

WORKING SMARTER IN THE LAW LIBRARY

By: George Butterfield

The ideal law school education teaches a student how to find legal information, how to find it fast, and how to find it for the lowest cost. The word "ideal" is the key because I am not familiar with any law school that does this or, at least, does it very well. I do not know of many schools that even care. We educate students but they have to figure out how to navigate issues of cost when they are practicing law. In fact, law schools generally cooperate with vendors such as LexisNexis and Westlaw who set out from the student's first day of law school to hook them on their product.

Recently, the Creighton Law School second year students prepared for moot court competition by printing all of their 22 cases on the "free" LexisNexis or Westlaw printers. Each set of 22 cases came to well over 300 pages. They never once stopped to think what spending three hours and printing off that number of pages would cost in a law firm setting. The printing was "free" and they were not charged by the minute. Midway through the first semester of law school, the students already had their biases about using either LexisNexis or Westlaw. They develop a loyalty to these products and seldom think that they will not be able to use them in the same way when they join your law firm.

The purpose of this article is not to set forth principles on how to teach new associates about the methods or costs of doing legal research in the law firm setting. In this article, I set out to mention some methods that can help the new associate or, for that matter, anyone who comes back to the law library after graduation to do legal research. The labs that include the free printing on LexisNexis and Westlaw are now closed and the attorney, no longer a student, has no print credits to burn to print their research. What are some things that they can do to work smart in the law library?

There are occasions when the ability to copy or scan a found document is worth the ten cents per page that the library charges. Sometimes you just need to have it and you can get it fast and inexpensively. But what do you do on the numerous occasions when you

cannot or do not care to pay ten cents per page for every possible case, statute, or journal article that you either need or are not quite sure that you need?

Following are some ways to work smart in the law library. First, carry a flash drive to store large files and the documents from the office that you need to do your research. For under \$20, you can purchase a flash drive that has a 400 megabyte capacity. That gives you plenty of space to store files that are too large to either print or email to yourself. For example, at the Creighton Law Library, patrons have access to Westlaw in the public access section. There are A.L.R. annotations, cases with detailed headnotes, and statutory analysis that can number over a hundred pages. There are occasions when you do not know whether you want that information and you do not have the time right then to go over everything and make that determination. You can copy the material, save it on your flash drive, and analyze it later. This can save spending all of your library time on an analysis of things that may not matter, making a return trip to the library to check on the same resources again, or having that nagging feeling later in the process that there are materials you should have considered but did not take the time to browse or collect.

Another way to get information out of the library at no cost is to access the material online, make a copy of it, and then email it to yourself. If you use email, you will need to have web access to your email provider. You will also need to remember your username and password. If you regularly use applications such as Microsoft Outlook or Express, you may not know how to access your web account. You may also have everything set up so that your home computer remembers your username and password. These are things you need to know if you access your web account from the library.

I frequently see attorneys making hard copies of cases and articles when they could find the same materials online. Even if you find something in hard copy form and do not know whether or not the library also has it in an electronic format, the

reference librarians are available to help you find it electronically if it is in the library collection. For example, Creighton has an extensive collection of journal articles on a variety of detailed subjects from banking to taxation and everything in between. If you find an article or even know in advance about an article that you need, the likelihood is that the article is available online. For example, the HeinOnline database contains a much more extensive collection of law review and journal articles than can be found in LexisNexis or Westlaw. Articles are easy to find and to "print" as pdf files. You can then either save the pdf file to your flash drive or email it to yourself.

The Creighton Law Library has material in print, electronic, and microfiche formats. If the material you need is only in print, then there is no way for you to copy it without cost to yourself, short of carrying your own scanner with you. On the other hand, many of the print resources are also available electronically and even the microfiche resources can be converted into pdf files that can be either emailed to your account or downloaded to a flash drive.

Utilize the library, get help from the online catalog and the reference librarians, and find everything you need in a format that can be converted into a file that you can either email to yourself or download to a flash drive, and you will be working smart in your local law library.



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