

GUIDE
8

Strategic Planning for Law Firm Libraries



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INTRODUCTION

Strategic Planning within Private Law Libraries

Why do private law libraries need to develop a strategic plan? To put it in a nutshell: “the object of strategic planning can be stated in a phrase: to achieve competitive advantage.” (Marke, Sloane & Ryan, 2015, p.1-2). Although law libraries do not compete directly with one another, their parent organizations – law firms and corporations – do. (Marke, et al., p.1-2). For this reason, strategic planning has become one of the most important responsibilities and functions of library management.

The overall strategic planning process addresses four basic questions:

- 1. Where are we?**
- 2. Where do we want to be in 3-5 years?**
- 3. How will we get there?**
- 4. How will we measure our progress?**

The librarian’s role in the strategic planning process entails identifying the library’s mission, vision and objectives,

and working to develop policies, projects and programs to achieve these goals. Librarians are keen to develop initiatives and services that support the firm’s overarching vision, meet existing client demands, and simultaneously plan for future growth. Because the work of the library touches almost every aspect of the law firm business, librarians are uniquely positioned to develop strategic processes that incorporate the vision of the law firm across all departments and to streamline activities, services and information to implement this vision.



The Changing Legal Market

As a result of the changed economy and competitive marketplace, law firms have dramatically changed the way they conduct business. Here are some of the important trends in the legal market that affect law firms and their libraries:

- Streamlined legal services to reflect the new economic reality
- Client-mandated changes in the way firms charge for their services

- Increased collaboration and knowledge sharing
- Increased globalization of law firms and their clients
- Technological innovations in business and legal services

As the legal market becomes increasingly competitive, the pressures on library directors and staff to adapt to new business models increase as well. Expectations have changed in terms of the library's

effectiveness, technical skills and the ability to "do more with less." Successful librarians have adjusted the way they operate and developed new and cost-efficient ways to provide the same level of service. The strategic planning process enables a library to conduct a critical self-evaluation and apply changes that ultimately align it with the firm's strategic vision, changing industry trends, and clients' heightened expectations.

Strategic Alignment and the Benefit of Planning

As the founder of modern management, Peter Drucker famously said: "[t]here is nothing more wasteful than becoming highly efficient at doing the wrong thing." (Matthews, 2014). Economics and competition drive law firms to rethink their organizational efficiency and demand proof of value from major cost centers, such as libraries. The AALL Report on the Economic Value of Law Libraries emphasizes

the role of library directors in asserting their leadership by proactively implementing strategic processes that align with their organization's needs and expectations.

Changing how the library serves its constituents (attorneys, staff, and clients) improves the way the law firm conducts business and can help improve the firm's bottom line. Librarians have distinct

[Librarians] are the best evaluators of what information and resources the organization is lacking and have the skill sets to help the firm operate in a leaner fashion . .



insight into the information needs of the firm and of the legal industry as a whole. They are the best evaluators of what information and resources the organization is lacking and have the skill sets to help the firm operate in a leaner fashion by engineering more efficient workflows that help create a more intelligent organization.

Key strategic areas where librarians add distinct value within law firms include:

1

Budget/Contract Negotiation:

strategic cost reduction and cost recovery, optimizing library services, electronic resources management, and copyright compliance;

3

Business Development Research:

competitive intelligence, marketing support, extranet support, all geared toward growing the firm's business;



2

Knowledge Management:

intranet content development, expert database creation, current awareness promotion, social network development, and information security enhancement;

4

Non-Traditional Roles:

embedded researchers, risk management research, compliance, and legal project management;

5

Moves/Facilities:

reducing the library's footprint by transitioning from print to electronic resources.

The processes developed by librarians in response to changes in technology and business practices help the firm to remain competitive in the legal market and can assist in providing strategic pricing that clients now demand. The strategy developed by the library should be aimed at

