Top Ten Internet Sites for Litigators

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How big is the Internet?
Search engines have indexed over *three billion* web pages, and these are just a fraction of the global Internet. Add to that number the millions of sites not indexed because they require a password for access, then, throw in all of the "deep" or "invisible" web--a vast reservoir of data requiring direct query to extract information and some *500 times* bigger than the indexed web. So how big is the Internet? BIG! It's bigger'n your Aunt Annie's fanny!

Give or Take a Trillion
These are my top ten helpful sites for litigators—each is one in a trillion—followed by some other sites deserving of honorable mention. Where two sites are named, they perform complementary functions or are simply too similar to warrant choosing one over another--in short, a tie.

1. Google
www.google.com
I can mislay a piece of paper in a ten-foot square area and tear my hair out trying to find it again. If you've ever wasted an hour or two searching for a file in your office or a document on your personal computer, you have a glimmer of the challenge to finding a digital needle in a several billion web page haystack strewn across the world. It's feast or famine. How often have you done a web search only to find that hundreds *or thousands* of the links returned had no relevance at all? Because of its uncanny ability to find and prioritize the right resource, the awesome search engine Google gets my vote as the most helpful site on the Internet for litigators, and for everyone else as well.

The secret to Google's success is its unique page ranking system. Unlike search engines that are influenced—and often mislead--by repeated key words appearing on or hidden within a web page, Google prioritizes pages according to how many other pages link to the target page, on the assumption that the more relevant and useful the content on a page, the greater likelihood that other sites have linked to it. Google interprets a link from page A to page B as a vote by page A for page B. Google looks at more than the sheer volume of links ("votes") a page receives; it also analyzes the page that casts the vote. Votes cast by pages that are themselves widely linked weigh more heavily and help to elevate target pages in the relevance ranking. The bottom line is higher precision, making Google head-and-shoulders better at finding what you seek.

Google also offers little-noticed bells and whistles that litigators will appreciate. Many users overlook the "Images" and "Groups" tabs at the top of each Google page or miss the "Language Tools" link on the homepage. If you click the Images tab, Google finds images relating to your search terms— a useful feature when looking for medical illustration for demonstrative purposes or something to beef up your mediation PowerPoint. The "Groups" tab leads to a twenty-year archive of 700 million Usenet messages—online postings that may reveal the preferences and peccadilloes of parties, witnesses and even opposing counsel, and probably uncover some useful information about products and companies. The Language Tools include an instant translator that, while no substitute for the flesh-and-blood variety, is great for on-the-fly translation of, *e.g.*, a Mexican marriage or birth certificate or a German technical report. It will even instantly translate an entire web page for you. The translator function handles German, Spanish, French, Italian and Portuguese, both to and from English.

2. MYTexasBar/FindLaw

www.mytexasbar.com
www.findlaw.com

Even if I weren't hopelessly biased because I helped create MYTexasBar, I'd include it on the top ten list. MYTexasBar is a customizable web portal site designed expressly to serve Texas lawyers and their staff. MTB would deserve kudos if all it offered were the online legal research that, for many users, is the entire law library they need. But MYTexasBar is so much more. It provides an electronic calendar, to-do list and contacts system that synchs with Palm devices and Microsoft Outlook, online storage, customized news feeds, weather, a lawyer cartoon from the New Yorker collection, Texas lawyer locator, dictionary, discussion groups, SEC Edgar access and a host of other resources and tools helping hardworking lawyers. Best of all, thanks to former State Bar president Lynne Liberato, MYTexasBar is totally free to all Texas lawyers and their staff.

FindLaw deserves a place of honor high on any law-related top ten list, but because FindLaw powers MYTexasBar and so much of MTB's content comes from FindLaw, I've grouped them together. FindLaw is the most visited legal website on the Internet, and for good reason. It's loaded with resources invaluable to any practice area. It's comprehensive, current and FREE.

3. Accurint

www.accurint.com

Locating people ("skip tracing") and finding out about them is an essential skill for litigators. The newest kid on the block for skip tracing is Accurint. What sets Accurint apart is not just the high quality of its data--rivaling

industry leader Choicepoint in some respects--but its pricing, which is just dirt cheap. Accurint can find your subject for a quarter--yes, just twenty-five cents--and will deliver a neat little dossier of addresses, relatives, neighbors and more in seconds, for under five bucks. The interface is intuitive and intelligent, and the system allows users to track usage by account or client number and authorize use by others within an account. The owner of the account can set additional user IDs and passwords, as well as program access limits for authorized sub-users.   Accurint has just added court records to its database and expects to be adding drivers' license records for thirty-three states along with criminal records data. On a scale from one to wow, Accurint is an unqualified WOW!

