

Legal E-mail Subscription Services for Busy Practitioners

by Elaine Cassel

Thanks to the wealth of legal information resources available on the World Wide Web, every practitioner can reap the benefits of up-to-the minute information formerly available only to firms with law libraries and research support staff.¹ Free online e-mail subscription services deliver legal news, case decisions, and legislative action to your desktop daily, weekly, and, in some cases, several times a day.

I tried several free subscription services before settling on FindLaw <http://www.findlaw.com> as my preferred portal for breaking legal news, current case decisions, and new federal statutes and regulations. FindLaw's home page provides links to many types of legal resources, as do many sites,² but it has additional valuable resources.

Its daily *Legal News Letter* <http://legalnews.findlaw.com> links to daily news categorized according to legal topic areas, such as business, employment, criminal, civil rights, international and intellectual property law as well as new case decisions relating to ongoing high profile cases (such as Microsoft, tobacco litigation, and the Wan Ho Lee prosecution).

FindLaw's weekly resource for solo attorneys and small law firms is *The Practice Paper*. Its features include marketing tips (a recent issue featured Web-based legal marketing), Web technology issues (such as how to choose an ISP and comparisons of DSL, cable modem and 56K), law office management tips, practice pointers, ethical issues, and news from solo attorneys and small firms. Register for any of FindLaw's subscription services at <http://www.findlaw.com/lists/announcesubscribe.html>.

FindLaw also has an e-mail bulletin announcing decisions from all of the federal circuit courts and the U.S. Supreme Court within hours after their release, with links to case opinions.³ However, I prefer the Supreme Court service from Cornell University Law School's Legal Information Institute. Since 1993, LII has distributed the *liibulletin* consisting of syllabi and full-text opinions of U.S. Supreme Court decisions within hours of their release by the Court's reporter.⁴ To subscribe to the *liibulletin* send an e-mail message (in plain text, not HTML) to listserv@listserv.law.cornell.edu, with the message: subscribe liibulletin.⁵

There are several subscription services dedicated to Internet law and e-commerce, but my favorite is New York attorney Martin Samson's *Internet Library Case Update*, e-mail messages with summaries of significant decisions in this fast changing arena. Subscribe at <http://www.phillipsnizer.com/internetlib.htm> or send e-mail to msamson@phillipsnizer.com.

Speaking of the Internet, if cyberspace is your domain, consider a free subscription to the periodic newsletter from Harvard University Law School's Berkman Center for Internet & Society.

With articles, policy analyses, position papers written by Harvard Law and other faculty from distinguished law schools, and online courses related to Internet law, The Berkman Center's site is on the cutting edge of cyberlaw. Subscribe at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu>.

Practitioners in the health care field should check out the weekly service of the American Medical Association, featuring news about health care policy and legal issues. Available at <http://www.ama-assn.org/public/journals/amnews>, you can subscribe by sending e-mail to U-A6.39.40733@unity.ama-assn.org.

Attorneys interested in criminal law and juvenile justice should take advantage of the National Criminal Justice Reference Service e-mail service. JustInfo has links to statistical reports, research studies, and policy papers from most federal criminal justice and law enforcement agencies. Subscribe by sending e-mail to listproc@ncjrs.org with this message: subscribe justinfo your name (e.g., subscribe justinfo John Doe).

Take some time to browse and find the services that work for you. A word of caution: as with anything else related to the Web, excess is the name of the game. If you don't limit your e-mail subscriptions, as well as the time spent following the links, you may begin to suffer from information overload and disruptions in your daily schedule. Consider setting aside a certain time each day to read the bulletins and link to the cases or stories that are of immediate concern. Develop a file system for saving others that may be helpful in the future, or that you want to read when time allows. ☺

Endnotes

- 1 Online legal research is beyond the scope of this Practice Note.
- 2 From the home page you can link to executive, legislative, and judicial federal resources, state codes and courts, foreign and international law and treaties, government directories, legal dictionaries, practice materials such as blank forms and software, treatises on legal subjects, law schools, legal organizations (national, state and local bars), law firms and lawyers, consultants and experts, and community and message boards. This type of megasite is not unique—many law sites provide this. But I have found FindLaw easy to navigate. I get to where I want to be in the Virginia code or Virginia legislative tracking site quicker from FindLaw than I do from using the URL directly. But these links are only the beginning.
- 3 For the Fourth Circuit, go to <http://www.findlaw.com/casecode/courts/4th.html>.
- 4 The site also indexes past and current cases by first- and last-named parties, searches opinions by key words, has detailed information about the court's calendar, including schedules for oral hearings, links to prior case histories, summaries of each term's decisions by topic area, and information about the justices.
- 5 Visit the Cornell site at <http://www.law.cornell.edu> and link to the Legal Information Institute.

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