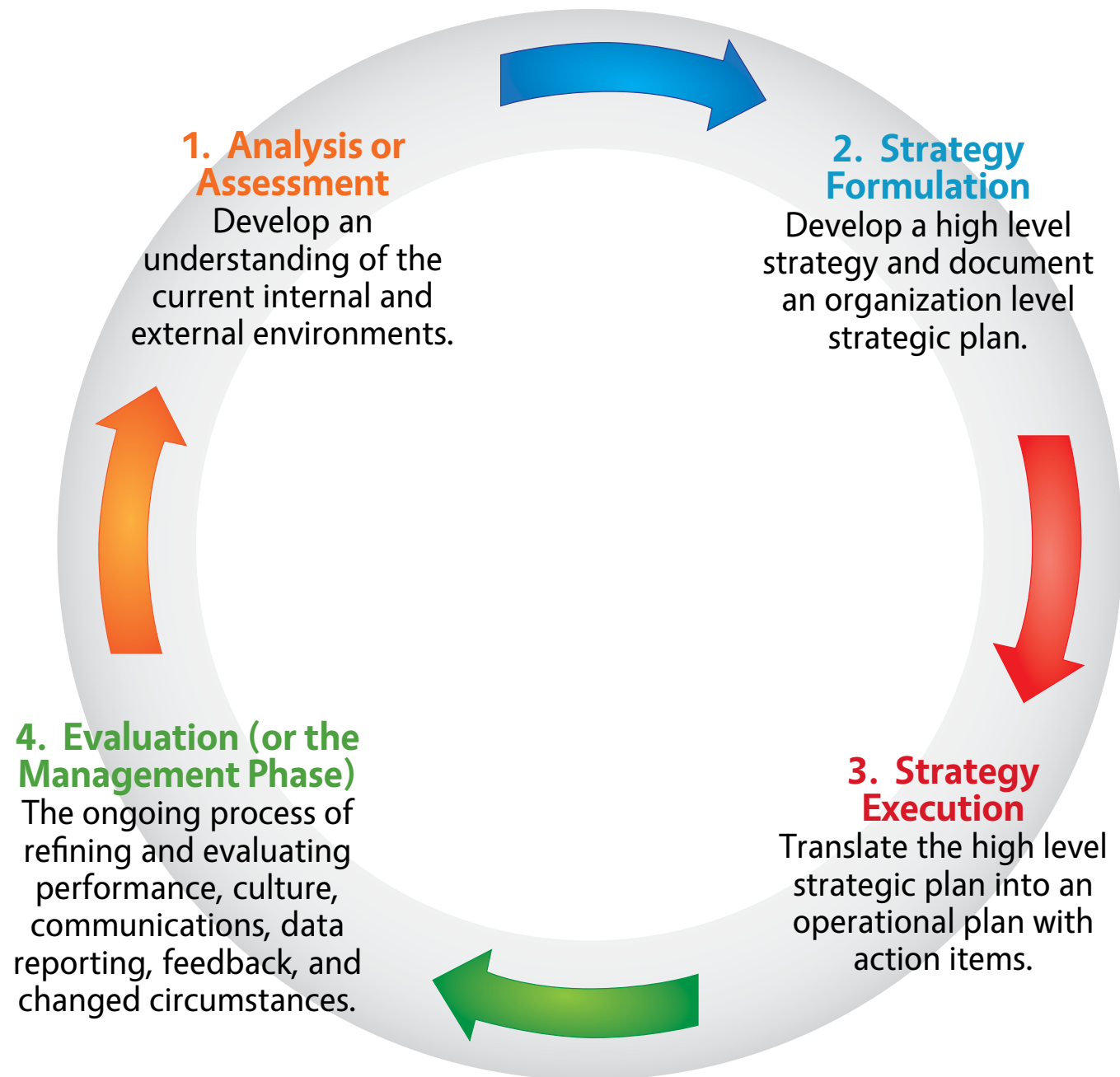
providing solutions to issues (e.g., information gaps, risk management, inefficient workflows) and capitalizing on untapped opportunities. The librarian's role continues to evolve in the changing legal market and it is imperative not only to identify, but also to anticipate the changing needs of

the firm through the process of strategic planning. It is important to remember "the end product of strategic planning is not so much to write a 'plan' as it is to change thinking and introduce a model in which ongoing decisions are made strategically." (Nedwek, 2014).



The Strategic Management Cycle

A successful strategic plan is one that is part of the strategic management cycle, which transforms a static plan into a system of planning activities. Strategic management ensures constant performance, evaluation and feedback that enables decision makers to evolve and adapt the plan to meet changing circumstances and needs. These are the four major stages that encompass the strategic management cycle:



PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING A STRATEGIC PLAN

Step 1 - Prepare to Plan

Identify the Team.

