APPENDIX 7.3 : OPERATIONAL USE - ANNOUNCEMENT

INFORMATION AWARENESS: A VALUE-IN-USE STUDY

The cost of supplying information to Fairbridges’ practitioners has been closely monitored in the first six months of the current financial year under the following headings:

- Hard copy sources - books, journal subscriptions, looseleaf subscriptions and miscellaneous documents that constitute a source of information
- Electronic subscription services
- Outsourced products and services, including current awareness services, counsel opinion, inter-library loans, indexing services
- Specialist administrative expenses, including library stationery, cost of book repairs or binding, specialist library stationery not provided to other departments
- Staffing expenses - salary, training, conference fees.

This data has been analysed to determine the total amount of money spent by the practice on supplying information to its practitioners and dividing this by the number of practitioners in the practice. This value - referred to here as infospend - represents the cost to the practice of providing information services to each practitioner for a given period. The average monthly infospend at Fairbridges is R491.89, which effectively means that the present cost to the firm of supplying information services can be estimated at R22.36 per practitioner per day.

Identifying and monitoring the cost to the organisation of its information resources - including its personnel - is an essential aspect of evaluation. The next step in evaluating the information services at Fairbridges is to attempt an analysis of the usefulness of these resources.

During the month of September I will be badgering Fairbridges practitioners to advise me on the amount of use to which they put the several information products and services. This will be a labour intensive exercise and it will be conducted as a daily survey. It is considered that this will capture results in as objective a fashion as possible.

One outcome of this month-long survey will be the exposure of under-utilised products or services. This will be helpful in reaching decisions regarding subscription renewals that occur at this time, but it is not the sole reason for estimating usefulness of the information products and services in this firm. If one is able to weigh up the cost to the practice of supplying a particular product - the electronic *South African Law Reports* for example - against the use that is made of the product for the same period, it then becomes possible to arrive at a measure of cost-effectiveness. This measure, the unit price versus the amount of time the product was in use, may not be sufficient to determine the worth of the product, but it contributes to an understanding of the value in monetary terms. This calculation may even be used to guide a practitioner’s deliberations with regard to disbursements and fees.

September promises to be a very busy month for monitoring the way Fairbridges uses its information resources. I appeal to all practitioners to bear with me as I harangue them during the course of this study and accept that I am attempting to develop a service that is cost-effective and that will provide you with information that you may approach with confidence.