4. TrialSmith

www.trialsmith.com

This amazing subscription-based resource (formerly DepoConnect.com) exclusively serves plaintiffs lawyers; that is, those who can attest that they will not utilize the site's materials for defense representation of insurance companies, corporations or defendants in actions filed by individuals who have been injured or damaged and who are not associated with a law firm that as a major component of its practice consistently represents insurance companies or defendants. If that describes you, then you are fortunate indeed to have access to the full text of over ten million pages of testimony in 147,000 depositions—principally depositions of corporate representatives and experts on both sides of the docket. The search engine is powerful and quick, and the other tools available are pretty impressive too. The site offers, *inter alia,* inexpensive access to public records and the right to join 40,000 other plaintiff lawyers in highly specialized forums. The only drawback is that TrialSmith is not dirt cheap, with limited subscriber access starting at $195.00 per year and $30.00 per download. The silver lining is that qualified users can search the databases for free as complimentary subscribers, allowing users to hold off on subscribing until something useful appears.

5. West and Lexis

www.westlaw.com
www.lexisnexis.com

Others are less costly, but there are simply no better online legal research providers than West and Lexis. Notwithstanding their ardent competition and West's higher scores in preference polls, the choice between them is like opting between Coke and Pepsi. If you haven't perused each company's offerings in some time, you might do well to give one or both a fresh look. Each has broadened and deepened its content far beyond case law and statutes, to include secondary sources, public records, news and litigation support. Moreover, some of the big bucks they rake in from selling the

world's most expensive online legal research has been turned to the public good in the form of useful, no-cost online offerings like West's FindLaw.com and Lexis' lexisone.com.

6. Lawyer Express
www.lawyerexpress.com

To paraphrase the great English author Samuel Johnson, 'the next best thing to knowing something is knowing where to find it.' A busy fellow like Sam might have made Lawyer Express his home page for the efficient way it crams a multitude of relevant links onto a single web page covering just about any topic of daily interest. Lawyer Express offers no content of its own, rather it's an intelligent, evolving way to get to many other sites that do. Best of all, Lawyer Express allows registered users to add and delete links from their page at no charge.

7. Terraserver and MapQuest
http://terraserver.microsoft.net/
www.mapquest.com

Whether you need aerial imagery for demonstrative evidence or just a map to help find the courthouse, these sites are lifesavers. Terraserver is one of the world's largest online databases providing free public access to a vast library of maps and aerial photography. How large? The site offers over three terabytes of image data. That's *three million* megabytes, or 120,000 four-drawer filing cabinets of information. It's a great way to take a bird's-eye look at an intersection where a crash occurred or a toxic waste site.

Since a reported one in four Internet users access MapQuest data every month, chances are the site is already on your favorites list. It couldn't be much simpler to use to map an address or intersection or to obtain driving directions between any two points. You never can tell when mapping an opponent's route will turn up inconsistencies, reveal deviation from course and scope or even expose an extramarital 'detour.' Having your client work from a map can prevent serious errors in deposition or trial with respect to compass points, street names and direction.

8. Design Gallery and Corbis
http://dgl.microsoft.com
www.corbis.com

After three days, jurors retain 650% more information when they acquire it by seeing and hearing than by listening alone. That means you're much more persuasive when you add a visual component to your advocacy. What works for jurors also wins the day with judges, risk managers and adjusters. You learned it in kindergarten, now use it: <u>show</u> and tell. A ready source of

images to reinforce advocacy can be found at Microsoft's Design Gallery Live, a free resource designed for users of the Microsoft Office suite of programs. The site affords ready access to hundreds of thousands of clip art images, photographs and sound samples. The easiest way to get to the site is to select *Insert > Picture > Clip Art > Clips Online* from your Office application menu.

Corbis has spent the past decade creating the world's finest and most comprehensive collections of digital imagery. From the Bettmann Collection to UPI, Corbis makes some of the world's most recognized images available online. The Corbis Collection includes over 65 million images, with 2.1 million available online, searchable by keyword. Typically a license to use an image costs less than six dollars, but remember: it's worth a thousand words.