It is important to include library staff members from all aspects of library services. Some libraries may also consider engaging various key members within the law firm such as law firm administration, attorneys, marketing staff, and the technology department. Not only does this bring different perspectives to the planning process, it also presents an opportunity for librarians to demonstrate to those involved how the library can play a vital role in helping the firm set and reach its strategic goals. Additionally, including a broad spectrum of stakeholders helps establish the buy-in needed for implementation of the plan once it is developed. Because librarians' work touches every

aspect of the law firm business, librarians are in the perfect position to identify and include key members of the firm in the strategic planning process.

Develop the Plan Strategy.

Establishing effective approaches for collecting data and defining roles and responsibilities are key to the pre-planning stage. The strategy developed will vary for each organization and largely depend on organizational structure and culture. In some cases, libraries may decide to hire outside consultants to facilitate the planning process. Consultants inject an objective voice to the process and provide a broader view of industry trends. A list of library consultants can be found at

<http://www.libraryconsultants.org/>.

Develop a Timeline.

This timeline should identify action items for the process and clearly delineate objectives and deadlines. Dates for completing essential tasks, such as the development of a vision/mission statement, and completion of surveys, analysis reports, and implementation tasks should be included. It is advantageous for the entire planning process to conclude within six months to one year after the start of the process. Although timeframes will vary based on the organization, prolonging the planning process beyond the six month timeframe runs the risk of developing strategies from stale information.

Step 2 - Data Collection & Assessment: External & Internal Audits

Librarians are sharp observers of trends and risks within the legal profession, and as such, are well-positioned to develop a strategic plan that effectively responds to the overall needs of the law firm resulting from these trends and risks.

Strategic plans are most effective when they are developed from a clear understanding of the environment in which the law firm and library operate. During this phase, the current state of the library is assessed and analyzed against external factors that affect the library's role within the firm. Librarians are sharp observers of industry trends and risks within the legal profession, and as such, are well-positioned to develop a strategic plan that effectively responds to the overall needs of the law firm resulting from these trends and risks.

Examine the External Environment.

Identify and evaluate external

factors that affect the information and service needs of the law firm, such as:

1. Industry Trends, Practice and Competition.

How are attorneys working differently than in the past? What new demands do they face? How can the library help attorneys and the firm adapt to new billing structures? Clients are demanding more efficiency in legal services and law firms are being forced to operate in a leaner fashion. In this environment, how is the library helping to provide more efficient legal services? What are other libraries doing to address these new demands on their attorneys? Consider developing innovative training programs

that will instruct attorneys on utilizing resources for cost-efficient research; developing knowledge-based systems that provide guidance for frequently asked questions; or embedding researchers into specific practice areas. Here is a partial list of helpful industry resources:

- Annual Report on the State of the Legal Market — [Georgetown Law Center for the Study of the Legal Profession](#)
- [Ark Group Publications](#)
- ABA and state bar association reports
- ALM Surveys of Law Firm Economics

- Altman Weil's law firm surveys and reports including the Chief Legal Officer Survey
- Legal industry & technology blogs (e.g., [3 Geeks and a Law Blog](#), [Dewey B Strategic](#), [On Firmer Ground](#), [Law Firm Transitions](#), etc.)

- State of Digital & Content Marketing Survey

2. Changes in Technology.

Technology has profoundly changed the delivery of legal services. Consider changes in legal technologies and software, such as data protection, eDiscovery, litigation and transactional law software, business development and

knowledge management solutions, practice management and other cloud-based applications. How can/does the library leverage changes in technology to enhance services? Helpful industry resources to consult include:

- ILTA's Peer to Peer, White Papers and Surveys (including Legal Technology Purchasing Survey)
- ALM's Law Legaltech News
- ABA TechReport
- [ABA Legal Technology Resource Center](#)
- Legal technology blogs (e.g., [3 Geeks and a Law Blog](#), [Dewey B Strategic](#), [On Firm-](#)

er Ground, ABA Techshow, Above and Beyond KM, etc.)

3. Increased Globalization of Law Firms and Businesses.

Law firms are expanding internationally as more businesses develop operations outside of the United States. As law firms expand, consider how the library can support global operations by extending service hours, recruiting staff for international offices, or implementing virtual library services. Helpful resources include:

- Altman Weil's [The](#)

[Globalization of Law Firms](#)

- [Global Policy Forum](#)
- [Global Practice from the U.S. Perspective](#)

4. Organizational Culture.

Each firm has a distinct culture in which it operates. Librarians have their hands on the pulse of their firm's culture and are in the best position to tailor and/or implement solutions that will match it.

