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Are We Recording?

The evolution of a law library radio show

By Marcia Dority Baker

The advent of technology has infinitely changed how humans exchange information. There are numerous ways to communicate with people: a phone call, by e-mail, at professional conferences, through networking opportunities, and in publications of all types. Another opportunity is via radio—not the old fashioned AM/FM kind, but online radio shows or podcasts.

In May 2008, Richard Leiter, director of Schmid Law Library at the University of Nebraska College of Law, hosted the first episode of “The Law Librarian on Blog Talk Radio.”

As a self-defined tech geek, Leiter wanted to experiment with Blog Talk Radio and, at the same time, talk about law library issues, information, technology, and current events. The show’s original co-host, Brian Striman of Schmid Law Library, “manned” the chat room, took questions from the audience for Leiter and/or show guests, and assisted with the show.

When I took over as co-host in the summer of 2009, my new responsibilities included leading the chat room discussion, helping with the show, promoting each episode, organizing show topics, helping to schedule guests, and offering general tech assistance. Basically, the co-host keeps things moving along while the host interviews guests.

One of the most active parts of the radio show is making sure all websites or people mentioned during a show are included in the chat room discussion. As a show progresses, I try to include website URLs, guest webpages, and other topics discussed on the show within the chat room. Following each show, a chat room transcript is made available to listeners. The great thing about Blog Talk Radio is the audio and visual component to the podcast. Users can listen to the show, participate in the chat

room, or do both, and if a user misses the live show, the podcast can be downloaded from iTunes.

Hosting Your Own Radio Show

Blog Talk Radio is a web-based, live radio internet service that includes free or basic services for individual users; premium levels of service and business accounts are available for companies. There are two types of individual accounts—one for listeners and one for hosts. Users can listen to shows without registering but they will appear as guests in the chat room instead of by their user names.



Richard Leiter and Marcia Dority Baker’s new show, “Law Librarian Conversations,” is hosted by the Center for Computer-Aided Legal Instruction (CALI).

The concept is user-friendly—you can sign up for a host account that allows you broadcast time ranging from 60 to 90 minutes. The only technology necessary is a computer and telephone, though Skype can be substituted for a phone line.

Before setting up a radio show, there are a few things to think about. First, find a good name for the show, something that gets the point across and is easy to remember. “The Law Librarian on Blog Talk Radio” says exactly what

the show is about: a law librarian on talk radio. Think of good book titles, band names, or even annoying songs or jingles—words or phrases that get stuck in your head and/or mean something. This is your first opportunity to announce to the world what your show is dedicated to.

Second, once you have a show to host, set a schedule and be consistent. In the beginning, the “Law Librarian on Blog Talk Radio” show was scheduled for the third Friday afternoon of each month. This was a good time for the hosts, guests, and panelists to talk, and the afternoon time slot benefited all time zones, which is a plus when

guests can be on either coast or somewhere in-between.

A regular schedule also retains listeners—there is nothing more annoying than finding a new website, blog, or show and never seeing new content.

Finally, promote the show. This is your new baby, so blog about it, tell your library coworkers about it, e-mail professional online discussion lists, etc. Blog Talk Radio provides buttons and flair for your website, or you can use a Facebook fan page, Twitter account, or other social media sites to share information about the show. Most social media sites are free, so take advantage of connecting with listeners, sharing content, and providing another avenue for audience feedback and suggestions.

Changes for “The Law Librarian” Show

While Blog Talk Radio is a great provider for online radio, it has created some issues for “The Law Librarian” radio show. First was the strict start time for the show and the allotted show length. The show host cannot log on to Blog Talk Radio until 15 minutes prior to the show’s start time, which often doesn’t allow adequate prep time for guests calling in from cell phones, Skype, or through the show’s switchboard. The

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Friday afternoon slot at 2 p.m. central standard time also confused the audience and guests, sometimes causing people to call in an hour early or late.

The most annoying aspect, however, was the advertising. While Blog Talk Radio did a great job with the radio show itself, it was the ads that listeners and guests had to suffer through that became the last straw. Even with an upgrade to the premium service, there would still be ads.

