

Technology

May It Please the Blog

Law-Related Web Journals Can Reveal a World of Information

By DANIEL J. SIEGEL

The first time I heard the word “blog” it sounded like something from a horror movie — “The Blog That Swallowed Philadelphia.” What the heck was a blog? Then when I learned that a blog was a “Web log,” I was still in the dark, so I didn’t pay attention to them.

For years, I continued to ignore blogs, consigning them to the fringes of the Internet. After all, the only people who talked about blogs seemed to be either newscasters or politicians, who claimed that blogs were responsible for a new form of political communication, or techno-geeks, those people who seem to have been hatched inside a computer. But after years of ignorance, I decided to see what all the fuss was about.

Guess what? Blogs can be very interesting, very informative, and very helpful.

So, what’s all the fuss about? And how can blogs help you?

BLOG BEGINNINGS

First, let’s look at the blog phenomenon. Originally, when the Internet was just emerging as a source of communication, computer users posted their questions and comments on things like Usenet news-

groups or commercial services like AOL or CompuServe. Eventually, as more people used the Internet, message boards became a more popular means for interactive communication. All you had to do was post your

the increasing popularity of blogs, bulletin boards continue to serve important functions, albeit in more controlled settings.

For example, the Philadelphia Bar Association’s Discussion Forums remain an easy way to exchange information between members. The Association’s Web site has both general subject and content-specific bulletin boards, which allow members to exchange information with other attorneys who have similar interests or practice areas.

Although similar to bulletin boards, blogs are different in meaningful ways. Unlike message boards, which are frequently found at business and organization Web sites, blogs generally originate from a single person, with most of the conversation triggered by the blogger’s posts.

Bloggers generally have full control not only of the management and creation of their blogs but also of what material others can post. In short, with blogs, there are very few rules, and almost anything goes.

SUBJECT AREAS

Not surprisingly, there are blogs for almost every conceivable subject. Law is no different. To get a taste of law-related blogs, visit <http://www.blawg.org> or <http://www.uakron.edu/law/library/blawg.php>, two of the better sites that try to maintain up-to-date listings of the ever-increasing number of such blogs. Blawg.org, for example, separates legal blogs into a multitude of categories, including Articles & News, Federal Judiciary-Courts, Federal Law, Law Firms, Law Technology, Legal Commentators, Litigation Support, Marketing & Public Relations, Firm Management, Religion & Law, State Judiciary and State Law.



problem or question on a message/bulletin board and wait for someone else to post an answer.

According to Blogpulse (www.blogpulse.com), a total of 36,486,708 blogs had been identified by November 2, 2006. Despite

New Podcasts Available

The Philadelphia Bar Association's October Quarterly Meeting and Luncheon featured Mary Robinson, the first woman president of Ireland, as its keynote speaker.



Members who were not able to attend can access a podcast of her remarks at philadelphiabar.org. Also available

for download is the Law Practice Management Division's podcast on setting up a client file system. Bob Pagni, of Isdaner & Company Certified Public Accountants, offers tips on how to organize client files to coordinate with time and billing systems and allow for growth.

LexisNexis at Jenkins Library

Jenkins Law Library offers free remote LexisNexis access through a new joint program with the research company called Lexis Thru Jenkins. Attorneys in solo practice or in firms with ten or fewer attorneys are eligible for twenty minutes of free access every 24 hours. The program is offered to library members at the regular (\$75) membership level. LexisNexis is also offering Jenkins Law Library members a twenty-five percent discount on subscriptions to its research services.



Legal Technology Ups, Downs

Technology has seen advances and setbacks in law firms, and it shows in the statistics from the 2006 ABA Legal Technology Survey. Sixty-one percent of survey respondents preferred saving e-mails as hard copies rather than DVD, servers, thumbdrives or other storage, leaving



firms to continue struggling to find storage space for all that paper. Among the technology gains were responses showing

that seventy-three percent of respondents, the highest figure in four years, said their firms maintain a Web site. Electronic discovery requests also saw an increase. Almost forty percent of respondents said they have received such requests. For more information about the survey or to order a copy, visit www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc.

You name it, there's probably a blog for it.

Or visit some of the more popular blogs, including the highly regarded U.S. Supreme Court blog, www.scotusblog.com. Scotusblog.com, sponsored by Akin Gump Strauss Hauer & Feld LLP, offers insight into the workings of the Supreme Court and its decisions. The site also offers links to other Web sites relevant to attorneys who practice before or are interested in the Supreme Court, including the Web sites of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court docket, Supreme Court transcripts, the Solicitor General, American Bar Association "Merits Briefs" and others.

HOW BLOGS CAN HELP

So how can blogs help you? For one, if you need assistance or insight into a particular legal topic, you may find the information posted on a blog. For example, suppose you are handling a case that involves a child's rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A September 20, 2006, posting on scotusblog.com, "Government urges review of parents' IDEA role," may be of help.

Or suppose you are a Pennsylvania family law practitioner. If so, you may find helpful information at Fox Rothschild's Pennsylvania Family Law blog, located at <http://pafamilylaw.foxrothschild.com>. Whatever your interest or need, there's almost certainly a blog that can help.

STARTING YOUR OWN BLOG

On the other hand, you may want to create your own blog. Why? Because potential clients may find your blog, consider you to be an expert in a particular area of the law, and contact you. Or, other lawyers may visit your blog and decide to refer a case to you.

Regardless of the reason you want a blog, you still have to have one in order to reap the benefits. You can create a blog on your current Web site or you can register a new Web site devoted exclusively to your blog. Either way, creating the blog itself is easy — and you can usually do it in about fifteen minutes.

Most people who are not experienced in Web publishing are best served by creating their blogs using Web sites devoted to bloggers. Among the most popular are www.blogger.com, www.livejournal.com or www.typepad.com, all of which allow you to register a blog and set it up instantly.

Another option is to register the blog yourself. Many Web site hosting companies

now recognize the popularity of blogs and provide blog software to their customers for free or for a nominal charge. Finally, you can obtain blogging software (some are free, others are not) and do all of the creation yourself, but I recommend this method only if you are confident in your software skills. If not, one of the more "out of the box" methods is perfectly adequate.

BROADER APPEAL

As you can see, blogs are no longer geared exclusively to the technological fringes. Instead, they have become common and popular. Of course, like any other sources of information, some blogs are more reliable and more accurate than others.

And just because something is written on a Web site does not make it more reliable than other more traditional sources of information. But when you need to find information quickly, don't ignore blogs. They may have the answers you are looking for. ■

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CAN'T MISS LEGAL BLOGS

www.scotusblog.com

www.uakron.edu/law/library/blawg.php

<http://pafamilylaw.foxrothschild.com>

<http://jurist.law.pitt.edu>

<http://www.inter-alia.net/>

FOR HELP SETTING UP YOUR BLOG

www.blawg.org

www.blogger.com

www.livejournal.com

www.typepad.com