

*The Wide World Of The World-Wide Web: International Law Resources On The Internet**

A Description of Web Browsers and Search Engines, with a Selective "Webography"

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A prominent jurist once described the law as a "seamless web"¹ This description of linked knowledge applies in reality to all fields of scholarship and investigation, and it is not only lawyers who experience the need to move through the library constantly, each open text citing another or suggesting another avenue of inquiry. The pile of open books on the library table and the constant recourse to catalogue and stacks, epitomize the image and the process of textual research, both for the advanced scholar and for the school-child writing her first essay. Computers clearly have the capacity to enhance the quality of our lives, but in my opinion their contribution to library reference work lies chiefly in this: to liberate us from the "up-and-down-and-fetch" mode of research as well as the "scissors-and-paste" method of text revision. This liberation is promised today in the hypertext features of all Windows-based or icon-clicking applications in use now, particularly with the incorporation of graphics and images, be they decorative or illustrative, from Netscape creatures to art, archaeology, or architecture.

Let us turn to our field of librarianship and research: international and foreign law. Most of us, I presume, have seen our professional lives changed substantially by the rise of the Internet and particularly of electronic mail, enabling all of us to share information about where materials may be located in our bibliographically-difficult field. Int-law and Euro-lex have become essential tools in my repertoire of reference aids, although I feel perpetually rather guilty because my own patron demands force me to "lurk" more than I would like. Much of the information presented in this paper was passed on to me and to the professional community by generous colleagues on the 'net, and while much of what I have to say is not, therefore, news to many practising international librarians, my aim is to select and organize a growing mass of information and to review strategies that exist to locate specific materials despite the near impossibility of listing all sites or keeping up with the appearance of new material in cyberspace. As must be apparent from my brief introductory remarks, I am not a technical specialist with regard to the function

* This paper is also scheduled to appear in a future issue of the *International Journal of Legal Information*

1 F.W Maitland, *A Prologue to a History of English Law*, (1898) 14 *Law Quarterly Review* 13.

of the Internet and its software applications. Therefore, my approach is that of the traditional legal researcher happy to sit in one place while crossing the globe electronically. No more trips to the card catalogue!²

I. Web Browsers

A. NETSCAPE

Netscape is a Windows-based software application which allows the user to "click" with a mouse or trackball on highlighted (or coloured) topic words or site descriptions and retrieve the material or use the search feature described. When the World-Wide Web linking concept was developed at CERN laboratories in Switzerland, one of its most attractive features was the presentation of an essay or outline of a field of knowledge with highlighted numbers (and later, words) which could be selected by mouse or cursor and "link" the user to another document. This hypertext linking feature seemed to help solve the problem of the other major Internet tool, the gopher, which had specific addresses. Soon web "home pages" sprang up all over the Internet with addresses of the hypertext documents at URLs or Uniform Resource Locators. These specific web sites, also accessible via the Lynx browser (discussed below) became rather prolific and difficult to control, both as to the length of the URL (hard to memorize) and the content of the linked material to be found there.

Netscape, a "shareware" product owned by Netscape Communications Corporation³, created a Windows-type interface with the easy mouse-driven search and select features described above. One can look at pre-selected new sites in a list provided by Netscape in a box marked "What's Cool," or open a window for entry of a known URL. One can also choose "Net Search" and be told about several search engines. One merely clicks on it to select it and get an introductory page with a window for search terms. While placing the cursor over the linking word discloses the URL of that site or search tool, Netscape has the potential to liberate us from archiving the URLs or even listing them as I have done, very selectively, in the "Webography" attached to this paper. To borrow an analogy from the old Gutenberg world, URLs are like call numbers: crucial to locating the material but difficult and time-wasting to memorize. The Gutenberg solution was a card catalogue searchable by the names, titles, and subjects that people did tend to remember, but the process has found even higher fulfillment in the paperless electronic catalogue. Netscape does both; it frees us from the need to know the URL or keep it somewhere obscure and lets us concentrate on the subject matter of document title we know. In international law, the gains are even greater: the Gutenberg world has had a hard time of it with treaties, documents of inter-governmental organizations, and the many other declarations, resolutions, recommendations and reports which were almost never

2 Well, if you believe this you are truly lost in cyberspace, and more comfortable with indeterminacy than all but the most advanced textual scholars, who have taken years to get used to two King Leirs and multiple Biblical texts. See, inter alia, G O Sayles, "Clio's Web" as Introduction to Scripta Diversa (1982).

3 The corporation recently created a stir in going public with its free product as evidence of excitement about its capabilities. See "Underwriters Raise Offer Price for Netscape," *The New York Times*, August 9, 1995, Sec D, p 2, col 5.

separately catalogued. Most never even appear in the electronic offspring of the card catalogue. Now the "surfing" of subjects and organization names makes the process easier.

Or perhaps too easy? An important feature of Netscape to remember is that of the "Bookmarks," a box or window basic to its operations which enables the user to record the sites visited in a particular session of searching or of following links from a known or selected site. Another apparent feature of Netscape (so far, at any rate) is the rigorous maintenance of the system such that if URLs change or sites "move," someone will have updated the link and will take us sailing through without our bearing the burden of updating records. (One major task in preparing this presentation was the checking of old URLs from older e-mail messages to see if the sites were still good.) This lends a stability to the Internet that is necessary if it is ever to become a reliable source of scholarly information. I will return to international law documents via Netscape when I review Internet web search engines.

