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CAPITAL MONITOR

Celebrating 25 years of premium parliamentary monitoring



2015 marks the 25th anniversary of Capital Monitor and the 10th anniversary of Capital Monitor becoming part of the LexisNexis[®] group. With these milestones, we thought it timely to take a look back and celebrate the Capital Monitor story.

1983 - 1989



Richard Griffiths, the founder of Capital Monitor, had recently left the navy after having spent three years working in Washington DC and being somewhat familiar with the new technology of computing. In April 1983, he was employed by Tasmanians Greg Ray and Nick Evers to run their new parliamentary monitoring business in Canberra, which was called Political Reference Service. Richard helped to build up the business over the next seven years.

In those early days, photocopiers and faxes were new technology. Staff would collect copies of press releases and Hansard, and photocopy them for distribution, primarily overnight via courier.

Long term clients, such as Tracey Vitnell from Gilbert + Tobin, remember fondly that their days would start with a cup of coffee and the packet of information from Capital Monitor.

As early adopters of technology, the first Capital Monitor computer had a whole megabyte of hard drive space, pioneering the earliest form of document indexing. It was so new at the time that even the Hawke Government wanted to know how it was done.

Towards the end of 1989, Richard decided to move on. Within a few days there was a second investor on board and the new business was born. Richard and his business partners, Ian Nicol and David Sistrom, initially wanted to call the new venture Federal Monitor but the Commonwealth owned the rights to the name so they came up with Capital Monitor instead.

1990 - 1994

Within six months, Capital Monitor had three staff. This increased over the next couple of years to between four and six staff.

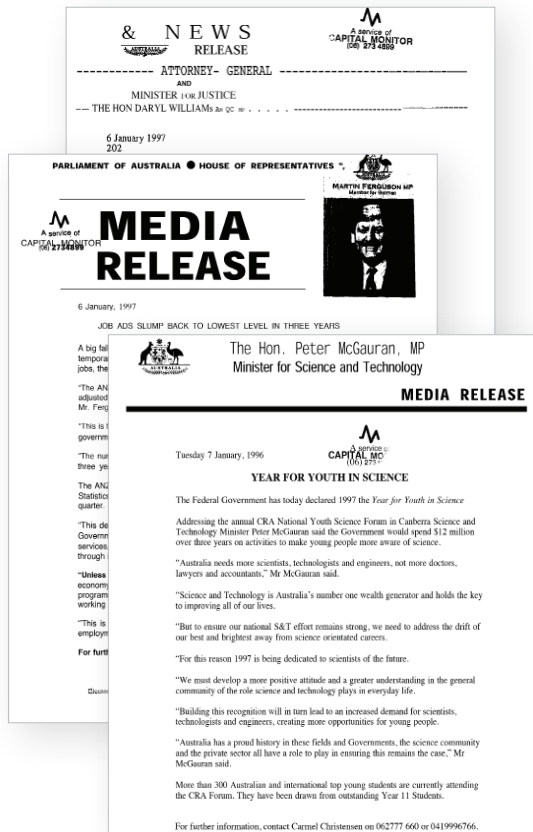
By 1991 the media landscape had begun to change with consolidation of ownership. This extended to the press gallery and media presence in Parliament House. Richard became aware that space was available in the press gallery and put in a request. Capital Monitor was initially given a small one-person office only. Staff soon worked out ingenious ways to get the most out of the small space – fitting in three desks, shelving all around the walls, with a large photocopier in the centre. To begin with the computer indexing documents was located off site.

Key to Capital Monitor's success was its staff, who understood the clients' needs extremely well. At that time, the photocopy-and-post service was subscription based, and the premium fax service attracted an additional charge. In the beginning, staff would phone clients when there was something they believed the client would want to know about immediately, and get approval for it to be faxed. Most clients trusted the service enough to allow staff to automatically fax the items they believed were significant enough to warrant it, without first obtaining authority for the additional expense.

Once in Parliament House, Capital Monitor was able to expand the types of information available to subscribers. Richard was asked to write a series of articles for the Australian Law Librarians' magazine, starting with one on how legislation is made.

The research he did as part of the exercise led him to forge great contacts within Parliament House. People started to open up about how everything was accomplished inside the political process. Richard became very well-known inside the Table and Committee Offices. He often stumbled on unexpected 'gems' of information that were essentially public, but that the public wasn't aware of at the time, such as Explanatory Memoranda. These were prepared by the Attorney-General's department for the Governor General as an explanation of legislation, and used to prove that the government had the legal authority to do what they were doing. Up until then, no one thought these documents were of any real value except Capital Monitor subscribers. Explanatory Memoranda were an excellent insight into the intention and motivation of the government of the day. As similar information treasures were discovered and sent to subscribers, the service offered clients an inside edge, often unavailable to others without a similar subscription.

1995



In 1995, Adobe released Acrobat 1. This was the first really practical optical character reading software that could cope with poor quality text. It made scanning of government documents for Capital Monitor's purposes possible. In that same year, the business made the decision to invest in an American system called Verity Topic which enabled auto-indexation of text. This system had been developed as part of an American defense project and then declassified and sold. It was a sizable investment for the business at the time but the decision was made to pay for proprietary rights, so there were no ongoing licensing fees. The other purchasers of the system were Defence Intelligence and the Office of Assessment (PM & Cabinet). Within a year, the expert who sold Verity Topic, Hayden Kent, came to work for Capital Monitor as IT Manager.

