

The Continuing Education of Lawyers – Why It Matters

by Heather Casey

A lawyer's education does not end at the conclusion of a bar exam. There are good reasons for this; the law evolves over time, as do the tools researchers use to find the law. In order to keep up with substantive changes in the law and technological advances, lawyers, like doctors and other learned professionals, need to maintain their grasp on the changes that arise as society develops and technology improves.

One method of ensuring that lawyers continue their education after law school is the continuing legal education requirement that all state bars require of active members. To meet Virginia's annual twelve credit-hour requirement (including two hours of ethics), national organizations such as the Practising Law Institute offer CLE courses which may count towards the state's requirements. Conferences concerning a specific area of law can often apply to a state bar's CLE credit hour requirements. Law schools also hold events such as symposia and workshops that may count towards CLE credits.

Technological advances now provide methods of completing CLE courses without the need to travel outside the comfort of home or office. Attorneys can "attend" CLE courses via audio and video webinars and teleconferences. Attorneys have options to pursue CLE courses through various methods of self-study, including online courses, audio CDs and DVDs as well as books and course materials. In Virginia, these books and course materials are essential; they are sometimes the only places to find discussions of those changes in the law so vital to successful practice.

We all know the law is ever-changing, but the pace of technological advances in finding the law has become staggering. Within the past few years, several publishers have unveiled new resources that

are changing the way lawyers research. These include new versions of Westlaw (WestlawNext) and LexisNexis (Lexis Advance). WestlawNext and Lexis Advance are research systems that offer "Google-like" approaches to searching for legal materials. Rather than selecting specific databases first and typing in a terms and connectors search, researchers can simply type a query into both WestlawNext and Lexis Advance, just as if using Google, and receive countless results spanning all types of resources, from cases to statutes to secondary sources such as law review articles and practice forms. (Researchers can also narrow selections in both systems but the default setting retrieves results from all available databases).

At the same time, Bloomberg has expanded its business coverage to include a new online database focused on law, Bloomberg Law. Bloomberg Law offers access to cases and statutes as well as a citator service similar to KeyCite in Westlaw and Shepard's citators in LexisNexis. One advantage of Bloomberg Law is its ability to retrieve docket items if the dockets have been retrieved from PACER and posted to Bloomberg Law. This ability to retrieve court documents without incurring PACER's charges gives Bloomberg Law an edge as a legal online resource. Bloomberg also recently acquired another legal publisher, the Bureau of National Affairs, and changes are in the works based on that merger. Hein Online continues to expand its collections, making more materials available to practitioners who know where to look.

Knowing how to use these various platforms is essential to the effective practice of law. Legal research is the foundation of a lawyer's job and as we increasingly move away from print resources to electronic access, it is important for lawyers, whether they have

Continuing Legal Education Websites

Virginia CLE: <https://www.vacle.org/>
The website outlines hundreds of Virginia-centric MCLE-approved seminars with many media options. An attorney can search the programs by topic or date and report credits online to the Virginia State Bar.

Practising Law Institute:
<http://www.pli.edu/>
PLI is a national continuing education group and offers programs and publications in twenty-four practice areas. They offer onsite seminars, mostly in New York, but offer webcasts as well. Contact the Virginia State Bar to inquire about credit approval.

been practicing for fifty, fifteen, or five years, to stay aware of the changes to the tools they rely on for competent legal research. CLE courses are an excellent resource for learning about changes in the law, but it is also vital to remain educated about the evolving tools for finding the law.



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