

LOOKING FOR THE LEGAL NEEDLE IN THE HAYSTACK
or
How to Find It on the Internet
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1. INTRODUCTION

Well, just when you thought it was safe to go back to the Selectric, Reggie and Pat are back. Reggie is still hiding computer magazines under his mattress and Pat's VCR is still set at 12 o'clock. In the thirty-two months since we last talked about overcoming fear and loathing of the internet with you, enough folks to popuate California again (that's a frightening thought) have gotten on line.

- March '97 - Reggy and Pat talk about overcoming fear of the internet
- Nov. '97 - business.com sells for \$150K as a domain name
- April '98 - e-mail used 36% to 26% over telephone for business communication
- June '00 - Senate approves electronic signature bill

We are asked to once again talk you through the maze called the Internet and to focus on why it is that what you want seems to disappear behind opaque Windows, just when you start looking for it. We both know the frustration and joys of research on the Internet. Sometimes it seems like an employee who's lots of fun to talk with, but doesn't get any work done.

One reason for this is the lack of organization of the Internet itself. The World Wide Web, a.k.a. Internet, most closely resembles a library in which the pages of every book and magazine in the world, past and present, have been torn from the bindings and tossed into a colossal building, with unmarked rooms, and without method to the madness. Every day, new pages, some fresh off the press, find their way to this Library. Whether it's Automotive or related to care of a Zebra skin rug, written in Arabic, English or Tagalog, verified by 12 bishops on the head of a pin (a most uncomfortable thought and not intended to inject religion into this discussion during an election year) or fantasize by a 12 year old who fancies himself an expert on the subject, the information is accorded the same lack of respect. It is simply passed on to you without comment or verification.

The quest is simple: finding reliable information or services, in a reasonable time, with minimal frustration. Our mission, which we have decided to accept, is to offer assistance providing some of our favorite sites. We won't overload you but you have got to promise you will explore, otherwise you'll have no one to blame but yourself.

2. SEARCH ENGINES

Reggy: Pat, what is a search engine and why do I care?

Pat: The search engine is a world wide web site that serves as an index to other sites on the web. Relatively easy to use and usually have references to common subject areas that you can *point-and-click* to connect to other links, that connect to other links, and so on. They usually allow you to type in *key words* to begin a search.

Some are specialized, like www.govbot.com which looks for government sites. Others are sort of alpha engines; they use many smaller search engines to make a unified master search and provide more responses.

Why you care is that, without a search engine doing the leg work, you would have no way to find relevant information. For example, you type in "Houston Bar Association" & "family law" into a search engine's *query line*. Using Google.com, in 0.54 seconds, the Google search engine found 295 entries for those phrases. I was told that "&" was a very common word and was not used in my search. In the first 10 "hits" was information about the site, speeches, and events, and other relevant information.

Reggy: My favorite search engine for general searches is Google at www.google.com. I like it because it prioritizes the sites based on some assumptions (they call it artificial intelligence) but it is really gathering data daily on searches and prioritizing them based on which site people select first, then second and then third.

So, Pat what is your favorite site and why do you like it?

Pat: I like Google as well. It has indexed over 1,600,000,000 pages of information as of the first week in September and is easy to use. But I also like www.NorthernLight.com because it will automatically place the information gathered into folders. That makes researching easier, since even on the computer, files can get lost if they're not labeled or put where they can be found. Northern Light also groups the information so that I can tell which search engine was used. Even better, you can ask, under a "power search" for only search engines and resources that the user selects to be used in the search. (Go to the Northernlight home page, click on Power Search, and the form is self explanatory.) This means the search can be limited to government documents, or newspapers, or military records information, broadcast transcripts etc. It helps to authenticate the information. And as a portal, which is really a search engine with an alpha attitude, I like www.hotsheet.com as much as any. It seems to have more usable sites, within a click away, and with the back button, I keep coming back to it if I need to continue. I've added Google, NorthernLight and HotSheet buttons onto my browser, so I have a choice of ready search engines whenever I'm on the web.

III. LOCATING PEOPLE.

Reggy: Pat, I hear adlitems are using the internet to locate people, how and where can they get that information?

