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Litigators Who Untangle the Web Will Find Scores of Valuable Sites

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Many a cost-conscious litigator cannot distinguish Charlotte’s Web from the World Wide Web. This article untangles the Web by explaining how to use the Internet easily, effectively and inexpensively.

The Internet is an information database comprising protocol components. One is FTP, or “File Transfer Protocol.” FTP enables users to transfer and retrieve programs or files between computers on the Internet. Files are downloaded — saved to a local computer — faster through FTP than from a Gopher or Web site.

Another component is Telnet, which lets users access a computer networked on the Internet at a remote site. Once logged onto the remote computer, a user can search that computer’s system and software. Most libraries and universities offer Telnet access from their Web sites.

Gopher is a text-only, non-graphical (no pictures) Internet software front-end (an interface screen). Gopher allows users to find and retrieve information on the Internet. With the advent of the Web, Gopher is not used as regularly as before. Still, many Gopher sites are accessible over the Internet contain valuable information.

The Web, the Internet’s largest and most popular component, is a hypertext (linkable), graphical interface. The Web has dramatically increased awareness of and accessibility to Internet information. "Surfing the Net" means linking between Web sites through HTML, hypertext markup language.

Law Office Technology

By Gerald Lebovits and Ian M. Singer

Users need to download browser software to navigate the Web. Two popular browsers are Netscape Navigator (http://www.netscape.com) and Microsoft Explorer (http://www.microsoft.com).

Using the Internet begins with accessing it. Either establish a dial-up account through an ISP (Internet Service Provider) or connect via an OSP (Online Service Provider). An ISP, such as AT&T or MCI, accesses the Internet only. Find an ISP by logging onto http://thehost.world.com. OSPs like America Online, CompuServe or Prodigy access the Internet and proprietary content unavailable to nonsubscribers.

Regardless of which option you choose, you should pay no more than $20 a month for unlimited access, not including local calls to get on the Internet and charges incurred at fee-based sites.

Attorneys can also opt for “turnkey” solutions. These include Internet access, E-mail and a browser for a flat monthly fee. Counsel Connect (http://www.counselconnect.com) and Brief Exchange Legal Network (http://www.briefex.com) are two such turnkeys. Both provide added-value on line services like access to proprietary discussion groups, so lawyers can communicate with one another in cyberspace, and links to law sites. Counsel Connect and Brief Exchange assist attorneys who prefer fast, up-to-date one-stop shopping.

Once access is established, the next step is to find information. Search engines include Alta Vista (http://www.altavista.digital.com), Excite (http://www.excite.com), Lycos (http://www.lycos.com) and Yahoo (http://www.yahoo.com). These free sites are excellent places to start researching facts about a client’s case. Attorneys need not be experts, since search engines Web sites explain how to search. Entering queries as one does on Westlaw or Lexis works well on most engines, and using “bookmarks” to file and retrieve good sites reduces time spent on future projects.

Specific Information

For locating specific information, there are four comprehensive, and free, sites: Hieros Gamos (http://www.him.org), FindLaw (http://www.findlaw.com), Catalaw (http://www.catalaw.com) and Law Journal Index (http://www.ljix.com).

Hieros Gamos provides practice group (criminal law, family law, etc.) information. It claims to be “the largest and only comprehensive legal site with over 15,000 original pages and more than 30,000 links.” (Visited May 8, 1997.) This site also “contains information on more than 6,000 legal organizations and every government in the world.”

FindLaw and Catalaw are legal-resource Web directories with internal search engines to simplify a search. Researchers rely on these sites mostly to locate links to other sites.

The Law Journal Index site is a good source of free information.
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