Electronic Law Library

In a recent study, compiled at the urging of the chair of our law school's building committee, we discovered that if we get rid of every print volume that is on WESTLAW or LEXIS, the law library's collection would be 13 percent or 44,420 volumes smaller. If one print copy of all these "duplicated" legal materials would stay in the library's collection, our law library would get rid of 23,463 print volumes or 7 percent of the collection.

Third assumption: electronic access is equivalent to the print volume in terms of readability, economy, and portability. Again, many users of legal materials will argue that it is easier to read a book and that the print is more economical if many need access to the same case or article or work.

Fourth and fifth assumptions: everyone with an interest in legal research knows how to use the online systems and has access to them. Of course, neither of these assumptions is really safe. Every law school library serves the needs of the university community and many serve the public. And our LEXIS and WESTLAW educational contracts prohibit access to all except our own law students, faculty, and staff.

Sixth, seventh, and eighth assumptions: LEXIS, WESTLAW, or equivalent systems will still be in business in the future, will continue to include the titles we have discarded, and will be provided at a cost we can afford.

It makes sense to rely on WESTLAW and LEXIS-NEXIS for resources that academic law libraries would not otherwise have in their collections—for example, the vast array of non-legal periodicals included in NEXIS. It also makes sense to reduce the duplication of materials in print collections in reliance on online "backups." And it may even make sense to find ways to convert some legal research tools, primarily case verification systems such as Shepard's Citator, to electronic-only access since the print tools can never be as current or as convenient to use.

But, realistically, I know of no law library that would get rid of every print copy of the primary state and federal statutes, cases, and administrative rules and decisions that are available online. As my friend and colleague, George Grossman, said, "If legal information were available only in electronic form, someone would invent the book."

We cannot and should not give up the print unless we are convinced that we are not sacrificing access, functionality, or economy. We have a responsibility to uphold the rule of law in our society. We must evaluate and analyze our collections carefully and not be blinded by the technology hype.

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1999 Annual Meeting—London 2000

The ABA Annual Meeting will be in July this year due to the London 2000 program. The Section will host its regular Section activities, such as honoring the Robert J. Kutz Award recipient, in New York as part of the regular ABA Annual Meeting. In addition, Dean David Lieb is coordinating the Section's Presidential Showcase program for the London 2000 meeting on creating a new way of providing legal education. The Section's London activities will include a joint program with the law faculties of London University looking at legal education in the new millennium, a dinner at Middle Temple and a visit to Cambridge to meet with the Cambridge law faculty.