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Update Your Bookmarks! Great Sites for Effective Research

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Update Your Bookmarks!

Great Sites for Effective Research

By Nancy Vettorello

There are more than one billion websites available online.¹ Many are useful tools for attorneys, so it makes sense to review and refresh your favorite bookmarks regularly. While none of the many free sites offer the sophisticated search abilities of fee-based research services, a few minutes spent exploring free sites can help researchers significantly narrow their searches once they turn to a fee-based system. Remember to always take advantage of the advance-search option when available on a free site. Free sites are offering increasingly sophisticated search options, such as Boolean and proximity searches, which were previously exclusive to paid services.

Michigan and local law

Much of the primary law of Michigan is available online, but look beyond that for a number of other useful tools. In addition to the State Bar of Michigan's Research & Links tab (<http://www.michbar.org/opinions/content>), which links to Casemaker, ICLE, and much more, consider the following.

Michigan legislature:

<https://www.legislature.mi.gov/>

The Michigan legislature site provides access to and a searchable version of Michigan Compiled Laws as well as bills, resolutions, reports, and journal information necessary to build a legislative history. One particularly useful feature is the Frequently Requested Law section, which provides quick access to the Michigan Administrative Procedures Act, Public Health Code, Uniform Commercial Code, and more.

Municode:

<https://www.municode.com/library/mi>

Municode provides links to municipal codes in Michigan and other states. The site also allows various search options once you select a code of interest. Advance search options include Boolean, phrase, and proximity searches. The site also highlights recent changes in each municipal code as well as pending amendments.

Ravel Law:

<http://ravellaw.com/>

A partnership of several Stanford University schools, including the law school, and now in collaboration with Harvard Law, Ravellaw.com is an excellent source of free caselaw research with impressive search capabilities. The coverage of Michigan caselaw dates back to the 1950s while the coverage of federal caselaw is complete. Some advanced analytical tools come at a cost, but case searching is free.

Washlaw:

<http://washlaw.edu/uslaw/states/michigan.html>

Washburn University School of Law assembles primary and secondary research resources for each state and is one of the most comprehensive collections of links for the state of Michigan. The Michigan page, for example, links to demographic information about our state, news sources such as *Michigan Lawyers Weekly*, the Michigan Government Directory, and the State Bar of Michigan. It also links to commissions and boards, state agencies, and attorney general opinions. Links to various courts make

finding court rules easy, and a link to each Michigan law school library reminds researchers to take advantage of the many online resources each provides. The University of Michigan Law Library, for example, provides a guide for creating Michigan legislative histories (<http://libguides.law.umich.edu/milegishist>) while Wayne State University's Arthur Neef Law Library has a number of topic-specific research guides, such as Landlord Tenant and Federal Income Tax Law (<https://library.wayne.edu/neef/>).

Federal law

Primary federal law is also readily available online and is searchable with fairly sophisticated tools. Consider the following.

United States Government Publishing Office:

<https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/>

The Federal Digital System (fdsys) offers access to myriad federal resources, including a complete copy of the Code of Federal Regulations and the Federal Register from 1990 forward, a complete copy of the United States Code, and various congressional documents. For example, the site includes the Congressional Record from 1995 to date, congressional bills from the 103rd Congress to the current 115th Congress, and more.

The site also has been adding federal court opinions dating as far back as 1994, although, as noted above, Ravellaw.com includes complete coverage of federal caselaw. Be sure to select the Advanced Search tab from the home page, choose the resource you want to search, and add the search criteria (up to five) at the bottom

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of the page. The system also allows users to select a date range to further narrow the results.

USA.gov:
<https://www.usa.gov/federal-agencies/a>

Federal agency websites can provide one-stop shopping for researchers. In addition to including relevant statutes and regulations, agency websites can include reports, decisions by tribunals, forms for filing complaints, and much more. These resources are frequently overlooked by novice researchers and can be invaluable for those working in highly regulated areas such as tax, bankruptcy, healthcare, and others. USA.gov provides an A-to-Z list of and links to federal government departments and agencies.

Secondary sources

While it is more difficult to find reliable secondary resources related to the law online, there are a few sites worth bookmarking. Consider the following sites to quickly get up to speed when researching a new topic.

The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction:
<https://www.cali.org/>

The Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction's website includes a number of free books on a variety of legal topics. It is a consortium of mostly U.S. law schools, and also includes interactive tutorials on various legal subjects. One lesson, for example, focuses on locating and using transactional forms.

NOLO:
<http://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia>

Nolo is an online legal encyclopedia that offers articles on various legal topics. It incorporates one of the earliest free legal web resources, AllLaw.com. There are links to do-it-yourself guides (mostly for purchase) and useful forms (mostly free).

Writing resources

Not all useful websites focus on research. Consider the following for help with writing.

Purdue Owl Online Writing Lab:
<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

If you're puzzled about the proper use of semicolons, reducing your wordiness, or whether you need commas with appositives, Purdue Owl offers straightforward explanations on grammar, punctuation, and the mechanics of writing. It is appropriate for those struggling with writing and those with more experience, and even offers a section devoted to writers for whom English is a second language.

WordRake:
<http://www.wordrake.com/>

WordRake is a paid service offering editing assistance, but you don't need to purchase its software to take advantage of the free writing tips. A recent post, for example, examined whether it is ever appropriate to place a period outside of quotation marks. This question frequently invites debate among my students and results in conflicting advice from the attorneys for whom

they have worked. The post also examined the burning question of when a comma was necessary before a quotation mark. Sign up for the free writing tips via the website; for those for whom writing succinctly is difficult, consider the free seven-day trial to see if the program might work for you. Though not created specifically for attorneys, the service was founded by one.

WEX:
<https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/all>

Can't quite remember the definition of "alluvion" and how it differs from "avulsion"? The Legal Information Institute, housed at Cornell Law School, provides quick definitions of legal terms and includes short encyclopedic entries for legal issues and concepts like acceleration clause, alter ego, and abstention. Some entries are written in Spanish in addition to English.

Keeping current

Lexology:
<http://www.lexology.com/>

Finally, check out Lexology's Newsfeed service, which delivers the latest articles from practitioners on legal issues of interest to you. You can also search its archive of older articles and find authors and blogs worth following. Recent articles ranged from the question of whether NCAA athletes are employees, to an article about a law firm's responsibility to attorneys struggling with addiction, to a summary of what advertisers need to look out for in 2017. ■

Nancy Vettorello has been a member of the State Bar of Michigan since 1997. She is currently an assistant clinical professor at the University of Michigan Law School, teaching in the Legal Practice Program. She also served as a reference librarian at the University of Michigan Law School.

ENDNOTE

1. Internet live stats <<http://www.internetlivestats.com/>> (accessed February 18, 2017).