We made the decision to migrate from Blog Talk Radio to the Center for Computer-Aided Legal Instruction (CALI) in February 2010 after Leiter contacted CALI Director John Mayer about hosting a live radio show. CALI uses GoToWebinar for its regularly scheduled webinars, a format that would also work for a radio show. After a number of e-mails, phone calls, and a few test shows, "Law Librarian Conversations," hosted by CALI, went live March 2010.

While the new radio show format experienced some growing pains, it is currently working well. It allows for flexible show times, so we can start a bit earlier or later on Fridays or even change the day to accommodate special guests. While being consistent is important, so is having a show. Sometimes we have to adjust the start time—or even the day—to accommodate busy schedules. There is also the benefit of having a "name" behind the show—CALI is well known in the law library world and supportive of new technologies and education. One perk in working with CALI is the marketing and promotion of the show. The GoToWebinar software can send out show invitations to participate in scheduled podcasts. The host, co-host, and panel guests then receive unique invites or links to the show, and audience members can join the show from a general invite or link. We use this blurb to e-mail professional online discussion lists and post show

information on Twitter and Facebook. Once someone has participated in a show (either as an attendee or panelist), his or her contact information is saved, and an e-mail promoting the show is generated each time another "Law Librarian Conversations" show is scheduled.

One challenge presented by the GoToWebinar software, however, is the lack of a robust chat room. The program's stock chat room allows for chat between the attendees and presenter or organizer, but does not allow for effective back-and-forth conversation between attendees. In response, CALI has provided an alternative chat room for the show, which is located on the show's website. Listeners can participate and be identified by their names by logging in with their CALI credentials or as a guest. After the show, the chat room transcript is saved and posted.

As long as "Law Librarian Conversations" has listeners and is fun to do, we will continue to broadcast the show. I have enjoyed this experience, and it has given me the chance to play with new and fun technology. We have had an interesting list of guests, from the guy behind Google Scholar to a group of firm librarians discussing what new associates and summer clerks need to know. Co-hosting the show has also given me the opportunity to brainstorm ideas and talk to a variety of people. I also pay more attention to current events, legal and law news, and technology trends that make for entertaining talking points on the next show. I invite you to listen to our next podcast or try something similar in your library—it's a fun way to connect with people while sharing relevant information. ■

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Law Librarians Take the Lead

So what role do law librarians play in these developments? At the 2010 AALL Annual Meeting in Denver, a group of librarians from firm, public, and academic libraries met to discuss their involvement in animal law. The meeting was organized by Marie Erickson, head of public services at the State Law Library of Louisiana. Having given continuing legal education presentations on the subject for the Louisiana State Bar Association, Erickson has first-hand experience with the growing interest among practitioners.

It quickly became clear that those in attendance not only have a professional connection to animal law through their respective institutions, but also almost unanimously volunteer for animal welfare causes. The gathering created an initiative to formalize the group as the official AALL Animal Law Caucus. The caucus is in the process of developing its own online discussion list, website, and guidelines, and is open to all who are active in or have an interest in promoting animal welfare law.

Responses to a short survey on the Law-Lib online discussion list following the meeting revealed the wide range of activities librarians participate in at their institutions. They teach credited animal law courses; give guest lectures, both in law schools and other graduate programs; serve as faculty advisors to student animal law societies; create research guides; work pro bono for animal causes; coach student teams competing in the National Animal Law Competition; and field questions on topics related to animal control issues in both metropolitan and rural settings.

Animal law has become a mainstream topic in the legal community. As Anna Stolley Persky and David Sutton note in the September 2010 *ABA Journal* article "Their Day in Court," "Advocacy groups and lawyers in the animal protection field suggest their efforts are just warming up." Law librarians, with their skill in legislative advocacy, teaching, research, scholarship, public service, and work with future lawyers, will be instrumental to these forces of change. ■

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More Information

Podcasts for "Law Librarian Conversations" as well as older episodes from "The Law Librarian on Blog Talk Radio" are available on the show's website at <http://lawlibcon.classcaster.net/podcasts>.

You can also find the "Law Librarian on Blog Talk Radio" show at www.blogtalkradio.com/thelawlibrarian.

For more information on GoToWebinar, visit www.gotomeeting.com/fec/webinar.