Examine the Internal Library Environment.

This process involves collecting data on current processes, in-

formation needs, perceptions and expectations of the library from a variety of individuals within the firm. The internal audit studies the preferences, habits and expectations of the patrons within the firm and examines the current state of the library against these expectations.

1. Data Collection Methods:

There are various methods used to collect data during the internal audit. The data collected should focus on both the expressed and the *unexpressed* needs of library patrons; therefore, the wording of the questions

demands careful attention. In some instances, various approaches might be considered to query different groups (e.g., a survey for attorneys versus a focus group for marketing specialists). Data collection methods include:

- Survey
- Focus groups
- Phone interviews
- Questionnaires
- Usage data reports

- Circulation statistics

2. Target Specific Information.

Questions should identify the following:

- Who is the main customer base in the law firm? (identify devoted users, sporadic users, indirect users, and non-users)
- What resources are used and not used?
- What services are used and not used?
- When are library services utilized?
- How often are library services utilized?
- How do patrons anticipate using the library in the future?
- What information needs are not currently being met by the library? (pinpoint frustrations with current library services)
- What is the preferred format for materials consulted by patrons?



Step 3 - Data Analysis

Once all of the information has been gathered from external and internal environmental audits, analyze the current state of the library.

Conduct a SWOT Analysis.

The "SWOT" analysis (Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats) provides a critical view of current library services and operations against the external and internal expectations. The data collected should assess the following:

1

Strengths?

Identify areas of success and praise identified from the data collected. What does the library do well? What do patrons rely on from the library? What were the main achievements? Where does the library stand out against other libraries in the industry?

3

Opportunities?

Where can the library utilize strengths and expertise to expand services and work more strategically to implement the firm's initiatives? How can the library work with vendors to incorporate more technology solutions for patrons? Identify non-user sentiments – determine why specific users seek information elsewhere and do not utilize library services. Are there ways to restructure services to assist them? Identify areas for cross-department collaboration.

2

Weaknesses?

Note any complaints about the library and library services. What could the library be doing differently to meet the needs of the firm? Are there areas where the library lacks expertise? Identify gaps in resources, expertise, and services.

4

Threats?

What is the library doing that it should stop doing or is not beneficial to the firm? What policies and constraints might negatively affect the library? Are there issues with vendors/pricing modules that adversely affect the library? How can you strategically manage financial and staffing constraints?

SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS

1. Main achievements
2. What does the library do well?
3. Areas of praise

WEAKNESSES

1. What are the common complaints from patrons and staff?
2. Lack of expertise
3. Weak marketing of services

OPPORTUNITIES

1. Additional training opportunities
2. Collaboration with other departments
3. Spearhead technology solutions
4. Better space utilization

THREATS

1. Financial constraints
2. Increasing costs of resources
3. Staffing constraints

Identify Key Areas of Focus.

After analyzing the data collected, develop key areas of focus, and consider the following:

1. Frequent customers.

Who utilizes library services the most? How are they utilizing library services? What is working well for them? What are they missing? How can the library provide what is missing? How can the library provide even better services for this group? Consider incorporating

specialized librarians into various practice groups or designating a competitive intelligence librarian.

2. Non-users.

Who in the firm is not using the library? If they are not using the library, what are they using? Why don't they use library services? What can the library do to provide services to these groups? Consider attending meetings to identify areas

where library services can be utilized or developed to meet the needs of these groups.

3. Services, Resources and Technology.

What services are performing well? What services do not get used? What resources continue to meet the needs of patrons and what resources need to be cut? Identify areas of opportunity for the library staff to utilize their expertise. Focus on a collection development strategy that incorporates the firm's goals and areas of focus.

Step 4 - Plan Development

The process of developing the strategic plan can begin once data is collected and analyzed, and key areas of focus are identified. The plan should take the information gathered from the environmental scans and identify goals and strategies that address the business needs identified. It is important that each of the goals directly aligns with a strategy or business driver of the law firm. In the end, the plan should establish where the library wants to go, identify how to get there, and determine a measure for success.

The following illustration depicts how the strategic plan begins with vision and mission statements that are utilized to focus the development of goals, strategies, and evaluation methods.



Start with a Vision Statement.