Pat: With the search engines we've discussed, as well as some additional ones in the appendix, there are sites for locating people. Some of the superior ones are www.infoseek.com, www.switchboard.com & www.411.com. The problem with most searches is that they stop short of being thorough. If the user is trying to locate someone, then every variation of the spelling of the name should be used. Andersen, Anderson, Andersin—try them all. And use any known initials in a search, then try it without the initial. The more information you have, the more you can vary the search by combining different bits of information. Try the city and state, then try just the state, since sometimes a client may say his wife lives in Atlanta, but in fact she lives in an incorporated suburb. Try checking any affiliation groups including school, professional listings, interest clubs. Some sites list over 500,000 alumni organizations. See if you can run down any known relatives, friends or colleagues to question. The print any relevant pages and offer them to the court as

evidence of the diligence of the search. If they are not admitted, offer to read them into the record and they'll probably get admitted as a short hand rendition of testimony.

4. LEGAL RESEARCH

Pat: Reggy, which sites do you find are the best for research into relevant caselaw and statutes?

Reggy: Richard Orsinger is saying that Lexis is trying to convince the State Bar of Texas to create a free Internet site for Lexis research while displaying ads. My guess is to "Stay tuned."

My favorite legal research sites are www.findlaw.com or www.versus.com. They charge for the research but you can buy one day or one research time. The versuslaw costs have come down considerably since we last talked, and now each attorney in a firm pays only \$6.95 per month for access to most state and federal reported cases. Findlaw is a thorough outline search engine.

When I was looking for the US Supreme Court case of Troxel (Grandparent Case) I went to the Court site at www.supremecourtus.gov/opinions/opinions.html. Supreme Court of Texas cases can be found at www.supreme.courts.state.tx.us/scopn.htm.

Pat: The Cornell Law School site is still my favorite for initiating legal research, along with Attorney Toolbox. The Cornell site has links to every state's statutes, all Supreme Court opinions, and the Blue Book for legal citations, which is still pretty thin on plot.

5. SPECIFIC DIVORCE RELATED SITES.

Reggy: Pat, what specific sites are divorce related that you like and why?

Pat: I've included a list of sites that I prepared for the AAML and the South Carolina Trial Lawyers Association, as Appendix A, and it has most of the sites I think are helpful. But I think the Harris County District Court sites are especially useful and helpful. There is a listing of authorized agents for service which can save time and heartache for the staff.

The HCAD site (www.hcad.org) for property appraisals is a must run for both the parties and for any close friends, family or business associates of the parties who may have transactions with them. The federal government sites are helpful, like www.ussavingsbonds.gov will calculate the value of bonds, right up to the day of trial or settlement, and make it easier to make a division. The financial sites are useful. MSInvestor, Yahoo, quote.com, and other sites allow the creation of a free portfolio and the value, gain, yield and analyst's view of securities can be updated throughout the day if necessary. Now, in addition to edmonds and kellys, which I still like as automobile valuation sites, there is carpoint.com which is good as well.

To figure out inflation effects there's a good site I found on the Houston Public Library's free, easy to navigate and very useful statistics' site index at <http://www.hpl.lib.tx.us/>. In a matter of just seconds this inflation site, <http://woodrow.mpls.frb.fed.us/economy/calc/cpihome.html>, will calculate what dollars in any year since 1913 are worth in any year through first quarter 2000.

I also think the map sites, such as www.mapsonus.com and airline travel schedules such as those

found at www.biztravel.com can combine to provide persuasive evidence to demonstrate by showing whether the hours needed for travel will have little or great effect on a child's free time; the proximity of homes to schools, friends, family, and work; the effect on the parents of airplane and travel needs for the child. The maps can also make it easier for the client to get to depositions, forensic expert meetings and the courthouse since maps and directions can be e-mailed from your office straight to the client. That can save annoying delays or questions.

Finally, sites like www.ebay.com can give a simple but fairly straightforward estimate of value of collectibles that clients used to haggle over. And if the parties can't agree on values or division, I don't see why a reasonable receiver can't just dispose of the question by an orderly on line auction.

Pat: It's your turn, Reggie. What special sites do you find helpful with a matrimonial practice?

