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Surf's up -- And lawyers are riding the wave

by Susan Sebok

Just when the legal community is thinking it's safe to test the waters by plunging from DOS-based to Windows-based programs, a whole new pool of information has emerged. The Internet has grown from a stream of Defense Department security measures to an ocean of international properties filled with every imaginable element. Whether they're performing legal research, sending E-mail, or checking the status of Congressional legislation, attorneys are surfing the plentiful resources on the 'Net.

They're finding the Internet useful for helping them manage their hectic work pace. In these days of budget shortfalls and downsized staff, the Internet can be a real time saver. They can retrieve primary resources such as the U.S. Code, the Uniform Commercial Code, court of appeals cases, and treaties at no cost. They can participate in more than 300 Internet discussion groups tailored for the legal profession. Lawyers responding to an informal survey conducted late this past year said they primarily use the Internet for sending E-mail to clients, colleagues, and other individuals and for conducting legal research. Also high in their Internet usage are participating in legal discussion groups and doing research on background and nonlegal issues. More than one-third of lawyers responding to another survey say they surf the Net at least once daily, and another third say they go online three times a week. And while the temptation to float to non-work-related matters may exist, lawyers said they rarely use the Internet for fun.

How it began and grew

Concerned about security measures in the 1960s, the U.S. Department of Defense developed a system to link the Pentagon with military bases, defense contractors, and major universities throughout the country. The collection of networks was designed to be immune from nuclear attack. During the next 20 years, various non-commercial institutions and businesses tapped into this infrastructure. A major shift occurred in 1987 when restricted commercial accounts were linked to the system. Three years later, the general public was invited to take a dip.

Experts agree that the Net is growing exponentially, with usage basically doubling each year. However, statisticians cannot agree how many people across the world use the Net. Estimates range from 7 million to 50 million users, with thousands of rookies coming online each month. This phenomenal growth has led to a global networked village filled with every imaginable resource, from having discussions with NASA astronauts to contributing to charities.

How information is linked

The legal community has a unique need for a diverse amount of information, particularly that emanating from all branches of government. The Internet permits researchers to access these resources, which can include graphics, sound, video, and animation, in addition to pure text. The easiest method of locating this information is via software known as a Web browser. This program provides a consistent and simplistic point and click interface to the array of computers and their files that comprise the Internet. The Web browser then becomes an enabler of what's known as the World Wide Web. This interconnected network of approximately 50,000 file servers seamlessly links one site of information on the Internet to another. For example, a federal statute may cite to a specific section of the Code of Federal Regulations. A researcher can click his mouse on an icon or text called a hyperlink or hypertext link that represents the C.F.R. cite. The Web browser then will display the information served from the computer where the C.F.R. information resides. The hyperlink is contained in a document called a Web page. Web pages are growing at a phenomenal rate, with more than 250,000 of these pages currently available. Each Web page has a unique address on the Internet so that it can be accessed individually.

The federal government has issued an incredible amount of information on the Net. For example, President Bill Clinton's White House Web page contains such diverse topics as the proposed budget and graphics of artwork found throughout the building. In one year, people from throughout the world examined that site more than 1.25 million times and downloaded more than 18 million files.

Legal Research via THOMAS

One of the most comprehensive federal sites is the Library of Congress. This location houses a plethora of news, archives, speeches, and figures. One part of the Library of Congress collection is called THOMAS, which is named "In the spirit of Thomas Jefferson, a service of the U.S. Congress through its Library." It also is an acronym for The House Open Multimedia Access System.

THOMAS is a pet project of House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who led its development during the first days of the 104th Congress. Its estimated start-up cost is less than \$200,000, with most of that amount going to payroll costs. Up to 35,000 people from nearly 60 countries access that site daily. In addition to the requests from U.S. users, the most frequent researchers are from Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Australia, and Germany. At the end of 1995, more than 13,000,000 files were transmitted, with an average of nearly 38,000 sent daily.

Researchers surfing to THOMAS find the following general topics:

- Full text of legislation

Full text of all versions of House and Senate bills introduced in the 104th and 103rd Congress searchable by keyword(s) or by bill number. The search can be made of all bills or can be limited to only bills for which Floor action has occurred or only enrolled bills sent to the President. In addition, the bills can be from both houses of Congress or limited to Senate or House bills only.