The vision statement should be structured in a way that identifies what the library wants to be or how it wants

to be identified within the law firm. The vision statement should outline the future possibilities for the library within the overall organization and ultimately become the guide

for actions, goals, policies and services developed toward the accomplishment of this vision. Below are sample vision statements from various law firm libraries:

Example 1

“We are vital to the firm’s success.

- We cultivate relationships that embed us in the firm’s work and enrich the quality of this work.
- We enable our colleagues to advance the firm’s knowledge.
- We stay current with developments and projects in the firm, and in the broader legal and information spheres.
- We lead innovative information projects to increase our colleagues’ efficiency so they can in turn better serve our clients.”

Example 2

“We will provide every attorney, client and staff member with the information resources they need while moving with the evolution of information access. The library will be:

- The first place to look for information – be it part of our collection, in print or available electronically.
- Customer Service oriented – where the ‘buck stops here’ and no request or question is turned away.
- High Profile – active and visible in supporting the needs of the firm.
- Online resource – a resource for utilizing all types of computer retrievable information.
- Flexible and Respected – has the competencies and flexibility to continuously adapt.”

Develop a Mission Statement.

The mission statement identifies why the library exists. It should identify who the customers are, what services will be provided, and how these services will be provided. This statement provides law librarians with the opportunity to exemplify the value that the library provides within the firm. Many libraries display the mission statement prominently on the library's intranet site and within the library.

Sample mission statements from various law firm libraries include:

"The mission of the library team is to provide the best connections to information needed by attorneys and staff, making a vital contribution to the quality of legal services delivered by the Firm."

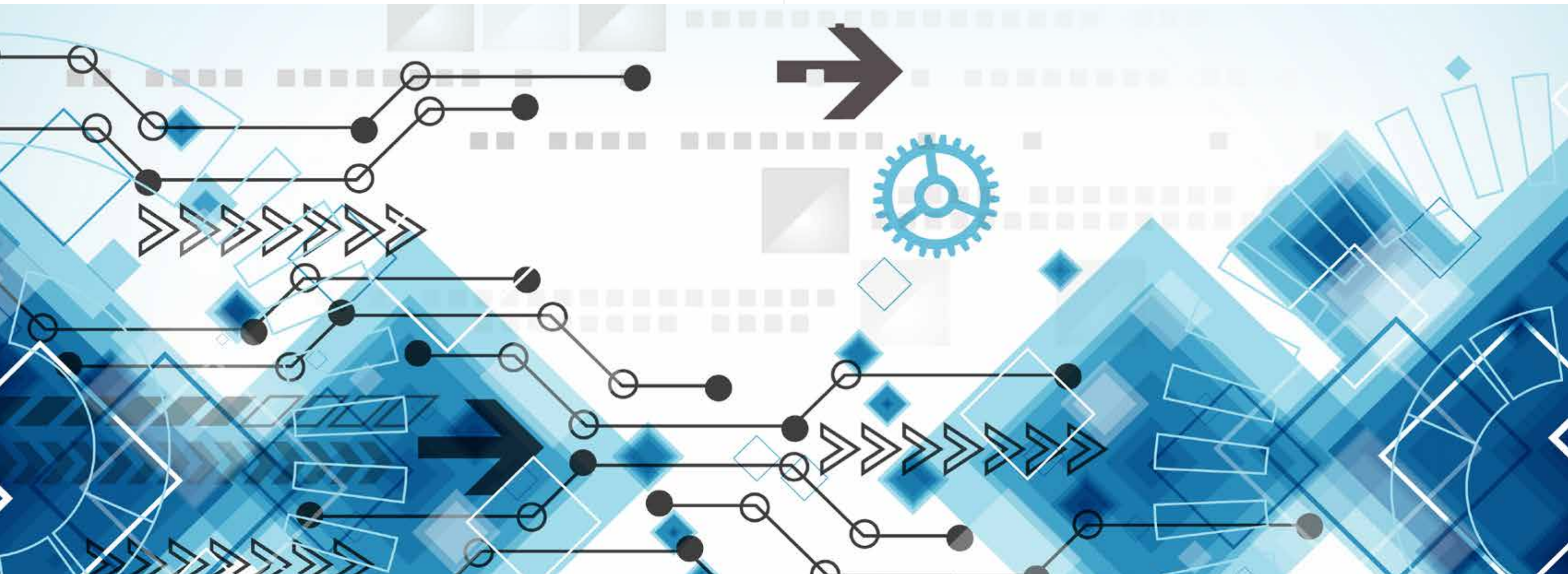
"The mission of the [law firm] InfoCenter is to meet the information needs of the firm by facilitating access to timely and accurate legal and business information in a cost-effective manner and sharing this knowledge proactively, advancing firm goals and objectives."