Reggy:

Well Pat, here is my Top Ten list:

- 1.Mental Health issues www.grohol.com
- 2.Best Place to Begin Research www.howardnations.com
- 3.Best info on Publicly traded companies www.freedgar.com
- 4.Best Federal Information site www.firstgov.gov
- 5.Best site for comparative family law
www.law.cornell.edu/topics/divorce.html
- 6.Best Source for Texas Court Information
www.info.courts.state.tx.us/juddir/juddir.exe
- 7.Best site for your clients
www.divorcesupport.com
- 8.The acclaimed largest internet resource on divorce www.divorcenet.com
- 9.The best divorce and bankruptcy site
www.divorce-bankruptcy.com/general.htm
- 10.Best shameless plug site www.yob.com

VI. Child Support Online,

Pat: Harris County Child Support information is online now. Tell us where we find it and how much information we need to input?

Reggy: Well, it's a beginning. The site will show the last payment only but not complete history of payments. That still has to be retrieved in hard copy.

Anyone can access the data as long as the cause number is known. It is important to remember to enter the seven to nine digits of the cause number without a dash. That means that "1999-12345" is entered as 9912345. The site is located at www.hcdistrictclerk.com/Child_Support/child_support.html .

VII. Investigations and Getting the Goods -

Pat: Reggie, how can the Internet be used to get the goods on an opposing party, and how is it best used to gather financial records?

Reggy: Funny you should ask, because this is the number one question I get so first let me caution that accessing financial information on an opposing party without his or her consent can be a violation of their right of privacy and there are state and federal laws prohibiting the illegal acquisition of financial information without that party's consent. So obtain a signed authorization from that party should be requested, first from the party, and if not forthcoming, from the court. Save yourself a lot of trouble.

But here is a story that should make the hair stand up on your neck. The complete version will be

delivered by Patsy Wicoff at New Frontiers in Albuquerque New Mexico later this month.

- First recognize and be aware that some internet PI services are illegal and most services utilize “pretext calling” as a method of gaining sensitive information, which is illegal in some states like Colorado.
- The fact that you obtain the information from an internet PI service does not relieve you of liability if it is determined that the information was illegally acquired or in violation of privacy rights and laws.

To really comprehend the depth and breadth and range of personal information which can be elicited, look at the results when a reporter from Forbes Magazine had a private investigator internet service gather information on himself.

For a complete article, see “The End of Privacy” by Adam L. Penenberg at <http://www.forbes.com/forbes/99/1129/6413182a.htm>.

Within a week and armed with only the author’s name, the agency (<http://www.docusearch.com>) was able to ascertain the following:

1. Author’s full name Adam Landis Penenberg
2. Mother’s maiden name
3. Birth date
4. Current address
5. Social security number. This information cost \$49.00(1-5 were in two days)

The following took an additional four days:

6. Whom the author calls late at night
 7. How much money he had in the bank (cost \$45.00)
 8. Salary
 9. Rent
 10. Author’s unlisted phone number (he had two and the PI got both!) Cost \$49.00
- The search also turned up how much cash the author spent in a week: (\$400.00)
how much Penenberg deposited every two weeks(\$3061.00)
his favorite bistro; and
how much he wrote monthly to his psychotherapist (\$720.00);latest phone bill (\$108.00) with a list of long distance calls; “including late light fiber-optic dalliances (which soon ended) with a woman who traveled a lot.” as well as the phone numbers of some of Penenberg’s sources; \$503.00 in a forgotten account;\$7.00 in a dormant savings account; and \$1000.00 in a Chase account; the search also located his cash management account at Merrill Lynch which produced the following information - his balance; “direct deposits, withdrawals, ATM visits, check numbers with dates and amounts, and the name of my broker.”

Additional information costs according to the author for docusearch charges are as follows:

- Trace a cell phone number- Cost \$84.00
- What securities, stocks and bonds are owned Cost \$209.00
- The article additionally list some other resources that obtain similar information. They are Strategic Data Service at <http://www.datahawk.com> ;Infoseekers at <http://www.infoseekers.com> and Dig Dirt both at <http://www.pimall.com>.
- Docusearch also lists 300 free Search, Databases and Links at <http://www.docusearch.com/free.html>.