- Full text of the Congressional Record

Full text of the daily account of proceedings on the House and Senate Floors searchable by keyword(s); Congressional Record for the 104th Congress; Congressional Record for the 103rd Congress

- Congressional Record Index

A browsable and searchable subject index of major topics in the Congressional Record prepared by Congressional Record Index staff under the direction of the Joint Committee on Printing for the 104th Congress and the 103rd Congress (1994)

- Bill summary and status

Digests and legislative history of bills and amendments, searchable by keyword, index term, bill/amendment number, sponsor/cosponsor, or committee/ subcommittee; Bill summary and status for the 104th Congress

- Hot legislation

Major bills receiving floor action in the 104th Congress as selected by legislative analysts in the Congressional Research Service that can be searched by topic, popular and/or short title, and number/type; Hot bills enacted into law; Hot bills under Congressional consideration this week.

- The U.S. Constitution

The full text of the Constitution and its amendments, searchable by keyword

- How our laws are made

An explanation of the lawmaking process from the origin of a legislative proposal through its publication as a law written by Edward F. Willett Jr., House law revision counsel

- U.S. House of Representatives

House World Wide Web Service, House gopher, House constituent E-mail directory, and House of Representatives audit (Office of the Inspector General Financial Statements and Performance Reports)

- U.S. Senate

Senate World Wide Web Service, Senate gopher, and Senate constituent E-mail addresses

- C-SPAN (Cable-Satellite Public Affairs Network)

C-SPAN Gopher provides program schedules, Congressional information, FEC reports, Supreme Court information, and historical government documents. C-SPAN Web Server offers program and events schedules, Campaign '96 information, and other political resources.

- THOMAS usage statistics

Textual Report showing a time period summary, graphs of daily and hourly usage, hourly and daily transmission statistics, and usage by high-level domain name and file retrieved. This report is available for the following time periods: Yesterday, current month, the previous month; and cumulative yearly summary. For example, hourly usage reports indicate that the site is accessed most frequently from 2 - 5 p.m. daily.

- Update policy

THOMAS receives text of legislation files several times daily and the text of the Congressional Record once daily when Congress is in session; files are processed immediately upon receipt from the Government Printing Office and are made available when processing is completed.

- Other Library of Congress government resources

Visit the Library of Congress World Wide Web Home Page. Select the Library of Congress Information System (LOCIS) for Library of Congress databases, including Federal legislation summary and status since the 93rd Congress and the Library of Congress Catalog. Select Indexes to Other World Wide Web Services for additional information on the Legislative Branch, the Executive Branch, and State and Local Government.

Visit the Library of Congress Gopher LC MARVEL. Select U.S. Congress for additional legislative information; select Government Information for additional U.S. federal and state and local government resources.

How to find a bill

A researcher can use THOMAS in various ways to retrieve the full text of a bill. As an example, he knows that Sen. Paul Simon (D-IL) sponsored a bill during the 104th Congress that amends the Immigration and Nationality Act and enhances international adoption. This bill was subsequently signed by President Bill Clinton, and it changes the term "legitimate child" to a "child born in wedlock" and the term "illegitimate child" to "a child born out of wedlock." The researcher can search by keyword, search by bill number or sponsor, and browse a list of bills by bill type.

For starters, he can enter the Bill Summary and Status section of THOMAS:

Bill Summary and Status

Digests and legislative history of bills and amendments, searchable by keyword, index term, bill/amendment number, sponsor/cosponsor, or committee/ subcommittee.

Bill Summary and Status for the 104th Congress

There he can search for the bill using keywords, bill number, Public Law number, sponsor or cosponsor, or committee. If he selects the Search by Sponsor/Cosponsor option and enters Sen. Simon's name, a list of 90 bills is retrieved. An excerpt of this is list is:

82 . S.766 : -- A bill to protect the constitutional right to travel to foreign countries.
Sponsor: Sen Simon .

83 . S.457 : -- P. L. 104-51, signed 11/15/95 -- A bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to update references in the classification of children for purposes of United States
Sponsor: Sen Simon . - FLOOR ACTION HAS OCCURRED.

84 . S.665 : -- A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to increase motor fuel taxes by 8 cents a gallon, the resulting revenues to be used for mass transit,
Sponsor: Sen Simon .

This information shows that S.457 was sponsored by Sen. Simon, is now Pub. Law No. 104-51, and was signed into law in November. This paragraph of information has hypertext links to other parts of THOMAS, so the researcher can extract the full text of S.457 by clicking on the text in item 83 above. THOMAS responds with the following information:

S.457

PUBLIC LAW: 104-51 , (signed 11/15/95)

SPONSOR: Sen Simon , (introduced 02/22/95)

RELATED BILL(S): H.R.1204

A bill to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to update references in the classification of children for purposes of United States immigration laws.