9. **LLRX**
www.llrx.com
Like Meg Ryan's children's bookstore in the film "You've Got Mail," Law Library Resource Xchange is one of those funky, spunky little gems that manages to be both useful and influential by dint of the perseverance and talent of a handful of people catering to a modest but devoted cadre of readers. As you poke around LLRX, you'll find great stuff—articles, links, reviews, and tips—all over the place. The site is free, as are the opt-in e-mail newsletters. Unlike Meg Ryan's "Shop Around the Corner," here's hoping that LLRX is with us for the long haul.

10.Ball's Links
www.craigball.com
Too many lawyers suggested that my website should be on this list for good taste to oblige me to omit it. Created expressly to assist trial lawyers, Craig's Sampler of Informal Discovery Links is a unique online resource. The site focuses on free and fee-based "cybersleuthing" resources as well as sites supporting the investigation of products liability and personal injury actions. Other pages include Ball's Phone Finder (a telephone white pages meta-locator), Search Central (a meta-search engine interface), plus various other publications and presentations for lawyers. It's free and doesn't track anything about your visit or try to sell you anything.

Honorable Mention:

Public Data
www.publicdata.com
This $25.00 *per year* database contains records of licensed drivers, sex offenders, Texas voters, vehicle license tags and criminal records for selected states. Search license records by name, or drivers license number and learn name, address,

weight, birth date, sex, expiration date, status, class and restrictions. Although most comprehensive in its coverage of Texas data, it also offers DMV or DL information for Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Mississippi, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, South Dakota, Utah, Wisconsin and Wyoming and criminal records for thirty states.

Law.com
www.law.com
The most entertaining legal journalism today fills the pages of two-dozen American Lawyer Media national and regional magazines and newspapers, and the choicest parts of those publications come online at Law.com. Law.com offers a daily Legal Newswire e-mail serving top headlines, state-specific webzines, a litigation practice center and many other free and subscription-based resources. Law.com also has all the rumor and gossip that makes its print counterparts so irresistible.

Search Systems
www.searchsystems.net
Search Systems is not a destination site but a compendium of free online public data resources. It lists more than 8,400 such sites, sensibly indexed both topically and geographically. Somebody deserves a medal for this one!

State Bar of Texas Online Library
www.texasbarcle.com
You know how one smart, on-point CLE article can save you hours of research? Imagine *3,500* recent CLE articles that you could search by practice area and keywords. That's the brilliance of the Online Library. For $295.00 per year, this ever-growing treasure trove will likely pay for itself the first time you use it.

Nations Law Links
www.howardnations.com
Houston personal injury attorney Howard Nations maintains an impressive links site geared to lawyers. The site has grown so large of late, it's increasingly hard to find what you're looking for, but it's surely in there…somewhere. The traumatic brain injury links are especially noteworthy.

Merck Manual
www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual
The Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy, now in its 17th edition, is the best all-around medical reference source out there. It's the perfect tool to quickly identify appropriate standards of care for health providers or the prognosis and

treatment regimen for particular ailments and injuries. If you don't keep the hardcover version at hand, be sure to bookmark the online edition.

New York Times
www.nytimes.com
"All the news that's fit to print" fits very nicely on the web too. Boasting the largest staff of journalists of any newspaper, The New York Times is simply the nation's finest daily. The depth, caliber and even-handedness of its coverage make it a solid source of information for lawyers. Its crossword puzzle is pretty wonderful, too! Content fairly mirrors the print version and just about everything online is free after a simple registration.

e-Bay
www.e-bay.com
Ask the question, "Where can I buy a product just like the one which failed" and you're likely to find the answer is "On e-Bay," the world's largest yard sale. Using an online auction system, e-Bay pairs buyers and sellers of just about anything (except firearms, contraband, prescription drugs and human body parts).

Computer Forensics, Inc.
www.forensics.com
Run by a commercial provider of electronic media discovery services, the CFI website includes concise and comprehensible articles about many aspects of computer forensics, as well as case summaries and sample discovery documents. If you are stymied by the challenge of electronic evidence discovery, this is a good place to start.

Babelfish Translator
http://babel.altavista.com
Though Google wins overall, the AltaVista search engine has the better automatic translator. AltaVista Babelfish translation enables you to translate short passages of text or entire Web sites to and from English in eight languages, including Chinese, Japanese and Korean, making it useful for making some sense of documents produced by, *e.g.*, Asian manufacturers and automakers.

Juritas
www.juritas.com
Juritas is a private company that has formed an alliance with the Defense Research Institute and makes the transcripts of "thousands" of expert witness depositions available online, but only to members of the DRI.