B. LYNX

Documents in hypertext mark-up language (HTML) may be viewed on a UNIX-based terminal or system even via telnet to a site offering the Lynx browser. At a prompt (in the Columbia Libraries System the prompt looks like this: \$), type Lynx and then one of the options at the bottom of the screen will be G(o) To and you can select "G" to open a space to enter a specific URL. Documents, gopher menus, and web pages are usually searchable by entering "s" or "v" and composing a simple word search (called a "search string").

II. Internet Search Engines

There are several searching tools that can seek out specific material through keyword searching, and these can be used via Netscape or accessed independently at a site or on a university-wide system by going to the URL for the search engine. Four of these will be described here with sample international law searches performed on two of the most common and powerful systems.

A. INFOSEEK SEARCH

InfoSeek calls itself "a comprehensive and accurate WWW search engine. You can type your search in plain English or just enter key words and phrases." Its URL is <http://www2.infoseek.com>

B. CUSI - CONFIGURABLE UNIFIED SEARCH INTERFACE

Served by Nexor, UK, this search engine covers a wide variety of documents but is less well-known in the United States. It turns up when you do a search for search engines using a tool such as W3 search Engines, put out by the University of Geneva but not often updated, according to Netscape.

C. LYCOS HOME PAGE [HTTP://LYCOS.CS.CMU.EDU](http://LYCOS.CS.CMU.EDU)

Originally set up by Carnegie-Mellon University in the US, Lycos searches document titles and contents, headings, links, and keywords. Search terms may be entered in a prompt space provided in the system.

I performed a Lycos search for documents relating to the terms "world trade law". The system will use an automatic truncation feature to pick up the word "worldbank" on this search, for example. Several "hits" were scored, and among them was the International Trade Law Home Page, http://ananse.irc.vit.no/trade_law/nav/trade.html. This site in turn contains links to information from the International Maritime [Committee], European Union Information Sources, <http://www.cec.lu/en/info.html>; Hague Conference on Private International Law, the International Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.usal.com/ibnet/icchp.html>; and the ICC International Court of Arbitration, <http://www.usal.com/ibnet/iccarb.html>. The latter site contains mainly people contacts and copyright information rather than actual decisions, but the wealth of material would be difficult to archive and to discover without the aid of this accurate search device.

D. WEBCRAWLER SEARCHING [HTTP://WEBCRAWLER.COM](http://WEBCRAWLER.COM)

WebCrawler allows searching by document title and content and is based at the University of Washington in the US.

The sample search I used was similar to the one above but specifically for documents from the World Trade Organization. I entered that exact organization name at the flashing cursor in Netscape and retrieved twenty-five excellent sites. These included the UN Home Page and the UNCITRAL WWW Server. (All URLs are listed in the accompanying "Webography".) By clicking on this link, I got a list of document URLs including one for the Decision on Financial Services and retrieved the full text. Remember that the URL is displayed at the bottom of a Netscape screen when the cursor touches the site name and the site can be bookmarked or copied for future reference on its own. The advantages of the search engine are twofold: 1) how effective the links are, and 2) the success of the "relevancy scoring" by which highly-ranked documents are ones which most closely satisfy the search terms. The types of documents I found were exactly what I had hoped to see as a result of this search which was broad but permitted an easy narrowing of subject matter further along in the process.

III. *Indexes and Gophers*

Some large sites group many subjects under broad headings but are still useful as general tools with easy-to-remember URLs. One such indexing site is Yahoo, <http://www.yahoo.com> where the broad topic of "Law" is under "Government". The link from clicking on Law leads to a large list of legal topics from Antitrust on down through and including "International". Clicking on that site discloses the following terms:

*Environmental, *Firms, *Human Rights, *International Law Documents (may be no link yet), *Law and Policy, *Organizations, *Trade, *Index ForIntWWW

Clicking on "Human Rights", I discovered a list of materials on Amnesty International, Rwanda, DIANA (the project of the Electronic Text in the Law at the University of Cincinnati College of Law in memory of Diana Vincent-Daviss) and materials from the UN and the OAS. Since the latter documents are difficult to locate, I clicked on "OAS" to see both general documents and a heading and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. Clicking on the latter revealed citations to several judgments and decisions, mostly from the mid-1980s.

The same site also has a link to the Human Rights Web, and if one clicks on a summary of provisions of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, one goes straight to the portion of the full document which was summarized at the previous screen. These links can go on in this way and thus create the effect of "surfing" or "tunnelling" into the web, a mixing of metaphors which still fails to convey the magic of these tools and their potential to transform research and information-gathering.

Another broad law site with a great deal of international and foreign material is the Washlaw web, <http://www.wuacc.edu>, and the gophersite for primary United Nations documents serves well for resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, Secretary-General's Reports, and so on (see UN Home Page in the Webography).

Conclusion

This brief narrative description of search processes now possible on the web is intended to guide new users into the world of the web and the navigation of the international law sector of cyberspace. Please refer to the attached "Webography" for more specific URLs and a brief description of some; to cover all is now impossible, and, as the search engines make clear, not necessary as long as the search features and the web itself grow more reliable. Direct connection to information is the kind of transparency that international law librarians have tried to achieve for patrons, and it is altogether a good thing that we and our patrons can now achieve it for ourselves.
