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Just How Does That Work? An In Depth Look at Three Useful Web Sites

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A. Confession and Overview of the Sites

I confess. This session is poorly named -- actually, it's inaccurately named. Program outlines, with titles, are due much too early in the planning process. In my pre-preparation exuberance I did actually imagine (clearly, I was not thinking) that I could offer an "*in depth*" look at three of the sites we mention most frequently in these Internet research programs. I can't. The three sites I will discuss are FindLaw, GPO Access, and the Legal Information Institute at Cornell. Each of them is now so vast that *in depth* discussion of any one of them would take an entire program. This session lasts thirty minutes. Forget about it!

So, let's start by renaming this undertaking: A Closer Look at Three Useful Web Sites. What I will offer in the meat of this session is a baker's dozen interesting, useful, or surprising offerings or links at each of these three wonderful sites. To make sure I follow through on my promise, I'll count as we go.

To get started, though, let's look generally at each of these sites. **FindLaw** has been described as by far one of the best subject specific meta sites on the Web. It offers primary law, legal news, commentary, directories, a career center, on line continuing education programs, mailing lists, and message boards for legal professionals, businesses, students and individuals. These resources can be accessed through the site's search engine, or through its directory structure which is both intuitive and redundant enough to ensure that most users can find anything they want on the site.

Cornell's Legal Information Institute was the first legal information site, coming online in 1992. It specializes in primary legal materials: cases, codes, regulations. Its version of the U.S. Code alone makes the site worthwhile. It offers five different access methods -- browse titles, search titles, browse Table of Popular Names, search by citation, and search the entire document. Its topical directory is also enormously easy to use, and useful. Over 100 areas of the law are covered, and for each the site offers an overview and links to applicable federal and state statutes, federal regulations, and U.S. Supreme Court decisions, as well as links to a handful of useful outside resources.

GPO Access is a service of the U.S. Government Printing Office. It offers the *official* texts of the Code of Federal Regulations, Federal Register, and Congressional Record. Both the Federal Register and Congressional Record are updated daily, so GPO Access is offering the most current official version of this material available. In addition, this site offers finding aids, including the Catalog of U.S. Government Publications, and publications indexes from the Agriculture, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, and Justice Departments.

B. FindLaw – <http://www.findlaw.com>

Although the FindLaw homepage is divided into eight sections: Public, Business, Students, Legal Professionals, Corporate Counsel, Latest News, Legal Analysis, and Marketplace, all of the offerings highlighted here come from the Legal Professionals section. That section is further divided: Research and Reference, Legal Practice and Services, and Community ; each of those divisions

has multiple sections; every section has numerous parts. The site unfolds like nested Russian dolls. I will do my best to walk through the path to each tidbit in my list. Remember, though, every path begins in the Legal Professionals section.

1. **U.S. Historical Documents** – Follow the “Cases and Codes” link and then hit “Introductory Materials” to find a this link to a wonderful array of often quoted U.S. documents, including Patrick Henry’s “Give me liberty or give me death” speech, the Declaration of Independence, and President Washington’s farewell address. The documents are arranged chronologically and separated into easily scanned short segments of history.
2. **Georgia Municipal Codes** – Hit “Browse by Jurisdiction”, then “Municipal Codes”, followed by “Municipal Code Corporation”, then “Online Codes” and arrive at a map of the U.S.. Each state is a link. Following the Georgia link leads you to nearly 100 city and county ordinance codes from around the state.
3. **Links to Georgia Courts** – Choose “Browse by Jurisdiction” again, and pick the “Georgia” link. Then hit “Courts”. You will see links to at least 10 Georgia judicial circuits, several Probate courts, and a few Magistrate courts. Most of these sites include the court’s calendar and internal operating procedures.
4. **Business Restructuring Review** – Follow the “Browse by Practice Area” link, hit “Bankruptcy”, then “FindLaw Library”, and finally “Commercial” to find this link to the Jones, Day newsletter

highlighting recent developments in bankruptcy and restructuring. Each issue's link features a summary of contents.

