

OSALL

Organisation of SA Law Libraries

"OSALL aims to link and support everyone interested in Law Librarianship in South Africa"



NEWSLETTER

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OSALL

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Editorial

The first newsletter of the year has unfortunately taken a while to appear. My apologies to our loyal readers, however the newsletter is back in a fresh, new jacket. By now you have probably noticed that the OSALL website also has a new look and as everything that is added to the website is tweeted you can now also follow OSALL on Twitter. The name is OSALLSA.

The Editor of the newsletter attended an OSALL meeting in Cape Town on the 15th March, a rather auspicious occasion as OSALL members in Cape Town meet infrequently. The presentation by Juta Senior Editor, Kallie Pauw, on the processes, procedures and practice relating to the making of laws was most informative. A special thank you to Juta and all who were involved in making this meeting possible.

The November 2010 newsletter included an article by Danielle Botha on the intricacies of loose-leaf filing. This time around Thirusha Naidu of LexisNexis lets us have the editor's perspective on loose-leaf filing. Paula Rainha of the Southern Africa Legal Information Institute (SAFLII) alerts us to the power of collaborative effort when trying to trace the elusive or obscure documents and SAFLII's plans to assist in this regard.

Loyal columnists Mary Bruce and Nico Ferreira are also back. Mary comments on the impact of new technologies in our lives and in the workplace, whilst Nico keeps us up-to-date on latest legal publications.

Enjoy the read!

Regards

Diana

News

A TRIBUTE TO PAT FARR

By Lynette Davis
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A long-time member of OSALL, Pat Farr, passed away peacefully on 6 December 2010. She had been living with her daughter Gillian Leigh and husband on the KwaZulu-Natal south coast since 2007 and had recently celebrated her 90th birthday. She is survived by her son, daughter, grand-daughter and two great-grandsons.

The OSALL committee have asked me to pay tribute to Pat in the newsletter. I had known her for over thirty years and she was in a class by herself. Pat was a person who faced many challenges in her life and overcame them. She was devoted to her family and friends. She was resourceful, kindly and optimistic. She enjoyed the small but important things in life; and foremost she had an amazing sense of humour.

This special lady started her working life as a teacher. Eventually she commenced a library career in the University of the Witwatersrand library system where she worked in various sections, but most importantly in the law library and the government publications department. She was a real grass-roots person, gaining satisfaction from tasks well done such as efficiently filing sets of Butterworths statutes.

Pat set an example to other colleagues in the law library field. She was always prepared to help and be obliging. I well remember the many evenings she spent with me, meticulously checking the proofs from Juta of my subject sequence to the Index to Volumes 71-89, 1954-1972 of the South African Law Journal.

In particular, we honour Pat as a loyal supporter of OSALL right from its inception. Her belief and participation in the organisation helped to move it along a co-operative and creative path. She was always there to provide moral support. She was proud to have been one of the start-up members of OSALL; and felt she had been privileged to belong for so many years.

EDITORIAL PERSPECTIVE ON LOOSE-LEAF FILING

By Thirusha Naidu
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Immediately after graduating from university, I entered the professional work environment as a junior editor at LexisNexis. During my years of study I had become accustomed to the use of textbooks and in my spare time I took to either a book or magazine. So you can imagine

my astonishment at learning that my first task in training as editor was to file a loose-leaf. What? Up until such point I was a loose-leaf virgin and had never heard of this form of print product before. I was given a brief run-down of the Instruction Sheet, probably more famously known as the Control Sheet. At first I did not appreciate the value of this (usually about 4-6 pages) document until I was faced with my first (of many) filing dilemma.

Here was this matte red, brand spanking new plastic divider tab with the title "Table of Statutes" which had accompanied the service issue that I had just completed filing. Panic stricken, and by some sort of divine intervention an old pearl of wisdom handed down to me by one of my high school teachers popped into my head, "read through the instructions carefully and twice if you have to until you understand what is being asked of you!" Sure enough after reading through the Control Sheet again, beginning with the LexisNexis logo on the first page, I reached the neat little box above the title "Table of Statues" which said: "Table of Statues Guide Card to be inserted here before page Stat-1". Thankfully, all that was required to rectify my filing mishap was to insert the guide card as indicated.

