

LEADER PROFILE SHAPING THE FUTURE

Marketing is more than just a legal information industry buzzword, according to incoming Chapter Professional Development Award Jury Chair Lucy Curci-Gonzalez; it's something librarians have been doing all along—and it's the best way to shape the field's future.



LUCY CURCI-GONZALEZ

- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
- THE NEW YORK LAW INSTITUTE
- NEW YORK, NY

For Lucy Curci-Gonzalez, becoming a law librarian was literally a family affair.

Her great aunt worked as a librarian at a medical center in Queens. Another aunt, her mother's sister Cecily,

was also a librarian, serving as the *Los Angeles Times*' library director. Her parents were attorneys.

Curci-Gonzalez had contemplated going to law school until her junior year of college, when she started working as a part-time student clerk at the Brooklyn Kings County Supreme Court Law Library.

"I had been working in my college library when I got the job at the courthouse library," she says. "Doing the

research, working with the public, and with attorneys—I just loved it."

After pursuing an MS in library science at Columbia University—her Aunt Cecily's alma mater—Curci-Gonzalez worked as a catalog, interlibrary loan, and reference librarian at state court, law school, corporate legal department, and federal government agency law libraries in New York City, including the Federal Reserve Bank of New York.

QUICK HITS WITH LUCY CURCI-GONZALEZ



iPhone or Android?

iPhone

e-books or print? I'm somewhere in the middle.

Text or phone call?

I find calling better because texting feels like I'm too limited; but it depends on what I'm calling about.

Did you upgrade to Windows 10?

Not here, but in my previous position I did.

Phone order or GrubHub?

GrubHub is my friend.

Favorite type of take-out?

It depends; but anything greasy.

Scrabble or Words with Friends?

I tend not to play a lot of games. When I'm on my iPad, I'm reading or checking email. But I used to work for a firm that represented Scrabble.

Favorite app? Electronic banking; I like that I can take a picture of a check and deposit it. I also like to read the *New York Times* app online.

staffing, and outreach issues—getting the right materials to the right person at the right time for the right price—are all very much the same. I really think we've got more in common than most think.

There's no difference between a demanding, high-profile dean or professor than a judge or managing partner. Law school librarians still have to do marketing to support their dean and the school's recruiting; they still have to support the business of professors going out there and finding hot topics to write about. We've always been doing competitive intelligence. Has it gotten much more sophisticated? Have law firms been canaries in the mine, in terms of that process? Yes, but we're all in the same boat.

When did the New York Law Institute (NYLI) start offering materials online?

In the past five years, NYLI has moved very strongly into electronic resource delivery. The decision was made to provide resources that were needed nationwide, even though they were sitting here in New York. That's the way we needed to go. We couldn't be a solely brick-and-mortar institution; we had to provide services to the entire legal community.

The process of adding information that is available online is still ongoing. Our director of information technology—Ellyssa Valenti (Kroski)—who recently won AALL's 2014 Joseph L. Andrews Legal Literature Award for a book she edited titled *Law Librarianship in the Digital Age*—is leading the effort.

Our goal for the conversion is to have a good, responsible mix of materials. Google Scholar has some of our materials; some rare books go all the way back to colonial New York.

Who comprises your main audience?

We're a nonprofit, with a pretty lean staff of seven, including myself. We do

Since January 2016, she has served as executive director of the New York Law Institute (NYLI), a membership library with a collection of more than 300,000 volumes.

An active American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) member, Curci-Gonzalez participates in the Legal Information Services to the Public Special Interest Section (LISP-SIS), Online Bibliographic SIS, Private Law Librarians & Information Professionals SIS, Research Instruction & Patron Services SIS, and the Technical Services SIS. She is also a member of the Law Library Association of Greater New York.

We recently spoke with the Brooklyn native—whose 23-year-old daughter is currently considering attending library school—about the challenges law librarians face, her famous first co-worker, and how marketing can help librarians enhance their value proposition.

How did you initially enter the field?

My first job, in the Brooklyn Supreme Court, was across the street from my school. I will be honest, my father worked in the building, and that's how I heard about it. I worked there with [current New York] Governor Cuomo—known to me as Andy. I went to high school with his sister in Queens. His father was on the board of directors at the library and so he worked in the library, filing, with me.