Sample mission statements from various law firm libraries include:

"Our mission is to provide timely, accurate, and cost-effective information to all [law firm] employees. While recognizing the varied needs of the Firm's individuals and departments, Knowledge & Research Services is committed to providing an environment that delivers a balance of traditional and high-tech materials, and excellent service."

"We provide high-quality legal information, resources and services to the firm, through in-depth research, knowledgeable training and resourceful problem solving."

"To enhance the practice of [the law firm] by providing information resources while anticipating and responding to the continuously changing information needs of the firm's practice groups. Making a commitment to excellence in the delivery and support of those resources. Leveraging appropriate technology and available resources in a professional, efficient, cost-effective manner."



Develop Goals.

Goals developed during the strategic planning process should be directly tied to the overall strategic initiatives of the firm and identify target levels of service. Goals should be S.M.A.R.T. — that is, they must be

- S** - Specific;
- M** - Measurable;
- A** - Attainable;
- R** - Realistic; and
- T** - Timely.

Formulate Objectives.

Objectives are the action items used to accomplish the goals. They are milestones to be achieved during the implementation of the strategic plan. Similar to the goals, objectives should be specific and provide a timeframe for completion.

Step 5 - Implementation: Putting the Strategic Plan into Action

The implementation phase addresses the “who,” “where,” “when” and “how” of reaching the goals and objectives of a strategic plan. It is a major phase in the strategic planning process that involves the entire organization. The implementation phase involves the following:

Specify Each Objective or Initiative with Each Strategic Goal.

Developing a workable strategic plan means dissecting each of the objectives and identifying the best strategy for achieving the objectives. The end product should be a document that defines short-term, concrete objectives leading to the achievement of strategic goals that is both easy to use and to monitor.

Prioritize the Objectives and Set a Realistic Timetable.

The timeframe for strategic plans is usually 3 - 5 years. Plan to implement some of the initiatives in phases based on a logical order and the plan’s priorities. It is common to develop an annual plan (sometimes called the operational plan or management plan), which includes the strategic goals, objectives, responsibilities and deadlines for completion within the coming year.

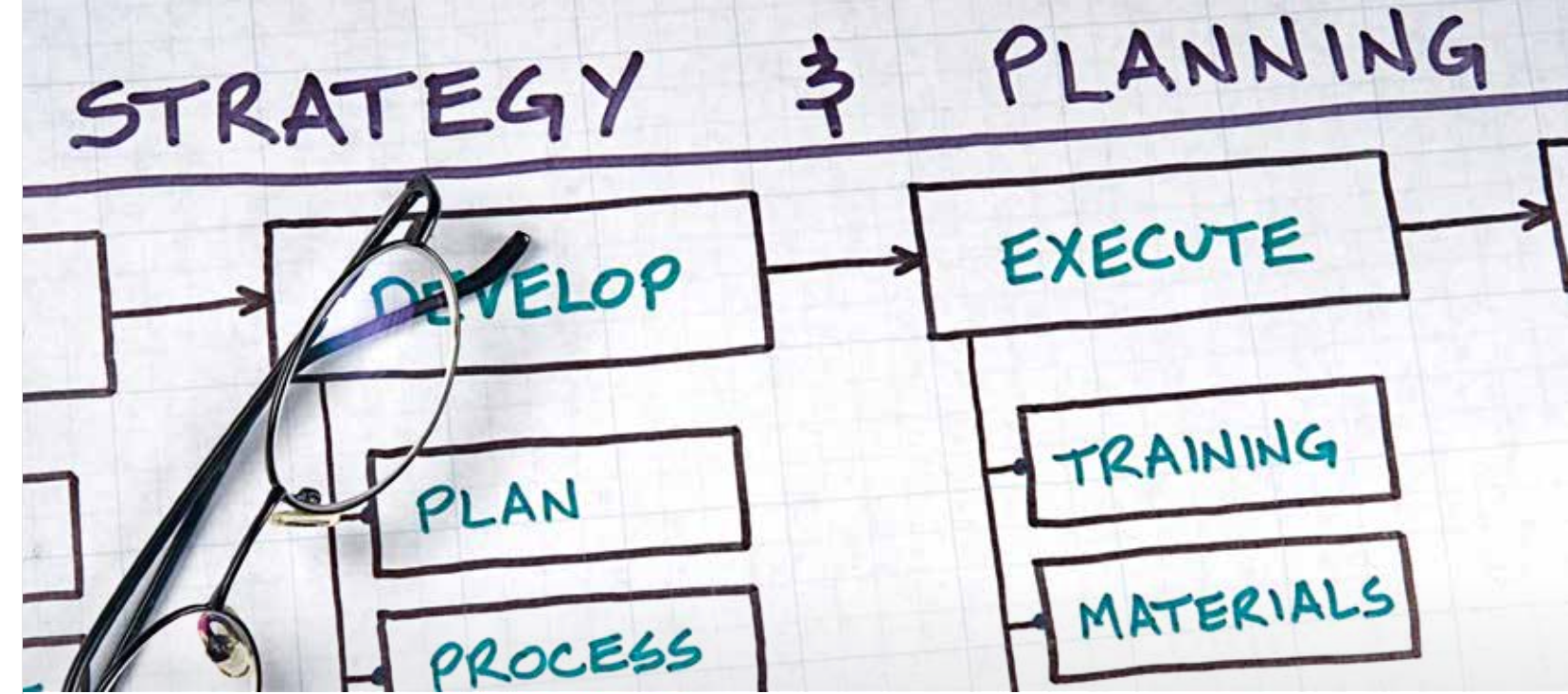
Allocate Resources for Implementation of Each Initiative.

