

Book Review

Cochard, Susan, and Samantha Whitney-Ulane, *Computer-Assisted Legal Research: A Guide to Successful Online Searching*, Law Practice Management Section, American Bar Association, 1997, 245 pages, illus., index

Reviewed by Marya Place

Written by two law librarians (one of whom works as a consultant for LEXIS-NEXIS), *Computer-Assisted Legal Research: A Guide to Successful Online Searching* was developed so that readers can "quickly attain basic proficiency" in conducting online research. This guide covers the major legal research services and some non-legal databases, and discusses CD-ROM, bulletin board services, and the Internet.

The first two chapters are devoted to LEXIS-NEXIS and WESTLAW. Step-by-step information for each service includes hardware and software requirements, database selection, and guidance in formulating a search query. The guide discusses proximity, truncation, exclusion, connectors, and stop words (those terms ignored by a system because of their frequent occurrences) for each service. It provides specific instruction for retrieving legal information, such as statutes and cases, along with "real world" examples that any legal researcher could encounter.

Also covered in these chapters are special features, such as LEXIS-NEXIS's lexsee and lexstat commands, keep and the LEXIS-NEXIS log, and WESTLAW's Key number searching and the find command. The guide describes in detail natural language searching, cite-checking services, and current awareness monitoring services. Finally, the LEXIS-NEXIS and WESTLAW chapters conclude with a discussion of how billing for each service is computed. This last point may not be particularly useful for anyone with a contract agreement, but an attorney or researcher who is just getting started with online research will appreciate the clarifying points about pricing options.

Perhaps the best feature of these opening chapters is the numerous illustrations that accompany the descriptions of searching, database selection, etc. Readers who don't have the benefit of assistance from experienced librarians or weekly visits from vendor representatives will appreciate knowing what they will be looking at on their own computer screens.

The remaining half of the guide addresses researching the law by subject, online choices for non-legal research, and other electronic services. Subject access to LEXIS and WESTLAW is explained and includes recommended database choices; however, those looking for in-depth discussions particular to their areas of practice should look elsewhere. The recommendations are scant, and not all areas of the law are covered. This half of the guide addresses legislative history research and using online secondary sources, including coverage of the Legi-Slate service. Non-legal sources are, for

the most part, limited to DIALOG and the non-legal databases in LEXIS-NEXIS and WESTLAW, although there are mentions of public records services such as CDB Infotek and business-oriented services such as Dow Jones. The final chapter, on "other" resources, is a catch-all for CD-ROM, bulletin board services, and the Internet, which gets only three pages or so—hardly enough in this day and age. The Internet segment does not include even a small table of landmark sites for conducting free research, such as THOMAS, the Patent & Trademark Office, or the myriad access points for U.S. Supreme Court opinions.

The guide closes with a helpful Appendix of LEXIS-NEXIS and WESTLAW reference card reprints. How many times have you

wanted to use the lexstat feature but couldn't remember how LEXIS-NEXIS cites the Virgin Islands Code? How about trying to find the numerical equivalent for Contracts in the Key number Contracts 48? The Appendix offers these and many other useful reference tables, such as WESTLAW and LEXIS-NEXIS commands, searchable fields, an explanation of citator services, and a listing of addresses and phone numbers for more information.

While *Computer-Assisted Legal Research: A Guide to Successful Online Searching* may not be an absolute necessity for your collection, keep it in mind to recommend to those working in settings without a library and those who want to get started independently and at their own

pace. Once they attain basic proficiency with the help of this book, those individuals will be ready for something with more in-depth coverage for their areas of interest.

Marya Place (mpp@nutter.com) is Assistant Librarian at Nutter McClennen & Fish, Boston, Massachusetts.



Lawbook exchange