Do We, Do They, Can We, Is It?

My technical services team and I have been meeting once a week for years to review the numerous cost, collection, billing, cataloging, filing, format, delivery, and access questions that come up each and every day related to the materials we work with in our law firm library.

And over the past few years, since reality television has been so popular, I have regularly suggested to my team that we create a reality show—partly to demonstrate the intricacy of the work we do (after all, who would believe what it takes to deliver a little bit of content!), but mostly to show how really funny this work can be and how crucially important it is to have a sense of humor (which we do) when dealing with vendor issues, the rapidly changing business we are in, and the daily challenges we face trying to satisfy individual attorney needs.

Who on earth would believe some of the choices we must contemplate? And to those who thought librarians would be a thing of the past, I think it is safe to remind them—if you haven’t already—that we are needed and relied upon now more than ever before.

During last week’s TS meeting, we received a letter from a publisher saying that the next issue will be the last one; of course, we just paid for our annual renewal two months ago. No problem, they have acknowledged our payment and our loyalty, and they even have suggestions as to how we should apply that money. They recommend that we buy the expanded version of the old publication, now with a new name and broader coverage. Yes, it will cost a little more; but, for that increase, they will give us one seat of electronic access! Grand. Just a few problems: We don’t need expanded coverage, our practice is very focused. We didn’t budget more money for the publication. Multiple people share the hard copy, so to whom would we give the electronic access? So, before we have to adjust the catalog, we have several decisions to make: Is the expanded coverage useful? We will check with the attorneys. Is there another way to deliver similar information? We will check other sources. Can we get a refund? Keep your eyes out for it and make sure it arrives—yellow post-it on the bulletin board! After these decisions are made, we should tell the attorneys any changes that may take place. Adjust the catalog. Adjust the serial control. Should we keep the old title on the shelves? Is a password being issued? Will they send it to us so we have a record, or is it being emailed directly to the user?

All this work from one itty, bitty little publication change for an item that probably cost less than the staff time it took to manage this process.

Are you tired, or do you want to review the rest of the weekly pile with me? Not the whole pile, I don’t blame you; just one more.

This next one may be unique to our firm because of our endless willingness to accommodate personal preference, but a law firm is as a law firm does, and it is probably quite prevalent.

The fabulous ability to deliver news and docket alerts via database current awareness tools has allowed us to deliver some of the most useful content we have access to in a very timely fashion. And while there are many technical applications to use to deliver this information, not all attorneys want to receive the information in the same way or from the same source. In a large firm with subscriptions to the same materials from different sources, there are a lot of options. Let’s take a very popular legal news magazine, for instance: You have the hard copy, preferred by some, and you have the free daily alerts from multiple titles by the same publisher, which are easy enough to sign up for but do not deliver the
full content unless you subscribe. Rather than subscribing each attorney directly, you might decide to rely on a big database’s ability to deliver the same content in a similarly timely way; but should that material be sent to an entire practice group, which would be easy to set up, or are there a few people in that group who do not want it, so now you have to add recipients individually?—much easier to manage once you get through the initial set up. If using a content aggregator at the firm, should you have the material delivered through the aggregator? That method is preferred by most, yes, but not all. So, how do you keep track of who is receiving what, and how? Well, we have our ways, and we are awfully good at it; but wouldn’t it be so much simpler if everyone could agree on delivery method, amount of text delivered, et cetera?

Easier? Yes, it would be. Likely? Not so much.

This is all okay; it’s just funny. Who would ever believe?

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