However, after 2 years of working as an editor and updating numerous control sheets, I quickly realised that it wasn't always that simple. Thus, the two most important and vital aspects of efficient and successful loose-leaf filing are an accurate control sheet and clear instructions on how the Issue being filed is going to affect the layout of the binder. In the end, this is what every editor aims or should aim to achieve with every service issue that is sent to print to ensure pain-free filing!

THE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

By Paul Rainha
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At a very enjoyable breakfast with some OSALL members we were merrily discussing how research requests nowadays are often vague, whilst ironically requiring very detailed and self-explanatory

answers. I ventured that library clients don't need a librarian but rather an [oracle](#), a source of wise counsel or prophetic opinion even if they cannot handle oracular replies like "I have e-mailed you '1919 133 LT 643 CA'".

However, often enough, queries are quite clear but the answer is simply not on your real or virtual bookshelf. If you have ever been asked things like “I am looking for a public policy formulated in 1920/1921 concerning monetary policy” or “Can you please find the latest DRC Mining Act?” you know what we mean. You peruse your catalogue, check all online paid subscriptions, SafLII and (yes) Google and the answer does not seem to be there or it seems to be written in French. Whilst lamenting all the money you spend on subscriptions and blaming yourself for all those French classes you skipped in high-school you e-mail Osall and in no time you get the magical e-mail with the document you needed. You marvel at the power of your network in action and go back to business as usual until the day when you will again contact your network to ask for or to give advice. Maybe next time it will be you sending that DRC Mining Act to someone else. But what if you had forwarded the difficult-to-obtain document to SafLII?

Indeed the power of collaborative effort in our online world is unbeatable and our aim at SafLII is to pool individual and network knowledge in and about Southern Africa and serve an increasingly large community of users, professionals and citizens. Amongst many other things, we at SafLII will be working this year on assessing our website and workflows and the needs of our users so that we can better serve them. We are sure your needs will involve adjectives like current, logic, organized, simplified, smart, and “in English, please”.

However the first thing we need is what we call raw data, as much as we can get or as close as possible to being exhaustive. This is an extraordinarily difficult task if we do not convince as many individuals and organizations to contribute to our common cause. We will work hard on improving our relationship with the official actors. However, we will be immensely richer with every single contribution we receive from each one of you out there.

We will be sending a tiny little survey soon so please start thinking about what would be the SafLII of your dreams and write it down so that you can click and answer as soon as the survey arrives. What countries do you search more often? What is that one (or other) thing which we could add to the website that would make a difference to your life? What made you cringe when you were searching on SafLII? What South African materials do you find systematically difficult to get? What do you have and what can you give to the advancement of free legal information?

These are just a few sample questions to get you started. We know how much you all love SafLII so don't be shy in slating us. We don't mind if you speak your mind!

If you have a lot to say before or after the survey please e-mail us at info@saflii.org.

Thanking you for your unrelenting support and in advance for your collaboration.

The SafLII team

NEWS FROM OUR MEMBERS

Mbali Makhanya joined Shepstone & Wylie in Umhlanga.

Lucky N. Mosia-Xaba joined the Alastair Kerr Law Library at Rhodes University.

Dotting the “i” and Crossing the “t”

WHEN A FRACTION OF DISTRACTION CAUSES BETTER ACTION

By Mary Bruce
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2011 is already feeling well-worn and I'm sure many of us are satisfied with how productively the year has started. Of course working at top speed doesn't always allow time for exploration and experimentation on the software front, but often the fact that new and improved ways of doing old tasks pass by can be ascribed to our personal comfort zones. More frustrating and frequently voiced are the effects of silicone ceilings dictated by the IT teams who control our computer-related environments.

This column will refer to two articles that look more closely at why employers might do well to reconsider their policies in some cases and whether a particular one of our requirements is justified on the other hand.

Most importantly, IT policies are essential business tools and their impact should not be minimised. Their purpose is generally to protect the assets of the business and disregarding them could result in incalculable losses. All of us are likely to be aware of, or have personally experienced, downtime as a result of virus activity. A few years ago a number of law firms had to close their doors for up to three days while their networks were cleaned and restored. The financial losses alone would have been significant.

While we would all like to think we are sufficiently computer-savvy not to be caught by obvious means, think how many of our colleagues and friends have forwarded emails offering cellphones or other new and shiny temptations if the messages are forwarded to twenty or more other people; our mail-servers are bombarded daily with spam from banks, Miriam Akaba reincarnated as Harris Johnson from the Sudan, marketers, apparent refunds and so on. Quite often we receive copies of these messages from the people we

least expect it from: those who are online most days of the week and could reasonably be expected to know better.