Has the executive director position been a significant change from your previous positions?

I think the challenges are the same. My career is a little bit unique among the vast majority of AALL members. I've worked at most of the major types of law libraries, at some point. Having had that diversity in my career made me realize that a lot of the budgeting,

not necessarily serve the general public. We're a government depository and membership library, so that tends to be public lawyers, law firm librarians, other librarians, and paralegals.

We have more than 150 members. Occasionally, we have accounting firms, but mostly corporate legal departments and law firms are our biggest business right now. We even have some European firms with New York offices and American firms with overseas offices using our electronic resources.

Do many members stop by your physical location?

We get a couple every day. We want to make that available to people. And we've got our regulars, including one law firm located in the building; they'll come across the hall and grab something. We tend to get more visitors online these days.

What's a typical day at the office?

When I arrive in the morning, I check to see what questions we've received, meet with my staff, and then I might be looking at new postage meters. I could be on the phone with our broker about insurance or with the building about a problem with a lock. Some days, I can be deeply involved in dealing with a vendor, looking at a contract; others, I could be doing bookkeeping, or backing up staff doing research. It's very varied because in the end, as executive director, I'm running a small business that happens to be a library.

I do a lot of marketing of webinars and hosting training webinars and phone calls; which takes up a lot of my time. We've always been out there marketing ourselves. As an executive director, that's much more a part of my job; it's actually part of my job description.

The NYLI has served the legal community since 1828, despite a fire and having to move several times. What challenges does it currently face?

[Law firms] used to be able to say, 'Oh, get rid of that because the firm has

Westlaw,' but what if the firm says you can't have LexisNexis and Westlaw, and you're just left with one? We're trying to match where we can fill in holes effectively. Normally, we're talking to the librarian. They hear that kind of conversation [about reducing resources] when they go to their financial people.

Are there any other industry-wide challenges you've seen lessen or increase in the past decade?

Librarians have always done competitive intelligence and marketing and training, but there is pressure to continue to provide those services in a more sophisticated way—things like, 'How much of an online presence do I need, how much physical space do I need?' It's just about continuing to do it at a higher level and getting credit for it. I don't know a law firm librarian who survived not doing those things.

To drive home the value libraries provide, librarians need to keep their technical skills honed and really be aware of the business that they're part of, whatever unit of the legal industry they're in. Continuing education is also important. I'm an AALL geek and think its programming is rising to the occasion.

What basic skills should law librarians who are just starting out possess?

That's a tough one, because there are fewer and fewer firms that are willing to do training. Some of it is to do as many internships as you can, get some work experience—a lot of what I look for is someone who has a wide variety of work in their background, because in the legal industry, you never know what you're going to need. I look for the generalist who can focus, is willing to learn and adapt, and has written and verbal skills.

Soft skills have become more important because the library—which was never really a place, but more of a function—has become much more integrated. You've got embedded librarians working in marketing. The

way you communicate, how you use email and voicemail and text messaging; you have less time and because of that, it's more important to be more precise, clear, and on point.

What changes do you anticipate in the legal information management field in the next 5 to 10 years?

If I could figure that out, I would make a lot of money! I think it's going to be much more integrated into the legal practice, and more involved in big data and analysis. I think it's going to be much more involved in presenting data, in teaching and providing the answers. What do law firms sell? They sell answers. In legal information, we have to provide the answers.

The days of the data dump where a young attorney has time to ferret all that information out are done. Realize you're part of the business of law, and try to make your management aware that you are, so they give you the information and autonomy to act.

Any other advice you'd give industry professionals to help them prepare for the future?

Be as professionally involved as possible. We all get by with a little help from our friends. Regularly talk to vendors and colleagues about technology trends, benchmarking—just being able to reach out to someone informally for some advice is so helpful.

I've often thought that even though I didn't go to law school, I really should have gotten an MBA. That kind of education—anyone who really understands business trends or business management trends, and can speak intelligently and bring technical skills into a firm and know about Lean Six Sigma—those people are valuable.

What do you think your future, as executive director, will involve?

I'm still learning stuff, and that's wonderful. In this profession, it's not so much that I don't know everything—because I don't—but I know how to find out about it. Something new is always presenting itself, every day. ■