Identify resources that are needed to implement each initiative or task, including personnel, technology, training, money, space, materials,

etc. Determine if a new group (working group, task force, or special committee) is needed to accomplish a particular initiative. Assign roles and responsibilities within the respective groups. Consider department interests, authority to commit resources, productivity record and leadership when selecting people for a working group or committee. Involve senior leaders in the selection process.

Manage Changes During Implementation.

Be aware that confusion and resistance to change may surface during the implementation phase. It is important to manage the changes and support organizational members in successfully executing those changes. Education,



communication, direct participation, and involvement of organizational members in the design and implementation phases are effective techniques in overcoming change resistance. Periodic reports, memos, group presen-

tations, surveys, or individual discussions can be very useful in keeping everyone informed of upcoming changes.

Many organizations use project management software to track the progress of individual

projects. Depending on the number and complexity of the projects, strategic planners should consider using such a program during the implementation phase.

Step 6 - Accountability & Evaluation: Develop a Checks and Balances System

Accountability.

Proper controls need to be part of the strategic plan to ensure that the plan is accomplished and the objectives are reached.

- Develop criteria to benchmark performance
- Identify performance standards

- Determine how to measure performance
- Compare actual performance against standard performance

- Apply corrective measures

Evaluation.

Review and evaluate the strategic plan every 3-5 years

to determine if it continues to meet the users’ needs. Needs fluctuate as priorities, economy, and operating methods shift.

Outcomes.

Identify outcomes from the plan. Increased customer satisfaction? Increased usage? Increased value? What worked? What did not work?



LIBRARY INNOVATION & THE FUTURE

Where are Law Libraries Headed?

Law libraries are rapidly evolving. Many libraries that have performed the environmental scans and internal audits described herein have revamped the way they conduct business in order to meet a need not currently filled within the law firm. In some libraries, this analysis revealed a need to change or cut certain aspects of the traditional library. For example, most libraries are scaling back on print materials, featuring more electronic resources, and utilizing smaller library spaces as places for collaboration. Instead of focusing on the materials and space offered, libraries are highlighting the value of services provided. Additional examples of trends in libraries are discussed below:

Centralization.

The moment the library moves away from being restricted to a space, it is presented with the opportunity to centralize

the services it offers. Centralization involves consolidating resources. It offers services in one less-costly physical location and at the same time offers the same services through multiple virtual venues. This provides an opportunity for libraries to streamline operations, negotiate contracts on a firm-wide basis, and eliminate redundancies in resources.

Collaboration/Integration with Other Departments.