Docusearch's

Free Searches, Databases & Links

Detailed below is a collection of **300** links to totally free, online databases and valuable resources that you may use, at any time.

People/Business Searches	Telephone Searches	E-Mail Directories
US People Finder	Area Code Look-Up	bigfoot E-Mail Look-Up
Yahoo! People Search	Country Codes	Excite E-Mail Look-Up
Any-Who People Search	InfoSeek Toll-Free Directory	Findem E-Mail
Big Foot	US Telephone Finder	E-Mail Directory
Search Canada	Business InfoSpace Reverse	Internet Address Finder
Companies Online		
Big Yellow Business Directory		US Government Listings
Canadian Yellow Pages		Federal Government
		State Government
Genealogy	Business Reverse Look-Up	County Government
Genealogy Toolbox	Yellow Pages by Name	Local Government
Genealogy Online	Yellow Pages Reverse	US Patent Database
Ancestry Directory	Big Book Business Directory	Postal Links
Family Tree	International Directory	Zip Code Directory
Genealogy Directory	Internet 800 Directory	Zip + 4 Directory
Genealogy Resource Page	World Page Directory	City/State Zip Directory
Rootsweb.com	Fax Numbers	US Postal Service
	International Dialing Codes	

Searchable State Databases & Records		
		<u>Adoption Resources</u>
<u>Federal Agencies</u>	<u>Map Look-Ups</u>	<u>Find Me</u>
<u>Veterans Affairs</u>	<u>City Map</u>	<u>CAN Adopt</u>
<u>The White House</u>	Info Seek Maps	Birth Quest
US Bureau Of Prisons	Map Quest	The Seeker
US Department of Immigration	Map Routing	Adoption Puzzle Pieces
Federal Election Contributors	Maps On Us	Wingies Registry
FDIC Bank Locator	Yahoo! Maps	Who? Me?
Miscellaneous Links		Adoption Forum
Attorney Directory	Social Security Death Index	Adoption.Com
National Attorney Search	State Abbreviations	Bail Jumpers Ten Most Wanted
Patent Database	Power Cube Search Engine	Military Locator
Better Business Bureau.	SEC Filings Database	Domain Name Look-Up

VIII. Conclusion:

New sites are added daily, and old sites are improved. Information provided through Internet research and investigation must be verified, like any other source, but with practice and effort, the practitioner can access useful and up to the minute financial information, access to witnesses, caselaw and statutes, comparative detail and information.

We hope this has been helpful and we hope the needle you find in the Internet haystack is the shot in the arm your case needed.

APPENDIX "A"

The following sites were discussed
in the March 1999 AAML presentation.

- www.lib.berkeley.edu/Teachinglib//guides/internet/FindInfo.html information for beginners
- www.screen.com/start/gate is "A Beginner's Guide to Life on the Internet"
- www.4yourhoroscope.com may be smart to move for a continuance
- www.artbrokerage.com starting point for pricing collectibles and art for inventories,
- www.adobe.com easy downloading the adobe acrobat reader at no cost.
- Automobiles:
- www.edmunds.com Edmunds Blue Book
- www.kbb.com Kelley's Blue Book
- Employment/Labor:
- www.census.gov statistical information
- www.ssa.gov/ social security benefit information
- <http://stats.bls.gov> statistical information
- www.pbgc.gov/divorce.htm sample QDRO's and guides for preparation
- Family Law Resources:
- www.divorcenet.com
- www.divorceonline.com
- www.divorcesource.com
- www.custodysource.com
- <http://www.yob.com>: Reggy Hirsch's website offers articles and links to helpful research
- www.co.harris.tx.us/hcdc/family/family.html: Home page for nine family courts, with links to family code, state bar and ABA family sites.
- A comprehensive and large data base, this legal site has links to organizations, government agencies, specific practice areas, discussion groups and libraries.
- www.divorcenet.com
- This site provides links to other attorneys, chatrooms, topical articles and caselaw.
- www.divorcesource.com
- These two sites offer information and topical advice to the lawyer, as well as directly to the litigant. As clients are probably reading these sites, and others like them, it is worthwhile to examine them to understand the information that the client is acquiring.
- www.custodysource.com
- www.aaml.org/articles : The site of the American Academy of Matrimonial Lawyers, some of these articles can help deal with the esoteric issues that only occasionally arise: the athlete and divorce, stock options, frequent errors by business appraisers, dividing large assets are a few of the more than a hundred articles written by top attorneys from around the country.
- Financial:
- ftc.gov/us/statutes/fera.html Fair Credit Reporting Act.
- www.law.vill.edu/vcilp/fed_leg/ecpa.html) Electronic Comm. Privacy Act
- www.pcquote.com
- <http://investor.msn.com> : with this and similar free sites, you can input client's securities holdings for daily updates in value, dividends and research.
- <http://quote.yahoo.com>
- <http://pointcase.net>
- www.sec.gov/edgar
- www.paytrust.com as of August merged with www.paymybills.com and provides complete online bill paying and filing for \$8.95 per month after the three month trial period
- www.yodlee.com
- Sites provide account aggregation, enabling consumers to check everything from credit card activity

