Law Library Audits by Bernadette M. St. John, J.D. ©

Steven Covey, the author of 7 Habits of Highly Successful People, says to start with the end in mind. So, I would suggest that you keep in mind that you are conducting an audit to save money, to streamline, to be sure that you have the resources that you truly need.

Audits can be conducted by: the law librarian, an outside agency, or by the attorneys. I propose the following eight steps in conducting a law library audit.

1). Ensure that your company /firm is getting the best deals from the publishers and vendors. I have found it effective to call every publisher and vendor and ask, "I am calling for XYZ firm. Are we getting the best deal on your publications?"

Quite often they will offer 10-30% off the contract price, just by asking. They may extend the discount to new offers. They may offer you free one month trials for online services or treatises. Here are some other ideas. I have found that some publishers may give you the online version of their publication either free or at an intro rate if you have the print copy.

I would also recommend doublechecking rates different departments in your company are being charged. It's possible that your corporate library is paying a different rate than the legal library, so check that out.

2). Request an updated standing order list from each publisher. Such a list is important because sometimes attorneys and staff have left the firm and taken your books with them, (sometimes inadvertently, sometimes not). It is also important because more and more often the publishers are sending out books to the firm that no one ever ordered. After reviewing the list and double-checking with the firm, I ask the publishers to stop sending unsolicited books. I also ask the attorneys and staff to place their orders through the library. This will cut down on multiple orders for the same book. Finally, having a standing order list helps answer the question about whether a particular book is needed. Perhaps the attorney(s) that ordered the book are no longer at the firm, yet these old orders continue to stay on standing order. Once it is determined that an item is no longer needed, communicate that to the vendor

3). Negotiate with the online vendors. Clean up user lists - so that you are maximizing flat rate contracts. I recently checked a Lexis password list for a client and found that twelve of the users on the current active password list no longer worked there and that however, some of them were still using the service. Also, I recommend that you track your online usage online. Most vendors offer this service free of charge. You can then communicate with individuals about effective search techniques if the online services are not being used in as cost effective manner as possible and additional training sessions can be crafted and offered. Furthermore, monitor whether client-matter numbers are being correctly entered, so that the online research costs may be expensed to clients.

4). Ensure that your resources are current. This is a liability issue. If your books are really seriously out of date, you can add labels to the book spines indicating that a particular series is no longer being updated. Otherwise, the source's currency is at issue.

5). Ensure that you are receiving what you ordered. Cross check against the line items in your budget. If you don't have a formal library budget in place, cross check against the publisher invoices. If there are no publisher invoices, cross check against the lists from the publishers.

6). Recommendations for new purchases and/or contracts. Are there any holes in the library collection? Talk to some of the firm's library users and get recommendations and comments about titles.

7). Training on online resources. Confirm what training is included in your contract. Negotiate to have unlimited training included in your contract. Give the vendors your "Wish List" of classes and request that there be one hour classes that will enable the attorneys to also get MCLE credit. Promote any classes and drop in hours that your firm library offers.

8). Wish list/concerns/comments and kudos from the attorneys, paralegals and staff Ask them what they would like to see added to the collection, what can be deleted, what can't they live with out, what could they handle accessing as an online subscription. Also, check to see if there are any pending moves for the library. For instance, if your library is looking at substantially less square footage in the near future, then moving some of the resources to online may be an easier sell.

Good luck and let me know how your audit goes.

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