

## TECHNOLOGY AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR LAW LIBRARIES

Michelle M. Wu\*

In a time when library resources are arguably some of the most utilized resources in their institutions, second only to the technology infrastructures that support their schools, library resources are also coming under more scrutiny. Technology can explain, in part, this contradiction. After all, even though online information is exploding, e-resources and technology are not always overtly connected with their providing libraries. Therefore, users increasingly disassociate these resources from their providers, translating into (1) a lack of awareness of other library resources—including librarians—available to assist them, and (2) a reduction of financial support for collections and staff in the mistaken belief that libraries are no longer used or needed. In this environment, where demand is greater but resources scarcer, libraries will encounter challenges and undertake drastic changes to continue to meet user needs. This summary seeks to highlight only a few possible directions or necessary advances for libraries and related industries in the coming years.

***Collections.*** With the [ABA Standards](#) shifting to allow reliable access instead of ownership, libraries will develop more robust consortia and shared digital collections to control individual library costs but expand access to diverse sources. Consortia already exist, but they have been limited in utility when handling physical resources due to costs (storage, retrieval, and delivery) and time constraints. Digital resources have fewer inherent limitations and can accommodate broader communities. One proposed model is described [here](#). The success, or failure, of this enterprise will depend equally on higher education's willingness to test the limits of fair use and on vendors' sales and licensing practices.

---

\* © 2015, Michelle M. Wu. All rights reserved.

**Legal information vendors and cost allocations.** Vendors are moving increasingly towards licensing instead of sales, as the former produces a continual revenue stream. They are expected to continue explorations into different markets and revenue tactics including: licensing legal information and related tools directly to users, and testing consumer tolerance for various licensing models (e.g., use-based restrictions). Libraries in turn will seek to minimize continuing costs, or unduly invasive or unfair licensing terms, by becoming publishers and distributors of some academic works.

**Library systems.** Currently, libraries pay a premium for databases, as fees cover not only access to content but also the research and design necessary for an interface. As each vendor has a proprietary interface, libraries are arguably paying multiple times for the same function (i.e., user interface), [producing poor search results for their users](#). Vendors should migrate to licensing only the data and providing a field manual for their data structures. Libraries could then pay only for content, with standards allowing for any number of commercial interfaces to access the data. Libraries would have to map fields if the vendor uses non-standard formats, but this could be programmed by a single entity and shared with other libraries subscribing to the same data. Further, instead of the standard integrated library system and discovery platform, libraries will partner with the technology industry to build interfaces/search engines to effectively search all of the data we own and license. [That interface would allow the user to search simultaneously all libraries at which she has borrowing privileges, duplicate results, and limit searches to meet individual needs](#). A combination of artificial intelligence and specialized crowdsourcing (by catalogers) will establish relationships between items, linking footnotes and references to their full texts, allowing a researcher to follow a path to conclusion without interruption.

**Big data.** Libraries will spend more time researching with unstructured data such as digitized, unindexed archival materials. As equipment becomes less expensive, digitization both by experts and non-experts will increase, magnifying issues of duplication, version control, authenticity, comparability, and accuracy. In this area, mediated searching will return as a

popular option, as the searcher would need to be familiar not only with the data sources but industry-specialized queries and standards to effectively extract, analyze, and selectively discard the information obtained. Research instruction will continue to become more specialized and hands-on to educate students and faculty on the nuances of searching different types of data effectively.

***Customization, personalization, and loss of privacy.*** As users demand greater customization of research queries, requiring the cross-communication of platforms/services and the sharing of personal preferences, control over privacy will largely be lost to libraries. Services will have built-in data collection functions, and vendors will have more access to [usage information](#). Users will have to assume greater responsibility for the protection of their own privacy, and libraries will spend more time educating them on potential privacy issues and consequences.

***Preservation of machine-readable materials.*** Microforms, A/V materials, and digital resources share a common feature: they are not readable by the unaided human eye. As technology changes, materials must be migrated from one format to the next to ensure access and guard against image/sound degradation. To minimize duplication of effort, the conversion of materials would be done in bulk and stored in multiple locations, at least one of which would be offline for security purposes. Where materials are licensed and not owned, libraries will continue to rely on [ventures](#) like [CLOCKSS](#) to ensure access to the data during catastrophic events.

***Preservation of physical materials.*** As e-reader technology and copyright interpretations evolve, most content will be digitized or born digitally. Physical books will still be retained, for a multitude of reasons, only two of which are discussed here. First, the physical form still conveys information that cannot be conveyed digitally, and second, “last copies” will be necessary for occasional verification of digitized materials. However, most physical materials will be consolidated and stored in duplicate at a few locations across the country. Coordination between regions or multiple locations would ensure the preservation of a “last copy” despite natural or man-made disasters.

In short, technology will continue to shape information content and format, requiring further adaptation by libraries in their services, their conceptions of collections, and their methods of patron outreach.