation

The National Assembly should be persuaded to make enabling laws geared towards making accessible online free of charge or at subsidized rate.

CONCLUSION

The application of IT and its success story is a modern trend in information management. This application will promote efficiency, reduce delay and costs, facilitate access to justice and increase public confidence in the legal system.

The challenges posed by advancement of IT on law libraries and librarians are enormous but not insurmountable. Even the banking payments and withdrawals are now IT compliant. With other competitors in the information industry, law librarians must embrace this global moving train. The Judicial Librarians, the judicial libraries and their parent bodies must synergies to benefit from this free flow of information and instant transfer of knowledge which has come to stay. Forward ever and backward never.

Thanks for listening

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