



# Introduction

## WHY A BOOK ABOUT FREE ONLINE LEGAL RESEARCH?

With cost-conscious clients scrutinizing legal bills, lawyers cannot afford to only depend on fee-based resources the way they used to, especially if there are reliable free resources available. Our goal in writing the second edition of this book is the same goal we had when we wrote the first edition: to point lawyers to useful and reliable free (and low cost) Internet legal research resources and to explain how to use them effectively so they can become more satisfied using these resources. In other words, our goal is to help you save time and money and avoid frustration in your legal research quest.

Reviewing the 103-page Online Research Report (completed by 622 lawyers) published as Volume 1 of 5 volumes by the American Bar Association Legal Technology Resource Center (*2019 Legal Technology Survey Report* at <http://bit.ly/abaltrc2019survey>), we learned that lawyers spend a good deal of their time on legal research and they mostly use free Internet services. For example, “Respondents admitted to the bar less than ten years and [who were] associates, on average, spend . . .” 25% of work time on legal research. Not falling far behind that percentage are respondents less than 40 years old (23%) and those between ages 40–49 years (21%). In that Report, we also learned that solos (who represented 30% of respondents to the Survey) reported spending 19% of their work time on legal research. Firms of 2–9 lawyers (who represented 30% of respondents to the Survey) reported spending 18% of their work time on legal research. Firms of 10–49 lawyers (who represented 15% of respondents to the Survey) reported spending 15% of their

work time on legal research, while firms of 100 or more (who represented 18% of respondents to the Survey) reported spending 15% of their work time on legal research.

In that Report, we also learned that 90% of lawyers who responded to the survey stated that they use free Internet services (65% regularly and 25% occasionally). The large amount of time both newer admittees and older lawyers spend on legal research and that 90% of that research focuses on free Internet services confirms the usefulness of a book on free Internet legal research.

We have tested and evaluated each site, described and explained how to actually use the site, often step-by-step, and have included numerous screenshots to better illustrate the steps. If you didn't receive Internet legal research training in law school or at your firm, or if the Internet did not even exist then, this book is for you.

This book focuses primarily on "pure" Internet legal research (cases, statutes, dockets, ordinances, legal blogs, etc.). We know that a lawyer's research can sometimes also involve investigative and background research. For those who want to learn about that, please read *The Cybersleuth's Guide to the Internet*, 14th edition revised (2019), by Carole Levitt and Mark E. Rosch (<https://www.netforlawyers.com/products>).

## THE AUTHORS OF THIS BOOK ARE UNIQUELY QUALIFIED TO WRITE THIS BOOK

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The authors of this book share a common background that uniquely qualifies them to write this book: We have both had careers as lawyers as well as law librarians. Carole worked as a law librarian at corporate legal departments, law schools, and law firms in Chicago and Los Angeles. Judy currently works as a senior law librarian at the University of Southern California (USC) Gould School of Law and previously at the University of San Diego Pardee Legal Research Center. We have also both taught Legal Research at law schools (Judy currently teaches at the USC Gould School of Law and Carole taught at Pepperdine University School of Law and at the West Los Angeles College's Paralegal School). In 1999, Carole founded Internet For Lawyers (IFL) to teach Internet research CLE seminars to lawyers and paralegals throughout the United States. By the time you read this book, she will have retired from IFL, but continues as the Vice-President of IFL's webinar division founded in 2015 (CLEwebinars.com).

Because of this background, we understand how lawyers think when it comes to legal research, so we decided to put our heads together to write a current book on Internet legal research, discussing government, academic, and commercial (free and pay) websites as well as apps, blogs, Twitter feeds, and crowdsourced sites.

## WHAT'S NEW IN THE SECOND EDITION?

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In the second edition of the book, we updated information about resources discussed in the first edition, deleted resources no longer available, and added new resources. We have taken all new screen shots of every site. Also, we've expanded the chapters on Case-maker and Fastcase because lawyers in every state can now access one or both of these for free through membership to a state, local, or specialty bar association (or other legal entities, such as the Los Angeles Law Library). We don't go into great detail about Artificial Intelligence (AI) products because this book is about free (or low-cost) online resources and AI resources are neither free nor low-cost. Also, AI resources are primarily limited to case law and this book goes well beyond case law research.

## IS FREE ALWAYS BEST?

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We know, as it is with most anything, that price is a major consideration when deciding between alternative research resources—and we all agree that all other things being equal, free is better. With that said, we do make note of pay databases when they have more useful features than the free sites. Sometimes it makes sense to pay for data—especially if the pay databases have something the free ones are lacking (content or functionality), or when using the pay databases can simply save you time, and thus money.

## HOW THIS BOOK IS ORGANIZED

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This book is primarily organized by type of material. For example, there are chapters about websites for statutes, cases, dockets, and so on. One chapter is organized by practice area, from advertising law to trademarks. That law chapter includes both websites and blogs. We also included a chapter about general legal research (such as where to find free law review articles, forms, court rules, etc.) websites and apps.

We only show you the best sites. We begin each chapter with the most useful or comprehensive site for a specific topic. We then discuss a few alternative sites. We

include tips about the most useful aspect of each site (content and functionality) and let you know if there are any hidden functions.

## CONVENTIONS USED IN THIS BOOK

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Throughout the book we will use boldfaced type to indicate exact text that appears on a web page (links, buttons, dropdown menus, etc.), and italics to indicate the exact text of search terms/keywords used in sample searches we conducted to evaluate the sites we discuss. Website URLs, descriptions, and screenshots are accurate and up to date as of October 2019.