and brokerage statements to email accounts. Some like paytrust permit online bill paying.

www.savingsbonds.gov/

Input the type and date of your government bonds, and after downloading the free Savings Bonds Wizard from the Dept. Of U.S. Debt., you'll have a calculation of the current value. May be updated day of mediation or trial. Note that the ".gov" is crucial; using ".com" will bring up a commercial site.

Finders:

www.switchboard.com

One of the more reliable business and personal telephone/address finding sites.

http://100.infospace.com/_1_247687807_info/reverse.htm

Put in the telephone number and the site gives back the name and address, however, it only seems successful about 25 percent of the time. An ever increasing number of ad litemis, appointed to represent absent respondents, are utilizing these search tools with success.

<http://ilrg.com>

www.555-1212.com

Investigation:

www.pimall.com/nais/dir.spec.htm

Private investigator listings

www.knowx.com

Fee based searches for persons and property

Law:

www.law.cornell.edu/uniform

comprehensive statutes and laws

www.law.cornell.edu/topics/topic2

family law all 50 state statutes

www.findlaw.com/casecode/supreme

all cases since 1893

www.versuslaw.com

fee based case law and research, the bargain of the Internet, now costing less than \$7.00 per month per attorney for almost all state and federal courts

www.mgrossmanlaw.com/articles

Email computer law articles

www.mother.com/~randy/tools

"the Attorney's Tool Box", this is an excellent starting point for gathering information on research, office management, client needs.

www.Tx.direct.net/users/richard

Richard Orsinger shares his knowledge

www.raggiolaw.com/index

Ken Raggio's articles and helpful sites

<http://law.house.gov/319>

law on the internet, including AAML articles

www.law.cornell.edu/citation/citation.table

Blue Book citation guide

Maps:

www.freetrip.com

www.mapsonus.com

www.mapblast.com

www.mapquest.com

www.lycos.com/roadmap.html

These sites are similar, and most offer both pictorial maps as well as street by street turning directions with milage notations. These provide a good way to let the court know exactly where the school, home, friends and work of your client are located.

Mental health:

www.aacap.org

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

www.counseling.org

The American Counseling Association

www.ama.assn.org

The American Medical Association

www.psych.org

The American Psychiatric Association

www.apa.org

The American Psychological Association

www.naswdc.org

The National Association of Social Workers

www.nimh.nih.gov

The National Institute of Mental Health

www.psychcrawler.com

www.pace-custody.org

www.samhsa.gov

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Adm.

www.mentalhealth.org Center for Mental Health Services (SMHS)

Office Management:

www.anyday.com

Free, online and complete dayplanner, imports from Palm Pilot, Outlook and others.

www.faxwave.com

www.efax.com

www.jfax.com

All three sites claim to make free faxing and receiving from the laptop or desktop a simple matter.

But if the number dialed is not local, there could be hidden charges for incoming and outgoing faxes.

