

REFERENCE

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Electronic Sources for Current Awareness

As our organisations move closer to full automation, whereby all practitioners have PC's on their desks and everyone is linked up with electronic mail, there are opportunities by which to save trees and distribute current awareness material electronically.

The objective of this column is to give a brief overview of the sources of Australian information that are available electronically and their strengths and weaknesses. I will not be going into the copyright implications or distribution methods as these vary from supplier to supplier and need to be negotiated according to your needs and organisational context. Also if I have missed any sources please contact the reference column co-ordinator with details. Contact details for each of the suppliers is listed at the end of this column.

Judgment Information

Recent judgment information is critical in any current awareness service. Sources include:

ALMD Advance

The Australian Legal Monthly Digest Advance is available via the LBC Bulletin Board Service. The LBC Bulletin Board is available via subscription of \$475. ALMD is up-to-date and simple to download in text but is only compatible with Word 6 to download formatted text. That means that time is required to reformat the information for distribution if you don't use Word 6

A disadvantage of the service is that you need to check the bulletin board for recent ALMD advances rather than being notified automatically

AUSTLII

For all case law databases on AUSTLII there is what's new section that will give you the brief details of name and date for each recent case with hypertext links to the full text judgment. By joining the AUSTLII user list you will be notified by email when each database is updated.

Australian Current Law Express

Australian Current Law Express is available free via the Butterworths Homepage. Each fortnightly current law update is available separately with hypertext links to the text of the summary. Each summary can be downloaded individually. The Homepage also provides a search facility across all the *Australian Current Law Express* issues which makes it a valuable research tool. Once again the disadvantage is that you need to check the Homepage for recent additions rather than being notified automatically.

High Court Judgment Bulletin

The High Court Judgment Bulletin is available free via AUSTLII. The High Court Judgment Bulletin provides comprehensive details on the progress of High Court matters and is updated monthly. This bulletin works best while on the Internet as the hypertext links are lost when the document is downloaded.

LBC Weekly Judgment Bulletin

This service is free via the LBC Homepage. It generally includes case summaries in subject order of 5-8 hot cases for the week and is downloadable in text format. While a handy reference it is limited in its coverage and has the disadvantage of all bulletins being in one document rather than separated into weekly portions.

Legislation

AUSTLII

For all legislative databases on AUSTLII there is a what's new section that will give you the brief details of legislative change with hypertext links to the relevant text. By joining the AUSTLII user list you will be notified by email when each database is updated.

Capital Monitor

Capital Monitor provide comprehensive access to Commonwealth government legislation, bills and extrinsic material via a subscription. Capital Monitor can email the information in PDF (Portable Document Format) to you daily according to your interest profile using Adobe Acrobat software which is available freely via the Internet. Sample monthly update services are also available via their Homepage

LBC Bulletin Board

LBC Bulletin Board, as a part of the subscription, has a bulletin for the Commonwealth and each state and territory regarding changes to legislation. Using the South Australian example, the information is relatively brief, refers only to Acts and bills and does not contain details of the legislation. A useful addition would be the inclusion of information on Content of Acts and Bills and on Regulations.

Looseleaf Flyers

A major source for current awareness material is the distribution of looseleaf flyers and bulletins. Their value is immense given that they both summarise the primary material and provide commentary on particular subject areas. Imagine the trees that you could save by distributing these electronically!

Australian Tax Practice Bulletin Board

All flyers for the components of the *Australian Tax Practice* services are available by subscription via the ATP Bulletin Board. Costs for each service vary according to the number of end users. The ATP Bulletin Board works very much like the LBC Direct Bulletin Board whereby access is via an icon and the information

is downloadable as text. The disadvantages are the same in that you need to go into the Bulletin Board to see what has been updated, and the information is only downloadable as text or Word 6 which requires reformatting.

CCH

All CCH Flyers are available via the CCH Bulletin Board via subscription. The cost of the service depends on which flyers you require access to and how many practitioners you service. A major advantage of the CCH Bulletin Board is that the information is in advance of the filing update which means it is more current than the hardcopy. CCH distribute the information via a daily update which is defined by your user profile. The daily updates are in ASCII text and may contain 2-3 bulletins which require considerable reformatting but at least you don't have to search for the relevant updates.

CLS Online Tax News

Computer Law Services provides access to their *Online Tax News* via their Internet Homepage at a subscription cost of \$295 per annum. This information is updated daily and you can access either summaries or full text documents. A separate section is available for appeal news on tax cases. You can search back issues of this service which makes it a valuable research tool.

LBC Bulletin Board

All LBC flyers are available via the LBC Bulletin Board Service which is available via subscription of \$475 pa. Access can be via icon in the subject grouping or via scanning the list of most recent flyers added, which are marked with a red flag. The flyers are relatively up-to-date (I have had to chase LBC for some bulletins that arrived in hard copy but were not on the bulletin board) and simple to download in text but are only compatible with Word 6 to download as formatted text which means that time is required to reformat the information for distribution. The other disadvantage of the service is that you need to check the Bulletin Board daily for recent flyers rather than being notified automatically.

Press Information

Information pertaining to new judgments, government policy and legislation is often much faster via the press than waiting for the actual materials. There are a number of sources that provide access to this information.

Capital Monitor

Capital Monitor provide comprehensive access to Commonwealth government information via a subscription. Capital Monitor are emailing the information to you daily in PDF (Portable Document Format) according to your interest profile using Adobe Acrobat. Sample monthly services are also available via the Homepage. The advantages of utilising Adobe Acrobat are less likelihood of virus inscription, greater speed of downloading and the ability to distribute the information in its original form without the need for reformatting.

Government Homepages

Many of the government departments are endeavouring to have their latest press releases and reports available via their Homepages at the same time as releasing them to the media. Many also provide search engines by which to search for previous releases. They use a mixture of Adobe Acrobat and text storage with the ability to download the data. Some of the departments

which keep their information relatively current are the Treasury, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Australian Securities Commission

Butterworths' Legal Express

Butterworths' Legal Express is available free via the Butterworths' Homepage and provides a daily summary of the major legal issues referred to in the press. The bulletin can be downloaded in text form and provides a quick up date on recent legal development. Like *Australian Current Law* the Homepage allows you to search across the daily updates for a particular topic

LBC Bulletin Board

The *LBC Bulletin Board* has a number of subject specific bulletins available which provide current information on particular subject areas

As you can see the range of materials being made available electronically is expanding every day and comes by a variety of methods. Much like the hardcopy circulation of current awareness material there is no one source and you will need to make decisions on the basis of your needs and the technology available in order to provide the best service to your practitioners.

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AUSTLII	http://www.austlii.edu.au
Butterworths Internet Homepage	http://www.butterworths.co.au
CCH Internet Homepage	http://www.cch.com/divs-sub/intrnatl/austral.htm
Capital Monitor Homepage	http://www.cap.mon.com/
CLS Internet Homepage	http://www.cls.com.au/
<i>Government Homepages</i>	
ACCC	http://www.accc.gov.au
ASC	http://www.asc.gov.au
Treasur	http://www.treasury.gov.au
High Court Judgment Bulletin	http://www.austlii.edu.au/hca/bulletin/
LBC Internet Homepage	http://www.ibt.com.au