Collaboration benefits the law firm and library alike because it effectively bridges information gaps and provides the library with opportunities to build a reputation as a knowledge hub, to develop relationships with key stakeholders, and to exemplify its value and expertise by contributing to firm-wide initiatives. Many libraries have successfully partnered with their marketing department, technology department, and practice groups to en-

hance workflow processes and improve efficiency. Conducting integral research for business development, creating user-centered intranet pages, maintaining integrated library systems, working to streamline workflows to assist the firm in providing more competitive fee arrangements, and working as subject matter experts within practice groups are all examples of ways librarians have utilized their expertise and skill sets to provide strategic growth and support to the firm. For a more detailed discussion, refer to the PLL Resource Guides titled [“New Roles for Law Libraries,”](#) [“The Library as a Business Development, Competitive Intelligence and Client Relations Asset for Law Firms,”](#) and [“Law Firm Library Intranets.”](#)

Embedded Specialists.

Embedded librarianship is a trending topic within the law library community. It has been described as “[i]ntentionally

building strong, collaborative work relationships with communities in our organizations.” (Striepe & Talley, p. 14). In the context of private law libraries, this involves focusing on specific groups or practice areas within the firm to build relationships, collaborate and customize services to fit the needs of the specific practice group.

Knowledge Management Initiatives.

Knowledge management (KM) initiatives are an effective way of collecting and sharing knowledge within the law firm. Sharing knowledge can foster collaboration among IT, marketing, attorneys, librarians and other staff, to improve client relations. It also secures valuable information for the future as attorneys retire and al-

lows them to easily pass down their forms, templates and experience to newer attorneys within the firm. In many firms, librarians play a key role in developing KM solutions that increase efficiency and improve workflows.

Library & Practice Group Portals.

Developing portals and intranet pages for the library



and practice groups within the firm can prove to be an effective solution to connecting users with resources. Linking internal resources, research guides, and other practice material on these portals/pages provides users with information specific to research topics that are relevant to various practice areas. They offer great jumping-off points in times when users need research assistance or are just looking

for fresh ideas. In particular, these can be of great assistance for new associates as well as attorneys, paralegals and legal assistants dabbling in a new area of law. Librarians can also use this portal to reach out to users with library contact information and link to the library's website and online catalog.

Risk Assessment/Management.

Librarians can assist the firm

in minimizing risks related to licensing restrictions, information quality and potential conflicts of interest. (O'Grady, 2015, p. 19-20). In some firms, library directors oversee the conflicts and records departments. Utilizing the knowledge, research and skills of librarians in these areas can help safeguard the firm and minimize risk.

Renaming & Rebranding.

Recently, there has been much discussion in the pri-

vate law library community regarding adopting names and brands that more accurately reflect the skills, value of services, and new role librarians play as strategic partners within law firms. The department name and branding should reflect both the overall services provided to the firm, and the library's alignment with the firm's goals. Consider what type of work the library performs, and what cost-effective solutions it provides to the firm. The new naming and branding efforts should be focused on presenting enhanced services to the users and enable them to connect the services with the new name. It is imperative to incorporate the firm's main objectives

into the department branding strategy. Overall, the process of rebranding is a complex, multi-faceted procedure and one that should not be rushed.

Other Customer Outreach Initiatives.

As user demand continues to evolve, so too should library services and spaces. Increasingly, libraries are transitioning to smaller spaces within their firm, and are identified more with services provided than by the space they encompass. Virtual libraries and services have become more commonplace and librarians are continually finding new and innovative ways to reach users. Many libraries are taking their services directly to the users at the point of need. To that end, some

libraries have created portable library spaces in various ways, such as:

- Reference services in the common areas and cafeterias;
- Using instant messaging systems for reference and training;
- Manning information tables during firm events;
- Hosting "open houses" on a regular basis;
- Conducting 10 minute "research breaks" to highlight specific resources; and
- Stopping by users' offices or walking the halls for on-the-spot reference assistance.



CONCLUSION

Strategic planning helps librarians maximize their contribution to the work product of law firms, increase the library's visibility and improve its value. It is a powerful business tool for law librarians who want to capitalize on in-depth knowledge about the firm's information

needs and contribute to the growth and sustainability of their law firm's practice.

A successful strategic plan will incorporate the firm's shared goals, is cyclical, and ultimately aims to provide the firm with a competitive advantage in the

marketplace. Whatever new directions the strategic plan proposes, they should be aligned with the goals of the organization. The real economic value of law librarians lies in their ability to positively impact the firm's business by providing quality legal services efficiently.

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