



## RESOURCES ON THE INTERNET FOR PENNSYLVANIA LAWYERS

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I was recently contacted on the Pennsylvania Bar Association Hot Line by a staff member in a solo attorney's office. The question posed was whether or not it was worthwhile for the attorney to get onto the internet, and if so, what information might he find which would be helpful. I almost didn't know how to answer, as the answer was potentially so huge there seemed no place to start.

I began by asking what areas of practice the attorney handled, and what types of information would be helpful. In a couple more questions it was determined that the ability to locate any and all web sites for state and county bar associations, along with web sites of elected officials, would be very useful in this particular attorney's practice. I went to my favorite search engine, entered a few key words, and in seconds I had a list of all state bar web sites. Another search provided all of the Pennsylvania county bar web sites. Finally, I found a listing of all the web sites of elected officials, first for the state, and then for each county. Each listing provided name, address, telephone, and a link to their own site, if any. Within a total of less than 10 minutes I had completed multiple searches and had located information which was very important and helpful to this attorney's practice.

As I waited for my searches to finish executing, I discussed the various search engines available. Most are free to use; one need only know the address of the search engine to go there and use it. Some search engines are better for finding web sites, others for news articles, and still others for Lexis-type word searches. For people like myself who are not particularly talented searchers, I often use what is called a meta-search engine. That means that it will automatically translate my query into the correct syntax for various other search engines, and my result will be better quality "hits" from multiple sources. I use [www.dogpile.com](http://www.dogpile.com) as my meta-search engine for that reason. It translates for and queries about 11 other search engines. I also like filling in my key words and clicking on "Fetch" more than the boring old "Find" command of other search engines. There are many other meta-

search engines. Just search on the word meta-search to find them. And like most surfers, Google ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) has become my number one resource for internet surfing. Even though it is not a meta-search engine, the algorithms it is built on are clearly superior, and I virtually always find what I'm seeking.

Next, we discussed listservs. Succinctly, a listserv is just an electronic mailing list used to exchange information efficiently with a group of people, called subscribers. When you "join" a listserv, you are added to the mailing list, and automatically receive an email of everything emailed to the listserv by others. No one except the organization which maintains the list (like PBA or ABA) has access to the names or email addresses of its members. So if you never post a message, no one will ever know you're there. Some people like benefiting anonymously by monitoring listservs but not contributing. They're called "lurkers", and lurking is perfectly ok too.

Different listservs serve different purposes. For example, Network2D and LawTech are both listservs maintained by the American Bar Association. Both are for technology postings. Looking for a scanner? Need some help with QuickBooks? Want to buy a new printer? Having a problem with your Timeslips upgrade? Send an email to either or both of these listservs, and you will receive numerous helpful responses. ABA also maintains a listserv called Solosez. This is represented as the "water cooler" for attorneys. Just about anything goes on this listserv – messages encompass the full gamut of law firm life, including related humor and griping.

ABA has so many different listservs, that they have a section of their web site devoted to a tour of them, where one can sign up as desired. Go to [www.abanet.org/discussions/home.html](http://www.abanet.org/discussions/home.html) to see them all. The Pennsylvania Bar Association maintains 21 listservs. Seven are at the request of sections, (Solo/Small Firm; Environmental Law; Family Law and so forth) and nine are at the request of committees. There is one location on the PBA home page, about ¾ of the way down, to find all of these and enroll. But in most cases you must be a member of the committee or section to join the related listserv.

The Solo/Small Firm Listserv is an excellent resource. This helpful on-line community of over 800 practitioners across the state assist each other with general information on fine points of law, referrals to other attorneys, discussion of practical administration issues, and more. Another powerful listserv is Net-Lawyers, managed by the Pennsylvania Bar Institute. It's purpose is to assist lawyers and law firm staff incorporate use of the Internet as a reliable tool in their practice of law.



One more internet resource which bears mentioning is that of law firm management consultants. They provide a wealth of information on law practice management located just a few clicks away. Major law firm consultants have articles available on-line on a wide variety of topics, from strategic planning to mergers to marketing. You can read on-line or print and read later. If you can't sleep because you have an office administration issue to deal with, hop on the internet, visit one of these resources, and find expert advice on what to do. And while you're at it, remember you can find a wealth of information about publications available to help you manage your practice at both the ABA site ([www.abanet.org/abapubs/home.html](http://www.abanet.org/abapubs/home.html)) and the PBA site ([www.pabar.org](http://www.pabar.org)).

Of course there is much, much more available on the internet. This is just a taste. Practice-specific resources, which can and will dramatically impact your ability to produce a quality product for your clients, abound. Should you be using the internet? Rule 1.1 states, "Competent handling of particular matter includes inquiry into and analysis of the factual and legal elements of a problem, and use of methods and procedures meeting the standards of competent practitioners." One can easily argue that use of the internet has now become a standard tool of research for competent practitioners. It has been an evolutionary process, much the same way as electronic research, like Lexis and Westlaw, evolved. At first few used them, but over time they have become a standard tool. No one would argue now that these are tools which are utilized routinely by competent practitioners. Unlike Lexis and Westlaw, there is a lot of junk to wade through out there on the internet. One has to be careful, as there is misinformation in addition to good information. Nonetheless, it is a tool which can be very helpful, and should be incorporated into your practice and used regularly.

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