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Current Awareness Alerts Make the Internet Revolve Around You

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Current awareness alerts make the Internet

REVOLVE AROUND YOU

By JAMES M. DONOVAN, FACULTY AND ACCESS SERVICES LIBRARIAN

The Internet is a constantly evolving source of information for the busy lawyer. Yet who has time to spend precious hours searching the Web to find the latest opinions or the hottest news that could make the difference in your professional practice?

Fortunately, there is an easier way: make it come to you. **Current awareness services** can collect all the information you want to routinely see and present it to you in a convenient format.

Despite the easy availability of these services, UGA law librarians were surprised to learn at their most recent CLE session on Internet legal researching – organized in collaboration with the Institute of Continuing Legal Education – that few attorneys utilize these opportunities.

The following suggestions should help even the most Internet-timid lawyer to set up basic services that can greatly ease the information crunch.

I want to be current, but I do not have time to search the Web for news. I wish it could come to me, like a newspaper subscription.

It can! Current awareness alerts can be set up using one of two methods.

The first uses traditional e-mails that arrive in the subscriber's inbox, while the second uses a Web-based reader to notify the user when new content has been posted to favorite Web sites and blogs.

Everyone probably already has an e-mail account. However, before using that account for current awareness notices, it would be a good idea to look at the filtering options available to keep these items separate from your critical business messages.

The second method is called "RSS" for "Really Simple Syndication," and it truly is.

The savvy attorney will use a combination of e-mail and RSS subscriptions in order to get everything of interest, because not all sites that will appeal to you offer subscription services in both formats.

I understand how e-mail works, but what is RSS?

A short and entertaining explanation of RSS is available from Common Craft at www.commoncraft.com/rss_plain_english.

Basically, RSS requires setting up a "reader" from which you will subscribe to your favorite Internet sources. The reader tells you when

those sites have new content. As a result, rather than searching every site yourself one-by-one to see if there is anything new, this single site lets you see everything at a glance.

What kinds of content can I use my "reader" to subscribe to?

After selecting your e-mail account and RSS reader, the next step is finding Internet sources to which you want to subscribe. The Internet does not lack for available blogs, podcasts and newsfeeds for the curious lawyer.

Depending on the reader's interests, choices can include services tracking up-to-the-minute events in the world or general legal developments.

Favorite selections can report on special courts like the U.S. Supreme Court or the most recent discussions in legal specialties of all kinds, be it business law, intellectual property or local criminal procedure.

Other options track the Web itself in order to keep you informed of new sites that you may wish to add to your list of subscriptions. And, once you become familiar with the format, you will no doubt find yourself expanding its use to track breaking news in sports, entertainment, financial markets or any subject imaginable that intrigues you.

There's a lot out there! Is there a limit to the number of subscriptions I can choose?

The wonderful thing about current awareness alerts is they are free and unlimited. However, that is also their danger. Many people have found reading RSS feeds to be habit-forming.

Remember, the goal of this method is to save you time, not find new ways to use it up! So, exercise good common sense in the quantity of blogs you follow.

If after a few days you decide that a new choice is not providing what you need, delete it from your list. A reasonable number of subscriptions would be between 10-20. You might consider editing your choices if the feed total is significantly higher or if you find yourself spending a large amount of time skimming the reader for the latest updates.

CUT ALONG LINE TO SAVE THIS RESOURCE

Getting started with current awareness alerts

Readers

The following are but a small sample of the available RSS readers, but include the most popular choices.

Bloglines	www.bloglines.com All-in-one blog and newsfeed search; optimized for handheld computers and cell phones; quick pick subscriptions get new users started quickly.
Google Reader	www.google.com/reader Special features include easy sharing with other users; good searching functions across all updates.
FeedDemon	www.newsgator.com/Individuals/FeedDemon PC-based reader popular among attorneys because it lets you download content to a laptop for reading without being logged onto the Web, which is useful for heavy travelers.

Blog Lists

While finding new sites to subscribe to will be a piecemeal process, based on recommendations and new sites discovered on the Web, these two services collect most of what would interest the new user.

Blawg	www.blawg.com Currently tracks over 1,300 active blogs; site offers something for almost every lawyer.
BlogCatalog	www.blogcatalog.com/directory/law-legal Contains fewer choices than Blawg, yet many of these are in languages other than English, allowing an opportunity for your newsfeeds to include foreign and international perspectives.

Popular Choices

Part of the fun of setting up your current awareness subscriptions is exploring the Web to find just the right sites for you. Good places to begin when setting up your initial alerts may include the following sites.

Current Events

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution	www.ajc.com When searching for relevant Web resources, don't overlook the obvious, including a local newspaper.
CNN	www.cnn.com This reputable news outlet "delivers up-to-the-minute news and information on the latest top stories, weather, entertainment, politics and more."

Practice Management

Law Department Management	lawdepartmentmanagement.typepad.com Associated with the publishers of <i>American Lawyer</i> , this blog "comments on every aspect of how best to manage a law department, including how to manage outside counsel."
MyShingle	www.myshingle.com A resource for the solo practitioner, where ideas can be exchanged on topics like "starting a firm, working from home, maximizing use of technology" as well as stories about "the process of going solo."

General Legal News

Jurist	jurist.law.pitt.edu/email.php Offers "the latest legal developments in real time," based on "substantive importance rather than on their mass-market or commercial appeal." No Paris Hilton updates here!
Lexology	www.lexology.com Collects information from leading commercial law firms, with tailored search results delivered to your e-mail (e-mail only).
LLRX	www.llrx.com The "premiere free, independent, one person produced Web journal dedicated to providing legal, library, IT/IS, marketing and administrative professionals with the most up-to-date information on a wide range of Internet research and technology-related issues, applications, resources and tools."

Jurisdictional Services

Defense Newsletter Blog	defensenewsletter.blogspot.com Breaking news covering 11th Circuit and U.S. Supreme Court cases.
Eleventh Circuit Opinions	www.ca11.uscourts.gov Allows subscribers to receive its new opinions via RSS.
Fulton County Daily Report	www.dailyreportonline.com Although subscription to the <i>Fulton County Daily Report</i> is required for full access to this important newspaper, some content is available without charge via RSS.
SCOTUS	www.scotusblog.com Sponsored by the law firm Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld, this blog is arguably the best source for up-to-the-minute details about the U.S. Supreme Court (RSS only).

Legal Specialties

Georgia Bankruptcy Law Blog	www.georgiabankruptcyblog.com Published by Atlanta attorney Scott Riddle, this blog comments on bankruptcy developments of interest to Georgia practitioners, in addition to providing other useful tools such as sample forms.
Georgia Family Law Blog	gafamilylawblog.com Marietta attorney Stephen Worrall (J.D.'83) offers "news and thoughts on Family Law issues in Georgia."

New Resources

Robert Ambrogli	www.legaline.com/lawsites.html Massachusetts lawyer and author of <i>The Essential Guide to the Best (and Worst) Legal Sites on the Web</i> , Ambrogli tracks "new and intriguing Web sites for the legal profession" (RSS only).
BeSpacific	www.bespacific.com This site "provides daily law and technology news with links to reliable primary and secondary sources."
InSite	library2.lawschool.cornell.edu/insite.asp Compiled by the Cornell Law Library, InSite "highlights selected law-related World Wide Web sites."
Inter Alia	www.inter-alia.net Among its useful features is a highlighted "blawg of the day," which can be helpful to identify new offerings in your specialty.

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