Incoming faxes are received via email.

www.estamp.com

www.stamps.com

Both sites are competing to be the online provider of postage, so that the envelope can be stamped for delivery right at your legal assistant's desk. Overnight mail, priority, pick up and pricing are all explained. Credit card billing means no more standing in line at the post office.

www.mailstart.com

With your email address and password, you can retrieve email from the road and from any computer with an internet connection.

Parenting:

www.parentsoup.com

parents guides

www.fafsa.edu.gov/

application for student aid on line

www.finaid.org

guide to available student financial aid for college

www.gocollege.com

input info (SAT etc.) advises on college choices

www.butterfly.net/peopleslaw/child/shared

Child support calculations, suggestions and worksheet based on shared physical custody.

www.2h.com/Tests/personality Visit this site and pick out a personality test to sample.

Quotes:

<http://barbleby.com/99>

Favorite quotes are found in this Bartlett's Familiar Quotation site at Columbia, listed either alphabetically or chronologically

www.thetech.mit.edu/80/Shakespeare/works

All of the bard's works are available through this site.

www.gutenberg.net

Full text from pre-1923 classic works, Dante and Poe to Alice in Wonderland.

Search Engines:

www.google.com

www.northernlights.com

www.yahoo.com

www.lycos.com

www.altavista.com

www.infoseek.com

www.findlaw.com

Travel:

www.iflyswa.com

SouthWestAirlines

www.cooltravelassistant.com

Continental Airlines

www.itn.net

linked with American Express

www.rentaphone.co.uk

If you need to stay touch with folks back home while you're exploring the caves in Cappadocia, an international cellular phone, at \$6.50 per day plus local U.S. telephone delivery charges, may be the answer. Usage rates vary depending on local and corporate rates are available.

www.biztravel.com

This site keeps track of several itineraries, permits booking and checks for best flights based on price as well as times of travel.

www.expedia.com

Yahoo, June 2000, highlights this as the best overall travel site, with Flight Price Matcher letting the user name a price and checking to see if any carrier will meet it.

www.lonelyplanet.com

Along with guidebooks of the same name, this irreverent site includes a bulletin board for those seeking travel advice, email services and great help for third world travel. Reads like insider information.

www.travelocity.com

Ownership by the Sabre group gives this site an edge over competitors, and in addition to personal travel, is good for helping clients schedule holiday periods and travel. By free subscription, users can gather current flight availability and cost, airport map information, discounted hotel rates. Flight information is useful in detailing travel arrangements for the long distance visitation periods.

www.trip.com/ft/home/

Flight tracking site lets you determine the current status of any flights between major cities in the United States. Not only will you be able to determine whether the plane is on schedule, this site offers a way to notify up to three people, over the internet, of an estimated arrival time.

www.priceline.com

A bid here on the highest price you're willing to pay for an airline trip or hotel stay may win you a bargain, but it's a firm one, so be certain before you send in that low bid.

[Http://www.xe.net/ucc/](http://www.xe.net/ucc/) This universal currency converter will calculate dollars in foreign currency values or vice versa, in seconds.

<http://www.travlang.com> Language school at your fingertips. Want to know how to say "how much is that" and hundreds of other useful phrases in more than 50 languages, from Africaans to Zulu, with a brush up on your high school French in between.

Verification:

With Congressional approval of the internet signature bill in mid-June, the path of internet contracting is cleared. Encryption programs will become increasingly available and user friendly, but in the meantime, several are available at little or no cost through web access:

www.digitalid.verisign.com

For monthly fees, this site provides digital signatures for verification and reliability in communication. The digital signature serves as a substitute for the sealed envelope or your signature when you send messages. Encryption and digital signing of email is possible here.

www.hushmail.com

This site provides an encrypted, free email service. Encryption works by scrambling and encoding information so that the proper recipient is the only party who has access to the message.

Vacation/Fun:

www.pollen.com

Check the maps to see four day allergy forecasts.

www.weatherexpress.com

Turns your PC into a weather station, but cost is \$20.00 after free trial.

www.ticketmaster.com

Might as well see if the Rolling Stones are going to be in the neighborhood, as long as you're taking the deposition.

Misc.

www.bluemountain.com ;

www.seeyouthere.com: greeting cards, invitations and RSVP services, free and easy to use.

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