

# Cyberlex

This is the first of what is to be a regular column. This column will let you know what you can find on the Internet - this will usually be practical, but all work and no play makes for 'unbalanced' lawyers so I will add a fun thing or two each column.

Why are over 75% of lawyers in NSW 'on-line'? What is this thing called the 'Internet'? If I have a computer am I surfing the web? All these questions and more will be answered in this column. Being the first column, I will naturally have to start at the beginning, so you guru's will have to be patient.

We have all heard these phrases: 'the Internet'; 'the web'; 'world wide web'; 'cyberspace'; and 'information super highway'. These are all names given to the same creature: a network of computers spread all over the world. The Internet (my preferred term) does not of itself provide information but rather provides the means to access computers that contain the requested information. The Internet can be viewed as your own international library.

## Jargon

Lawyers have their own jargon, our cryptic use of Latin at parties endears us no end. The Internet also has its own language that all users must master (remember, you can travel to France if you can't speak French, however, the trip is more enjoyable if you make the effort to learn the basics of the language: similarly with the Internet). Each column I will explain a term used in connection with the Internet.

This week we will look at URL or Uniform Resource Locator. URL's are essential to your navigation on the Internet. If you go to a library and you have no idea where the book you want is located, what do you do? Well you look it up on the microfiche reader and you obtain a dewey decimal number - an address to the location of the book. A URL is exactly the same but better, it has nice friendly names like [www.butterworths.com.au](http://www.butterworths.com.au), [www.ntu.edu.au](http://www.ntu.edu.au), [www.nt.gov.au](http://www.nt.gov.au), [www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com) and [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au). If you type one of the above addresses into the URL or Address Bar of your browser, then assuming everything else is working, it will retrieve the information stored at that address. It is that easy!

So in broad terms you now know what the Internet is, but what can it do for you? How will it benefit a legal practice? Well, it just so happens that the Northern Territory was one of the first jurisdictions to make publicly

available all of its legislation via the Internet (<http://notes.nt.gov.au/dcm/legislat/legislat.nsf?OpenDatabase>). All states now have legislation available on Austlii (see the Road Stop below). So, it is possible for a firm to obtain legislation via the Internet for less than 4% of the Supreme Court Scale i.e. less than \$5.00 per hour (the average rate users are charged for access to the Internet). Firms would no longer need space to store the legislation in hard copy and staff to maintain currency nor would the firm need to purchase new legislation the multitude of updates put out by parliaments every year. However, before you all throw your legislation away, remember that, as a practitioner you need to ensure that the material you use is reliable (Tip #1: always evaluate the source of your Internet materials and if in any doubt, verify



it with the hard copy). Further, when you rely on technology, Murphy's Law dictates that the technology will fail at the time it is most needed (Internet access problems are becoming rare, but are always possible - if a council worker puts a backhoe through your telephone cable or power lines, you have no access). Commercial publishers are also taking up the Internet challenge. Butterworths ([www.butterworths.com.au](http://www.butterworths.com.au)) provides almost all of its loose-leaf collections and reports on-line.

The amount of legal material now available on-line, whether it be legislation, cases, precedents, journals, parliamentary speeches is in a word, massive. Small firms have always envied the large and their library budgets. The Internet is an equaliser. All legal practitioners can have access to the Internet at a low cost. This means better resourced practitioners throughout the whole profession. The other advantage of the Internet is the ability to utilise electronic research methods. Practitioners are able to save hours by not having to leave their desks, now you can quickly locate relevant cases and materials

using text search engines.

That is all the space I have, so next month I will walk you through the complexities of finding information on the highway as well as explain the difference between FTP and HTTP. If you have any questions or requests please send them in and I will try to cover them. Future columns will discuss: getting connected; electronic search techniques; firewalls; ASIC and other government agencies on-line; I want my own domain name; [think of some more]

## Road Stop: Austlii ([www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au))

If you haven't heard of or been to Austlii then you are missing out on thousands of dollars of legal resources and are in for a treat. Austlii contains material that would normally cost a legal practice thousands per year to purchase and maintain properly. Practitioners in firms of all sizes have access to materials (at any time) that exceed even the resources that large firms have historically maintained at great expense. In a nutshell, Austlii contains primary materials (legislation and reports) for all jurisdictions and a multitude of other material including parliamentary Hansards and e-journals. Austlii also contains international material and links to hundreds of Internet sites. This column is too small to list all the resources available, but the most useful feature of Austlii is that all material on Austlii can be accessed using 'full text searching'. You can find relevant cases and materials in minutes at almost no cost! This site alone more than pays for the time, effort and cost of connecting your practice to the Internet.

## When the boss is not looking..

Check out the satirical comic site [www.dilbert.com](http://www.dilbert.com) (appears in *The Australian* newspaper). Who is Dilbert? "A poster boy for the corporately disenfranchised, Dilbert will never make vice president....". The Dilbert site offers a daily comic, a four-week archive of comic strips, a Daily Mental Workout, advice from Catbert's Anti-Career Zone and a List of the Day.

Jason Schoolmeester is a legal practitioner at Parishes. He can be reached at [jasons@legalnet.net.au](mailto:jasons@legalnet.net.au). For those without E-mail you can Ph: 8948 1155.