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Two Useful References to Help with the Internet

By Pat Yevics

Despite the widespread use of the Internet for all types of research, there are still many good print publications that should be on your bookshelf. In fact, one of the most effective and efficient ways to get information about how to use the Internet is with print publications. (Go figure!)

In this month's column, I will recommend and review two of those publications, give some tips from those publications and provide some helpful websites.

One of the best and most recent (2004) publications on lawyers using the Internet is an ABA Law Practice Management publication: *The Lawyer's Guide to Fact Finding on the Internet* by Carole A. Levitt and Mark E. Rosch. Levitt is a California lawyer and former law librarian, and her knowledge of the Internet is amazing. I had the opportunity to see her give a presentation on using the Internet and it was one of best presentations I had ever seen on the topic. Regardless of your level of use, you can learn something of great value. Rosch is a developer and web designer for Levitt's firm, Internet for Lawyers (www.netforlawyers.com). He is also vice president of marketing for the firm.

This is a book that all practitioners should have in their offices. It should be required reading for all staff regardless of their position in the firm. Since staff in solo and small firms wear so many different hats, having the ability to do research on the Internet can be a great value to the firm. The book is 600 pages and is meant to be used as a reference tool. It also includes a CD with hyperlinks to many of the websites listed in the book.

The book is practical and incredibly helpful whether you have a lot of experience with fact-finding on the Internet or are fairly new and unsure of how to search for information.

But the book does more than just provide a list of sites; it is filled with tips about how to use your time effectively in searching for information. It offers new and extremely helpful tips on using sites that are well-known by many who use the Internet. It also compares sites and lets you know when it is better to use one particular site over another.

The book discusses the difference between legal and factual research and the difference in meaning in similar terms. There is also an excellent and critical discussion on judging the worth and credibility of information that is found on the Internet. It gives a 10 point "Internet Source Credibility Checklist" and discusses each of the points in detail. I found this particularly helpful.

There is also an important section that gives information about citing Internet resources, something I have not seen in other publications. One of the best sites about this topic can be found at Cornell University's website (www.lawcornell.edu/citation).

Chapters 3 and 4 offer some very helpful tips on search strategies and search tools and engines. Although some of the information is basic, there are some real gems that even Internet-savvy users will find invaluable. (You will find yourself saying, "I didn't know that!")

Other chapters include "General Factual Research," "Government Resources On-Line," "Finding and Backgrounding People," "Accessing Public Records," "Finding and Backgrounding Expert Witnesses," "Company Research," "Competitive Intelligence Research," "Medical Research," "Scientific Research," "Environmental Research," "Foreign and International Research," "Law Practice Management and Professional Development," "Statistical Research," "Transportation Research," "Entertainment Industry Research" and "Intellectual Property."

Admittedly, most solo and small firm practitioners will not need to research many of these topics, but it is helpful to have a reference tool on your shelf that you can turn to should you ever need to research a new topic. This publication is a great starting point. It is also valuable for new staff members who may not be as familiar with legal research.

You may be asking the same question that I did: "Won't the book be obsolete very quickly?" Well, since this book is more a provider of techniques for using the Internet than just a simple list of sites it has a longer shelf life than most technology books. It also gives suggestions on how to keep up with new and improved techniques for the future. Technology will always be moving and changing and it is critical to know how to keep up; this book helps you with that process.

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