The internet for LAWYERS

By Ngaire Watson

The explosion of the internet has led to the proliferation of legal websites. The Australian Bureau of Statistics[1] reports that internet access has quadrupled in Australian households in the last ten years, reaching 72 per cent in the 2008-09 period. There were 9.6 million active internet subscribers in Australia at the end of June 2010, and 92 per cent of the connections were not dial-up.[2]

L ove it or hate it, the internet is here to stay; so how does one take advantage of this tool? In this vast array, it can be difficult to sort the wheat from the chaff.

For those people who have been reluctant adopters of the technology, it is never too late to begin. Some people may worry that they have missed the boat and can't catch up. Other people feel bereft if their internet connection goes slow for a while. No matter which category you identify with, there is something for you. The purpose of this article is to identify some practical techniques and websites that may be useful for lawyers. Most of the websites are Australian.

ONLINE SAFETY

The exponential expansion of the internet has been paralleled by a corresponding growth in those who use it for nefarious and illegal ends. There are a few basic points to remember, which can make the internet experience safer:
- Close browser pages down before leaving the office. This reduces the opportunity for hacking.
- Keep anti-virus software current and operating to keep up with new dangers.
- Use caution when providing personal information on social networks.
- Phishing occurs when emails are sent from sources that can look like bona fide organisations but are intended to obtain information such as user names, passwords and credit card details. The emails will typically link to a website that might look genuine but is fraudulent. Check sources before providing any information.

WEB BROWSERS

Browsers do the work of retrieving resources on the web; they are essentially software applications which search and locate information. Apple developed its own browser called Safari, although other browsers can also be used on a Mac. Windows PC users will be familiar with Internet Explorer. However, there are other browsers which offer users choice.

Mozilla Firefox

This browser allows customised searching with a huge choice of 'add-ons', which are applications to enhance searching. For example, there is an add-on to store favourites on a server. If your computer crashes, the favourites can be retrieved. Another add-on blocks advertisements.

Google Chrome

Chrome has a reputation for being fast. It is customisable and also provides an 'incognito mode' if you don't want your website visits to be recorded in the browser history.

SEARCH THE INTERNET

Everyone had heard of Austlii and Google. However, there are other engines and websites that also yield good results and are worth looking at.

Search Engines

Webwombat – an Australian-based search engine. www.webwombat.com.au

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AllPlus – allows you to narrow your results to areas of interest.
www.allplus.com

SearchCloud – allows you to choose the weight of each search term.
http://searchcloud.net

Hakia – uses semantic searching to produce more relevant results. Also has a link to search PubMed, one of the world's largest medical literature resources.
http://hakia.com/

LEGAL RESOURCES

Foolkit – A practical resource for lawyers searchable by state and territory. Information is organised according to major areas of law. A daily court list is provided.
www.foolkit.com.au/

Judicial Commission of NSW

The Commission holds information relating to its administrative, research, sentencing, education, and complaint-handling functions. Bench books in each jurisdiction are available.
http://www.judcom.nsw.gov.au/

JADE (Judgments and decisions enhanced)

With this free service, you can search case law, locate links to cases via CaseTrace and mark up and annotate cases for your own personal or shared library.
http://jade.barnet.com.au/

COMMUNITY JUSTICE SITES

National Pro Bono Resource Centre

This organisation supports lawyers and firms in providing quality legal services and matches services with clients in most need of assistance. A link to a pro bono manual offers a resource to those wanting to know more about pro bono work.
www.nationalprobono.org.au

Law and Justice Foundation

The Foundation is an independent statutory body working to improve access to justice in NSW, particularly for socially and economically disadvantaged people.
www.lawfoundation.net.au/

DICTIONARY

Oxford English Dictionary
http://www.oed.com/

ACADEMIC RESOURCE COLLECTION

Infomine calls itself a 'scholarly internet resource'.
http://infomine.ucr.edu/

THE NATIONAL LIBRARY OF AUSTRALIA

The National Library of Australia's Australian law selected websites provides an excellent selection of links to national, state and territory legislation and case law.
http://www.nla.gov.au/oz/law.html

NEWS, SOCIAL COMMENT AND BLOGGERS

InfoPig

This site is an aggregator of a number of high quality media organisations. You can search geographically, or for key-words of special interest.
www.infopig.com/

The Huffington Post

Popular internet newspaper.
www.huffingtonpost.com/

New Matilda

Australian independent website of news, analysis and satire.
http://newmatilda.com/

Justinian

Richard Ackland's website, Justinian, takes a humorous look at some foibles of the legal profession in Australia.
http://www.justinian.com.au/

The Australian Professional Liability Blog

Melbourne barrister, Stephen Warne, publishes an informative blog with a focus on lawyers' ethics.
http://lawyerslawyer.net/

New York Personal Injury Law Blog

This site includes interesting commentary and case law.
www.newyorkpersonalinjuryattorneyblog.com/

SPECIALIST SITES

Zeno's Forensic Site

Zeno is a Dutch forensic scientist. This fascinating website provides numerous high-quality links as a resource for those wanting to find information about forensics.
http://forensic.to/forensic.html

PubMed

This site provides access to over 20 million citations from Medline.
http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/

CONCLUSION

The internet is a fast and constantly moving resource with a lot to offer. Online safety principles are important for protection from the known risks that exist on the internet. Knowledge of how to best utilise the internet comes incrementally over time. ■

Notes: 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8146.0, accessed 1 February 2011. **2** *Ibid*, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/8153.0/

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