This new technological capability meant that the likes of press releases and Hansard could be converted into electronic text, saved as a PDF and attached an email for distribution – no more paper required. On 1st July 1996, Capital Monitor went digital. This gave many clients, like law librarians, the impetus they needed to make the business case for email access for the first time. For eight months, the staff worked tirelessly to integrate the new electronic system and to run the paper system of fax and courier/post alongside it – almost everything had to be done twice. As the change provided so many clients with the opportunity to make their first move into the world of email and the internet, uptake of the new system was so good that the decision was made to discontinue the paper-based service on 1st March 1997. By that time, only three clients had failed to make the change. Once the old system was turned off, all three had email set up within 10 days so they could continue to receive their valuable Capital Monitor information.

1996-2003



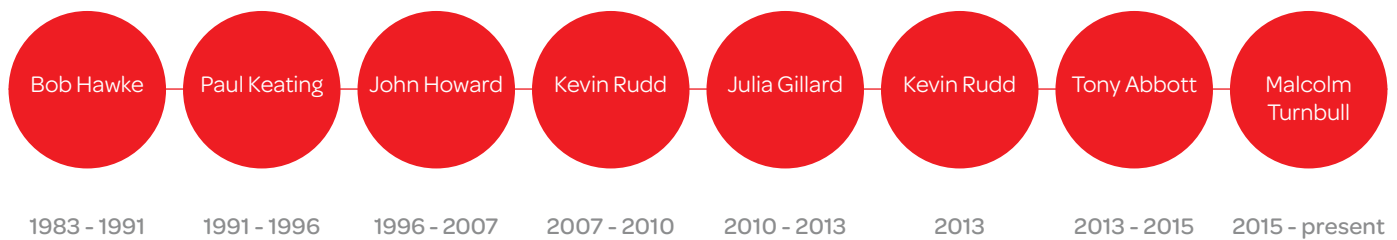
1996 was a big year. The move to digital meant that it was possible to create a database of every document that was processed. It made sense to make this available to clients for research purposes, and the now extensive digital collection was born. Every document ever indexed by Capital Monitor is now available to clients in its original format as a pdf and fully text searchable. To date, there are roughly 3 million documents in the collection.

Today, we take for granted the immediacy with which information is available, but in the late 1990s, the ability to make documents available

electronically played an important role in changing the face of Australian politics. For quite some years, politicians were in the habit of putting out press releases at around 3.00pm, in time for the next morning's paper. Industry groups and others would read the article in the paper the following day, and only then be able to formulate a response, often too late for anything to happen. This dynamic changed considerably when press releases became available online. Lobby groups and interested parties could now react, respond or influence an outcome almost immediately, launching the 24-hour news cycle we know today. This allowed journalists at the time to file a balanced article for the next day with commentary from both sides of the debate. The digital revolution was here to stay.

2004-2012

Prime Ministers of Australia since the beginning of Capital Monitor:



In 2004, Richard Griffiths was approached by a large publishing industry player, who sought to acquire Capital Monitor. As all of the large publishers were subscribers at the time, Richard felt he had to disclose the offer far and wide. LexisNexis® saw an opportunity to augment its primary legal content, and parliamentary monitoring fit the bill. A series of negotiations followed which saw LexisNexis emerge as the successful bidder. The sale was finalised on 31st March 2005. Under the agreement, Richard Griffiths would stay on for six months to oversee the transition. Richard Lawson was employed by LexisNexis and trained by Richard Griffiths to take over as Bureau Chief. Richard recalls feeling like a child as he scurried to keep up with Richard Griffiths' military stride when they moved through the halls of Parliament and other source destinations.

2013-2015



Under the umbrella of LexisNexis, Capital Monitor has continued to grow and adapt to ever-changing customer needs, and new technology. The current website was launched in 2011, offering subscribers the ability to customise alerts themselves for the first time. Subscribers can now elect the delivery method of their updates and how frequently they would like to receive them. This helps them create completely personalised and targeted alerts, delivered as attachments, links, digests or via customised content pages.

In order to balance a growing specificity of updates required by subscribers, Capital Monitor has also grown its suite of eNewsletters. These online publications offer a comprehensive view of the big picture, ensuring subscribers don't miss anything that might be relevant.

On the other hand, Capital Monitor's Digital Collection is increasingly recognised as an invaluable research tool. It has a growing number of subscribers from academia and various universities taking up the service to contribute to internal research resources.

From native title, superannuation or GST reform, to big ticket leadership spills, Capital Monitor has seen it all. The service has played a significant part in providing law firms, lobby groups, big business, industry and government departments with the information they require to maintain expert status in their area of influence, to disseminate their agenda politically, to do business with, and advise, government or clients. From the early days of ferreting out difficult-to-find information, to current day information-overload buzz where customisation is key to cutting through the sheer volume, Capital Monitor has played a key role in keeping customers up to date with the information they need to excel where it matters most.

If you read it in the news, it's too late.
Go straight to the source with Capital Monitor.

An expert team, situated in the heart of the Parliamentary press gallery in Canberra, Capital Monitor provides political and parliamentary, legislative, regulatory and judicial news and information to subscribers – as it happens.

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