LR Guidance - request for information

Background

Guidance is a knowledge repository consisting of sets of practice guides and other content that Land Registry (LR) caseworkers use to inform their judgments and decisions when processing Land Registration applications.

Much of this content is stored electronically in a system called “Gold” and delivered to the end user using a web browser interface. There is also additional information maintained on other intranet sites and various other information sources that contribute to the body of knowledge.

The current solution is inadequate for the business due to the following:

- It is difficult and time consuming for users to search for and navigate to information required, and when found it too much to assimilate.
- The authoring and review process is inadequate. This also due to responsibilities and deadlines are not well-defined and monitored.
- Several versions of the same information reside in separate files. Each file must be updated individually through a manual process, leading to errors and inaccuracies.
- The need to change the guidance rapidly and to communicate these changes effectively
- The need to support different audiences for information and different delivery channels.

These issues arise from the fact that guidance content is authored, managed and delivered in a “pre-digital” manner based on the concepts of how information is organized in a paper based world.

Gold consists of libraries of documents on specific topics aimed at educate the reader generally rather than inform a specific goal or task. Therefore the documents can be relatively long encompassing information relating to various issues and user goals or purposes that exist within that topic.

These documents are authored linearly with each paragraph assuming the user has read the previous paragraphs. They are often not self-contained and contain links to other linearly authored documents with additional and necessary information. Therefore, the user has more to read than is required to address the task in hand.

Gold has limited metadata about its documents, even the section headings can be very generic and unhelpful (e.g. “Related Information”) the effect of this is that electronic searches are based on the full content. Therefore, searching on aspects of land registration and land registration related produces a large number of hits without giving the end user any tools to refine these. The consequence is that finding information quickly often relies on the user’s experience of using the library/document structure.

Historically LR has had a large number of very long standing caseworkers, however not only is the demographic changing and there is sometimes a need for short term employment. Also there are pressures for ever greater efficiencies due to the increasing rate of change in legal and organizational frameworks. The combination of these effects means that our existing Guidance systems are becoming less adequate.

Vision

The ultimate vision is that there will be a single source of land registration knowledge to prevent contradictions between different systems (e.g. training, guidance and external guides). For guidance information would be surfaced in a context sensitive way from within the casework systems providing only the information the caseworker needs for the immediate task in hand.

The immediate need however is to greatly improve the user experience and provide some better capabilities for authors and librarian.

The initial step to this vision is to replace the existing casework system (GOLD) with a system that is built to “digital” principles. It will provide a more efficient and effective user experience and that will be instantly usable by new recruits familiar with using the intranet.

Our analysis and user research have led to the conclusion that the end user experience would be best realised by faceted search and the delivery of relatively short, self-contained, single purpose knowledge ”articles” which are constructed from one or more reusable knowledge “items” and text snippets.

The new user experience can be described in narrowing down initial search results using faceted filtering (similar to that used by sites such as eBay and Amazon). Each search result will contain a clear description of its content allowing the user to quickly assess its relevance. It is envisaged that the search experience will be largely driven by meta-data rather than the content of the articles. The knowledge articles will be based on single concepts and self-contained; and linking to other articles within the body of the text will be minimized. However, onward navigation links to other/related articles will be available in a separate panel to avoid the need to return to search if the article does not resolve the users’ issue. LR has built a prototype that demonstrates this user experience.

Migration of Existing Content

In order to realise the user experience, the existing content will need to be:

- Transformed into self-contained single purpose chunks or units of content that can be easily repurposed and reused, and combined to form complete articles.
- Tagged with metadata to drive the search and onward navigation experiences.

Because this involves making decisions on how content is to be split and the addition of new information it is likely that this process will be mostly manual and will take a significant elapsed time (>6 months). Since it is important for reuse and repurposing there is clear separation between information, styling and structure it is considered advantageous to use a WYSIWYM authoring tool.

While the above happens, it is desirable to avoid any significant periods of separately authoring content for the new and old systems.