

New Sources

LEGAL RESEARCH

The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet: Conducting Effective Investigative & Legal Research on the Internet.

9th ed. Carole A. Levitt & Mark E. Rosch. 2008. IFL Press. Softcover. 308p. ISBN: 978-0-9713257-3-9. \$59.95.

Despite my feeling that a book about Internet resources is a bit of an oxymoron, I looked forward to receiving my review copy of this guide. After reading it, I can't be quite so positive. I felt that the book was poorly written and contained information that I found to be incomplete, inaccurate, outdated, or internally inconsistent.

In the first five chapters, the authors discuss Internet basics. Chapter 1 covers Web browsers, and chapter 2 covers how to search the Web. In chapter 3, the authors offer their favorite search engines. Chapter 4 is about the "visible," "invisible," and "semi-visible" Web. Chapter 5, entitled "Technology Tips," is perhaps the book's weakest chapter. It covers three subjects that have only a tenuous relationship with each other or with the rest of the book: desktop search engines; Adobe Acrobat Professional; and "Keeping up with Your Practice Area with Technology" by using mailing lists, free e-newsletters, slip opinion alerts, and RSS feeds.

The balance of the book is devoted to chapters on free and paid investigative research resources; finding experts and verifying their credentials; and using the Internet for substantive legal research. There is a brief final chapter about how to cite resources found on the Internet.

In my opinion, the authors should have hired a professional editor to give the work a going over. I saw numerous grammatical and typographical errors. In addition, some of the styling (such as the continued use of quotation marks around a term that has already been defined) was annoying.

An editor's eye would have helped with the content as well. For example, I can certainly appreciate the necessity of addressing fairly basic topics, e.g., general-use search engines (Google and Yahoo) in a book such as this. However, this book is not intended for an inexperienced audience. Therefore, I feel that it is not necessary to start out by explaining such rudimentary concepts as what the Internet is, what a Web browser is, and that "[y]ou can e-mail information you have located on the Web by simply 'copying and pasting' the text of the Web page into the body of an e-mail." At the other end of the scale, the chapter on tech tools (including desktop search engines and Adobe Acrobat Pro) should perhaps have been excised as

beyond this work's scope.

If the writing and editing were poor, but the information provided was nevertheless thorough, accurate, and timely, the book might have some redeeming value. Unfortunately, this is not the case. For example, although the book's copyright date is 2008, the discussion of the scope of Google versus Yahoo relies on figures from 2004 and 2005. And while the authors explain (on p.41) that Google indexes documents in numerous formats (including PDF and Microsoft Word), two pages later they claim that the USA.gov site can help locate many government documents that would not be found anywhere else because they are posted in file formats other than HTML – such as (you guessed it) PDF and Word.

The authors' treatment of RSS, in particular, is exceedingly weak. For example, the half-page devoted to RSS mentions only three feed readers (Yahoo, Pluck, and Newsgator), omitting such popular readers as Google Reader and Bloglines. The only three blogging platforms mentioned are Blogger, Journalspace, and Moveable Type, despite the current ubiquity of blogs created with Wordpress and Typepad.

The discussion of available legal research resources confirmed my early impression of the book. For example, the authors overlook valuable sources like the Social Science Research Network (which includes an extensive Legal Scholarship Network), and the chapter on locating lawyers, judges, and legal professionals doesn't mention Avvo.com (which was launched in June 2007). Although I am not familiar enough with factual research on the Web to be able to comment on how the treatment of that subject measures up, I would guess that the book suffers from similar omissions in this area.

To their credit, the authors do clearly explain the scope of the websites they include. They also cover how to perform both basic and advanced searches on those sites.

Physically, the book (which was published by the authors' own publishing house) is not impressive. It is standard 8.5" x 11" pages bound with glue and not likely to hold up to heavy use.

In sum, the contents of this book may be useful as a handout at their CLE presentations (which the authors promote in the book's front matter and in some of the advertising flyers following the index). However, I feel the book, by itself, is not a worthwhile purchase for law firm or academic law libraries.

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