5. **State Department Bulletin on International Adoptions** – Hit “Browse by Practice Area”, then “Family Law”, “FindLaw Library”, then “Adoption” and one of your choices is this 1999 briefing from the State Department, which discusses immigration and visa application procedures, gives a full list of county specific adoption information flyers available from the State Department, and lists many resources for families interested in adoption.
6. **Immigration Update** – Once again, start with the “Browse by Practice Area” link, choose “Immigration”, then “FindLaw Library”, “Visas”, and finally “Employment” to find an October 2003 article entitled “H-1 B Cap, Annual Green Card Lottery and Changes in Visa Processing at U.S. Consulates Abroad”.
7. **Georgia Standard Probate Forms** – From the “Legal Forms” link, proceed to “Georgia”, and then “Probate” to arrive at the full panoply of official probate forms. They are arranged alphabetically, load in Adobe Acrobat, and can be completed and printed from your browser.
8. **Daily summaries of opinions from the 11th Circuit** – Choose the “Newsletters-Case Summaries” link and find a form which allows you to pick from around 50 different email newsletters and

alerts, which include daily summaries from more than a dozen courts.

9. **German Judgments and Statutes in English** – From the “Int’l” link, hit “Individual Countries”, then “Germany”, then “Primary Materials” to find a link to the German Law Archive, a site that offers a wide range of German primary law in translation.
10. **Guide to Foreign and International Legal Databases** – Choose the “Int’l” link again, but this time hit “Guide to Foreign and International Legal Databases”. This takes you to a site created at NYU Law School which sorts databases by legal subject area.
11. **FindLaw’s Modern Practice Magazine** – Hit the bar at the top headlining the “For Legal Professionals” section. This takes you to another directory of links. In the “Research and Reference”, pick the “Reference Resources” link. There you can access this monthly magazine on law practice and technology issues.
12. **Medical Demonstrative Evidence vendor** – Again from the directory you reach after clicking the bar atop the “For Legal Professionals” section, choose “Reference Resources”. Then follow the “FindLaw Demonstrative Evidence Market” link to *Doe Report*, which bills itself as the leading seller of medical demonstrative evidence in the U.S. The site includes articles on medical and health topics as well as offering medical models of all sorts.

13. **Georgia Arson Investigators** – This time, after following the link atop the “For Legal Professionals” section, pick “Legal Investigators” from the “Legal Practice and Services” section. Follow the link for “Arson Investigations” and choose “Georgia”. You’ll find listings for more than 80 firms offering arson investigation services in Georgia. Glancing at the various firms’ service areas, you will see that the entire state is covered, from Bainbridge to Rossville.

C. GPO Access – <http://www.gpoaccess.gov>

1. **History of Bills** – The History of Bills lists legislative actions on bills that are reported in the Congressional Record. *GPO Access* contains the History of Bills from 1983 to the present. Databases are cumulative from the beginning of each congressional session. The current year’s database is updated daily, usually the day after publication of the Congressional Record. Documents are available as ASCII text files only. You can search this database by bill number, public law number, or keyword.
2. **Versions of Bills** – *GPO Access* contains all published versions of Bills submitted to Congress from the 103rd (1993-94) Congress to the present. Bills of the 108th Congress are entered daily.
3. **Congressional Hearings** – All transcripts of Congressional hearings that are released by committee for publication from the

105th (1997-98) to the present are included on *GPO Access*.

Publication and release of transcripts occurs within 2 months to 2 years from the date of the actual hearing.

4. **Congressional Documents** – Congressional documents originate from congressional committees and cover a wide variety of topics and may include reports of executive departments and independent organizations, reports of special investigations made for Congress, and annual reports of non-governmental organizations. The *GPO Access* database of Congressional documents begins with the 104th (1995-96) Congress.
5. **Independent Counsel Reports** – Currently only the various Clinton reports (Madison Guaranty, Lewinsky) and those on Mike Espy and Bruce Babbitt are available. Surely, the trend of making these reports public will continue, though.
6. **Unified Agenda** – The Unified Agenda (also known as the Semiannual Regulatory Agenda), published twice a year (usually in April and October) in the Federal Register (FR), summarizes the rules and proposed rules that each Federal agency expects to issue during the next six months. *GPO Access* includes those from 1994 to the present.
7. **Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents** – The Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents is published every Monday and is the official publication of presidential statements,

messages, remarks, and other materials released by the White House Press Secretary. This collection begins in 1993 and is updated with each Monday's publication.