TITLE(S)

STATUS

DIGEST

COMMITTEE(S)

COSPONSOR(S)

AMENDMENT(S)

SUBJECT(S)

LAW TEXT

The researcher now can retrieve additional information on the legislation, including the title and full text of the bill, its co-sponsors, amendments, and status. For example, when the word STATUS is selected, THOMAS retrieves the bill's chronology:

S.457

PUBLIC LAW: 104-51 , (signed 11/15/95)

SPONSOR: Sen Simon , (introduced 02/22/95)

RELATED BILL(S): H.R.1204

STATUS:

CHRONOLOGY:

11/15/95 Public Law 104-51 (11/17/95 CR D1369)

11/08/95 Measure presented to President (CR S16821)

11/07/95 Enrolled Measure signed in Senate (CR S16753)

11/07/95 Enrolled Measure signed in House (CR H11828)

10/30/95 Measure passed House (CR H11387)

10/30/95 Measure considered in House (CR H11386-11387)

10/30/95 Called up by unanimous consent discharging House Committee on the Judiciary (CR H11386)

07/18/95 Referred to House Committee on the Judiciary (CR H7178)

07/17/95 Measure passed Senate (CR S10176)

07/17/95 Measure considered in Senate (CR S10176)

07/17/95 Measure called up by unanimous consent in Senate (CR S10176)

06/22/95 Reported to Senate from the Committee on the Judiciary (without written report) (CR S8945)

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD PAGE NUMBER(S):

02/22/95 Introductory remarks on Measure (CR S2965-2966)

02/22/95 Full text of Measure as introduced printed (CR S2966)

07/17/95 Full text of Measure as passed Senate printed (CR S10176)

10/30/95 Full text of Measure as passed House printed (CR H11387)

Hypertext links can retrieve the full text of any of these Congressional Record pages. For example, when the Nov. 15 item is highlighted, page D1369 of the Congressional Record appears.

THOMAS encourages users to voice concerns about the system and to keep in contact with their elected representatives. If a user wants to contact Sen. Simon by E-Mail, he would jump back

to the main menu and click on the link to the Senate Constituent E-Mail Addresses selection. The following information is retrieved:

Senators with Published E-Mail Addresses on the Senate Internet Server

State Senator's Name	Senator's E-Mail Address
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IL Simon, Paul	senator@simon.senate.gov
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Sen. Simon and many other member of Congress have developed special pages on the Internet to inform their constituents of legislative activities. Simon's page includes his photo, recent press releases, committee assignments, and a direct link to the Congressional Record for the full text of his speeches.

Other federal resources

THOMAS is only one of a multitude of Internet sites available for research. Other sites that may be of interest to Clearinghouse Review readers are in the following table:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov> White House

<http://www.house.gov> House of Representatives

<http://lcweb2.loc.gov:8080/constquery.html> U.S. Constitution searchable by keyword

<http://www.fourmilab.ch/uscode/8usc/8usc.html> Immigration and Nationality Act searchable by keyword

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/frcp//overview%2ehtm> Federal Rules of Civil Procedure searchable by keyword

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/rules/fre//overview%2ehtml> Federal Rules of Evidence searchable by keyword

<http://www.pls.com:8001/his.cfr.html> Code of Federal Regulations searchable by keyword

<http://www.gse.ucla.edu/iclp/hp.html> Cyberspace law and policy

<http://www-law.lib.uchicago.edu/lib/cyberdoc.html> "The Law of Cyberspace"

<http://www.fedworld.gov/> FedWorld Information Network

<http://www.os.dhhs.gov> Department of Health and Human Services

<http://www.ed.gov/> Department of Education

<http://www.eren.doe.gov> Department of Energy

<http://www.usda.gov> Department of Agriculture

<http://www.usgs.gov/doi/> Department of the Interior

<http://www.cdc.gov> Centers of Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.fda.gov/> Federal Drug Administration

<http://www.census.gov> Census Bureau

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/> U.S. Code

<http://www.osha.gov/> OSHA

<http://thomas.loc.gov/> Thomas: Legislative Information on the Net

<http://www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/Documents.center/docnews.html> Government documents
in the news

<http://policy.net/capweb/congress.html> Cap Web-Guide to the U.S. Congress

<http://www.law.emory.edu/FEDCTS> U.S. Federal Courts Finder. It's a partially completed site of
decisions from all circuits

<http://www.house.gov/Legproc.html>

<http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/gpo/>

Congressional bills of the 103rd and 104th Congress

<http://www.pls.com:8001/his/5.htm> Congressional Record of the 103rd and 104th Congress

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/ucc/ucc.table.html> Uniform Commercial Code indexed
numerically by Article

With a little practice and a spirit of adventure, legal advocates will be joining the thousands of Net surfers saying, "Come on in; the water's fine."