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2019

Ask a Director: Tackling Technology Competencies

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Recommended Citation

Brown, Kincaid C. "Ask a Director: Tackling Technology Competencies." *AALL Spectrum*, 23, no. 5 (2019): 30-31.

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ASK A DIRECTOR

Tackling Technology Competencies

Question: What technology competencies do librarians and legal information professionals need to assist their organizations as they grapple with issues such as data analytics, artificial intelligence, etc.?



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While much discussion of technology competency is platform (e.g., Microsoft Word or Excel), system type (e.g., e-discovery and social media), or topic (e.g., security and artificial intelligence) specific, I think that the overarching competency that can lead to success in all of the above is inquisitiveness, or having a questioning mind. To me, that breaks down into three segments.

First, it means thinking consciously about what you are doing and what the technology you are using is doing behind the screen. A lot of technology interaction in society is done in a rote manner (e.g., throwing search terms into the big search box, posting pictures to Instagram, or liking on Facebook), but legal technology requires engagement. To be a fully competent lawyer or librarian you need to ask the hows, whys, and whats: How can you use this platform more efficiently? Why is the algorithm returning these results? What are the benefits and risks inherent in the system (with a nod to Monty Python)? Conscious engagement allows you

to always wonder if there is an easier or better way, and to ward off both the complacency of assuming our technology will work just fine and the bias of putting too much trust in computerized systems.

Second, it means being both systematic and flexible. Being systematic means that you understand the breadth (why this tool, what does it do/what are the expectations, and how does it work?) of not only the platforms, tools, and technological concepts that you use in your work, but also those that

your lawyers/clients/patrons use as well. Being systematic is also about fully immersing yourself in the technology you use in your work, so you know the shortcuts, tricks, and affordances that allow you to use the system more effectively and efficiently. Flexibility is important because things change nothing more so than technology. There is always a new technology or new version of existing technology that needs to be learned (just because I preferred the old dot commands in Lexis doesn't mean I have the software loaded on my

computer). Technology competence is an iterative process, it moves forward into the future and you have to be comfortable with questioning it every step of the way.

Finally, it means asking for or finding help when you need it. There is always going to be someone who knows more than you. So, ask that question or find the appropriate help tools/bot; otherwise, you are just spinning your wheels and may not learn the best way to do something.