8. **Federal Research and Development Project Summaries** – *GPO Access* links to this Department of Energy sponsored project which allows users to search across databases from DOE, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation and see summaries of federally funded research projects in progress under the auspices of these three agencies.
9. **Internet Directory of Federal Agencies and Commissions** – This is another external site to which *GPO Access* links. Created and hosted by LSU, this directory breaks every agency and commission Web site into division and topical links. It makes both finding some lesser known commissions and navigating huge agency sites much more manageable.
10. **GPO Listservs** – The Government Printing Office offers over a dozen email alert services, including daily tables of contents from the Federal Register, and updates on statistical reports issued by various government agencies.
11. **List of Sections Affected** – The List of CFR Sections Affected lists proposed, new, and amended Federal regulations that have been published in the Federal Register since the most recent revision date of a CFR title. Each LSA issue is cumulative and

contains the CFR part and section numbers, a description of its status (e.g., amended, confirmed, revised), and the Federal Register page number where the change(s) may be found. This database includes each LSA published since 1986.

12. **National Council on Disability** – *GPO Access* links to this independent federal agency which lists as its purpose “ to promote policies, programs, practices, and procedures that guarantee equal opportunity for all individuals with disabilities, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability; and to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve economic self-sufficiency, independent living, and inclusion and integration into all aspects of society.”
13. **The Plum Book** – The 1996 and 2000 editions are online now. *GPO Access* will offer the 2004 when it is released in November.

D. Legal Information Institute at Cornell –

<http://www.law.cornell.edu>

Cornell does a very good job of providing or linking to cases and codes. However, by and large, FindLaw has a more complete collection of material and links. What makes this site impressive and worth visiting instead of FindLaw are the enhancements to the store of cases and codes it hosts that the Legal Information Institute (LII) has provided. As I run through my list of 13 wonders for this site, I will be repeating myself quite a bit. Over and over again, the folks

at LII have improved on the basic text of cases and codes. What follows are most of those improvements.

1. **Law About . . .** – Cornell takes about 20 categories of law, further divides them into nearly 100 legal topics, and offers a three or four paragraph summary of the nature of law for each topic. Alongside this summary are links to the applicable Federal Statutes, Supreme Court and Federal Circuit court opinions, and state statutes.
2. **U.S. Code** – In addition to providing the five separate means to access sections of the U.S. Code mentioned in the introduction to this paper, the LII Code carries embedded links that fully cross reference the Code to itself. In other words, any time a section of the Code refers to another section, there is a link that will carry you directly to that other section.
3. **U.S. Constitution** – Every portion of the Constitution that has been altered by amendment is highlighted in Cornell's version. The highlight text is, of course, a link that takes you to the amendment(s) that have changed that portion of the document.
4. **Federal Rules of Civil Procedure** – In every instance that one rule in the FRCP refers to another, there is a link to carry you to the text of the rule mentioned.
5. **Federal Rules of Evidence** – Linked within itself just as the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure

6. **Uniform Commercial Code** – Also, with embedded links to definitions, and cross referenced sections. . . .
7. **Uniform Commercial Code Locator** – For each Article of the UCC, LII offers a table with links to the corresponding code sections in each of the fifty states.
8. **Uniform Business and Financial Laws Locator** – Each of the thirty or so Uniform Laws covering business and financial matters are listed with a table showing which states have adopted the laws in whole or the main. Again, for each state listed, the site links to the corresponding sections of the state code.
9. **Uniform Rules of Evidence** – Links to the evidence code for each state that has adopted the uniform rules . . .
10. **Uniform Matrimonial and Family Laws Locator** – The same service (linking to applicable state code sections) is provided for each of the thirteen Uniform Laws that some states have adopted.
11. **Uniform Probate Code Locator** – All sixteen states that have adopted the Uniform Probate Code are listed, with links to the Probate portions of their codes.
12. **Supreme Court Decisions** – The Cornell database contains only decisions since 1990 and about 600 noteworthy decisions from all the years before that. However, each decision in the database has embedded links to all Supreme Court decisions cited within it. In the past, LII has also provided a function that allows you to get a list

of every recent Supreme Court decision citing the decisions in its database (a Supreme Court limited citator); but throughout the days I prepared this paper, that function appeared to be not working.

13. **Martin on Social Security** – The author of this treatise has reclaimed the rights to this work from Lexis, and given it to LII. Throughout the text, links take you to relevant sections of the Social Security Act and the Code of Federal Regulations, and the text of key case decisions and Social Security rulings.