More subtle is the threat posed by misuse of, for example, social media. Cases involving careless comments implicating employers or slanderous posts are frequently reported in the media. And, of course, loss of productivity has to be considered.

It is apparent why employers need to protect their assets and reputations. As far as IT teams are concerned, they are required to adhere to and apply policies just as the rest of the workforce and resisting will be counterproductive. However, I have frequently found that a reasonable knowledge of any service or product that we would like to use outside the existing facilities allows for rational motivation and, mostly, results in approval to try it out.

On the downside, Manjoo's article¹ voices the concern that arbitrary restrictions "infantilize workers" as they "foster resentment, reduce morale, lock people into inefficient routines and kill our incentives to work productively". He refers to a case study conducted by the University of Melbourne that tested whether having access to the Web reduced productivity by comparing two sets of workers. The group that had access were 9 percent more productive although taking short breaks to go online before continuing with their work. The conclusion is that "distractions can be good for the mind", doodling in meetings being a comparison.

A valid suggestion is that IT departments work harder to protect their networks by educating users rather than relying primarily on blocking access to useful resources.

On a similar but different note is Jeff Jarvis' more light-hearted take on whether Twitter is a distraction from what we should be doing². His references to the effects of our initial exposure to the Web and browsing, TV and even books, are valid reasons to reconsider bias against social media. The euphoria and commitment that come with the discovery of these facilities wear off and they each slot into a rational, appropriate and sustainable role in our lives. While we undoubtedly still burn the midnight oil occasionally over an unputdownable book, would we really say that reading is counterproductive to our lifestyles and should be curtailed? Not likely.

Jarvis refers to Elizabeth Eisenstein's *Divine Art, Infernal Machine*, specifically how "triumphalists" and "catastrophists" responded to the advent of the printing press. Read the article, maybe the book, but let this quote suffice for now: ". . . the very multitude of [new books] is hurting scholarship, because it creates a glut, and even in good things satiety is most harmful". The minds of men "flighty and curious of anything new" are lured "away from the study of old authors". "

Almost as interesting as the article are some of the comments posted below (a prime example of the benefits of Web 2.0 in the interchange of ideas):

"If one has faith in humanity, one tends to see new tools as enabling; if one has little faith, the tools are crippling" - Miki Chan

"You have done what few are willing or capable of doing to these discussions . . . apply Context" - Tim Pearson

"A tool is either useful in a given situation or it is not. There is no right or wrong or good or bad to it. They are only tools, waiting to be used by those who need them" - Tom

"No information is instantly available, omnipresent, and massive in scope. If you don't agree, do an experiment. Cancel your mobile phone. Nothing better illustrates how modern technology has exploded in distraction potential than it" - Dave D

"The sound of old media dying" - Jonathan

I'm going to end this column with one of those comments:

"Industrial Age workers needed to manage their time. Information Age workers need to manage their attention".

Opinions expressed in this column are my own and not necessarily those of my employer.

Please send suggestions and contributions for future columns to mary@lawsoc.co.za and/or d.riley@bowman.co.za

¹ *Unchain the office computers! : why corporate IT should let us browse any way we want / Farhad Manjoo.*

25 August 2009
<http://www.slate.com/id/2226279/pagenum/all>

² *The distraction trope / Jeff Jarvis. February 2011*
<http://www.buzzmachine.com/2011/02/24/the-distraction-trope/>

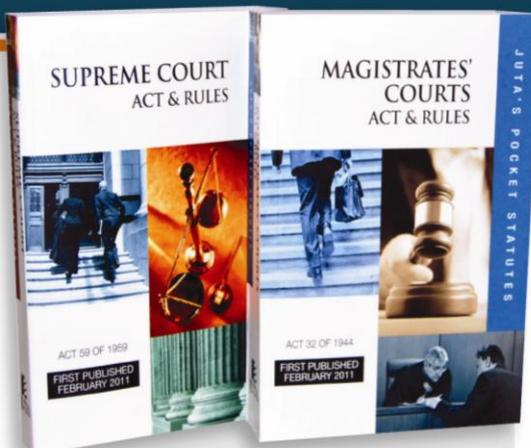
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