



Courthouse libraries association's web app called 'a win-win' for lawyers

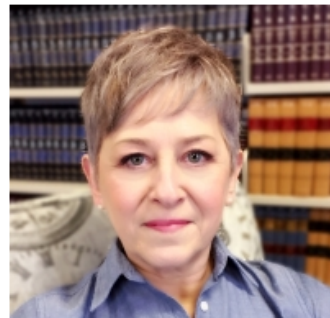
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The Ontario Courthouse Libraries Association (OCLA) is taking the provision of access to information to the next level by developing a mobile-friendly web app to assist lawyers using courthouse libraries across the province.

"There's always this talk about access to justice," said Christiane Wyskiel, law librarian at the Brant Law Association and past chair of the OCLA, stressing that better prepared lawyers means better service for clients.



Christiane Wyskiel, Brant Law Association

"I think if we offer them the resources then they'll practise better. They'll give their clients the best possible lawyering and it's a win-win at that point," she added.

The OCLA's [web app](#), launched on Nov. 30, lists the 48 courthouse libraries and, in great detail, breaks down everything the library has to offer.

"There's location-based mapping, so if they're heading to a location in the north they can check how to get there,"

explained Wyskiel, noting that there's also weather icons for each location, so lawyers will know if they're driving into inclement weather.

"There's information on robing rooms, parking information, printing, faxing, photocopying costs, whether there's lounge facilities available to the lawyers, what kind of electronic resources do the libraries provide," she added.

The web app also details hours of operation, since some libraries are not staffed fulltime, as well as how to access the courthouse library. Wyskiel emphasized that some of these resource centres are next to the judge's chambers and require access via keypad codes. The site also lists "value-added" benefits.

"Perhaps they've forgotten their tabs or their robe?" said Wyskiel, noting that the site will say whether robes are available onsite to borrow.

"Is there Wi-Fi available or courtroom aids? For example, does someone need a screen because they're doing a presentation to the judge? Or a skeleton? The other thing we thought was important was access to the catalogue. Some lawyers, especially criminal lawyers, have preferences with the respect to the *Criminal Code* that they like to use. So, prior to heading to that library they can check to see if the library has to borrow in court, say, *Tremear's*, or *Martin's*, or Gold's *The Practitioner's Criminal Code*," she explained.

The web app also has built in call and e-mail buttons for each library as well as the name of the law librarians, so lawyers are just a click away from being in touch with resource experts.

The creation of the site was inspired by encouragement from the Federation of Ontario Law Associations (FOLA).

"If you were to come up with something innovative as an association, FOLA would award a prize of up to \$5,000," said Wyskiel, adding that although the OCLA was not eligible for the prize, it took it as a call to action.

Wyskiel said she wanted the OCLA to pool its knowledge and showcase, not only to FOLA, but to the Law Society of Ontario that "we're a progressive organization and maybe find a better way to serve the lawyers of Ontario. That's how the idea was born."


The process to create the web app started in October 2016, as Wyskiel was stepping down from her position as OCLA chair. She decided to lead the project, and with the help of a developer and input from other librarians, the site was built bit by bit.

Assistance came from Betty Dykstra, at the York Region Law Association, and Jennifer Walker and Brenda Lauritzen, of the County of Carleton Law Association.

Librarians are innovators, Wyskiel said, adding they're "constantly seeking out opportunities and we try and be future-oriented. I think that's really at our core."

"Also, as librarians, we always put our user's needs first. That's something that, inherently, every librarian does. We go that extra mile. And I think that if we see that in ourselves, then we can take our organizations to brand new heights and show our funders we are innovative. We're the leaders," she stressed.

Wyskiel hopes that as lawyers become more familiar with the site, the OCLA will get more feedback and be able to improve the app.



"I don't think this is ever going to be static. We'll probably always look to innovate the app, add other features," she said.

Instructions on how to add the web app to your mobile homepage can be read [here](#).