

Report on "LAW VIA THE INTERNET" Conference

Ingrid Zuesse, Helen Culshaw, Heather Carine and Di Thompson from South Australia, attended this conference which was held in Sydney from 25 to 27 June 1997. Their impressions are given below.

Graham Greenleaf, Professor of Law, Director of AustLII and Chair of the conference, gave the opening address and welcomed the participants to the University of Technology Sydney Law School. AustLII (Australasian Legal Information Institute) is a university-based organisation specialising in research and teaching in computerisation of law, and operates one of the largest free law sites on the Web. In its two years of existence it has become the most comprehensive legal site in the country with a deep commitment to maximising free access to public legal information. AustLII is funded by grants from public bodies, including the Law Foundation of NSW

The Conference was held over two days with tutorial sessions on legal research on the Internet and Building a Website held a day before. Some eighty presenters from Australia, the US, Canada, Germany, New Zealand and Norway gave papers over the two days.

Presentations were organised in the following groupings:

- Automated large-scale law resources on the Web
- Commercial and academic legal publishing - the new medium
- Parliaments and law reform - changing law on line
- Courts and litigation on line
- Public policy and public legal information
- Finding law on the Web - indexing, searching and citing
- Legal practice - the impact of the Internet
- Teaching law using the Internet

- Social change and justice - what can the Internet deliver?
- International legal resources - the legal world on your desktop

Some of the papers which may be of interest to law librarians are summarised below.

Freeing the Law in Australia's Nine Jurisdictions

Graham Greenleaf gave a history of AustLII and the many difficulties the Institute faced (and still faces) in attempting to obtain access to public legal information. Reference was made to funding sources and the fact that at the present time it appears that AustLII will be able to carry on its core activities into the next century. The problem of citing electronically published information, in particular case law, was discussed, and the need for a vendor and medium neutral method of citing examined. Some issues relating to privacy and the Internet were touched on. AustLII's progress in obtaining permission to publish Queensland, Western Australian, and Victorian primary materials, and the politics of AustLII, were explored.

A New Approach to Internet Law Indexing - the Targeted Web Spider

After referring briefly to the problems of finding law on the Internet, AustLII's manager, **Geoffrey King**, discussed AustLII's approach to solving these problems using robot indexing of remote law sites

Using the Internet in the Delivery of Legal Services

Justice Vince Bruce of the Supreme Court of New South Wales reviewed applications of the Internet for lawyers, particularly in the areas of legal research, communication, keeping up-to-

date, and participating in discussion groups. Some innovative uses of the Internet in the USA and the UK were outlined, and some examples of use by the courts given. The Law Society of New South Wales and the Law Foundation Internet sites were discussed in some detail.

Human Rights Resources on the Internet

Difficulties with acquiring secondary materials for publication on the Internet and some of the reasons publishers resist providing their information were discussed. These included concerns about proceeds from hard-copy sales, copyright, and incomprehension as to why it should happen. Technological incompatibilities and good Web publishing practice were mentioned. Finally, the presenter pointed out seven particularly useful and reliable sites to visit for human rights resources.

The Internet - A Strategic Business Tool for a Professional Society

This paper detailed how the Law Society of New South Wales adopted the Internet as a business strategy for communication and providing services to members. The presenters discussed some technical aspects of setting up the site before moving on to the content of the site.

THEMIS - An Extranet to Facilitate Electronic Business in the Legal Arena

THEMIS (The Electronic Members' Information Service) is a private legal intranet available to Queensland Law Society members. It is designed to facilitate secure email communications between solicitors, their clients and government agencies. It also provides legal research materials such as legislation, select looseleaf services and law journals. At present the system focuses on Queensland materials.

Legal Expert Systems via the Internet

Expert systems are computer programs which perform tasks by emulating certain characteristics of the way people think. One such system is eLAPS (Electronic Legal Assistance PackageS) developed by the Centre for Legal Process and SoftLaw Corporation. eLAPS is designed to help deliver legal services over the Internet and currently consists of one module which basically assists in the preparation of an application for review to the AAT. The AAT module guides the user through a number of steps to determine issues such as whether the applicant has standing to apply to the AAT, whether the AAT has jurisdiction to deal with the decision under review, and so on.

Law Reform Using the Internet - the Practical Experience of the Victorian Parliamentary Law Reform Committee

In illustrating how the Internet can assist law reform bodies in carrying out their functions, Victorian MP **Victor Perton** described how the Victorian Law Reform Committee used the Net to obtain relevant information and make contact with people who could contribute to a recent inquiry into regulatory efficiency legislation. Other uses were also outlined. A number of law reform sites now exist on the Internet, and details of these were given.

Towards 2000: The Australian Parliament's Information on the Internet

A summary of the Parliamentary information now available on the Australian Parliament's home page was given, and the BillsNet service discussed in some detail. Future content was outlined.

Council of Chief Justices Electronic Appeals Book Report Project

This paper examined issues surrounding the use of electronic material in appeal cases throughout all jurisdictions and included strategies that would assist Appeal Courts in moving towards electronic appeals at some stage in the future

Cybercourts

The present and future use of technology in courts was examined. Topics covered included security, electronic filing and electronic appeal books, legal research material for the judiciary, standards, courtroom technology, electronic exchange of information, judicial education, public access to court materials and electronic preparation of court documents, privacy and copyright. It was argued that courts should work in conjunction with justice organisations with a view to providing an integrated system of justice

Legal Information Institute of New Zealand - Site Report: developments since March 1996

Some of the problems faced in setting up LIINZ were outlined and the future of the New Zealand site discussed.

Legal Citation of Electronic Information

The speaker discussed the need to establish a standard method of citation of legal electronic sources, in particular cases, but also including Internet addresses such as URL's, email messages, Listserv messages and Newsgroup (USENET) messages. The requirements of legal referencing and citation systems were discussed and some alternative options explored. Finally a proposed citation style was opened up to the floor for further debate

Alternative Methods of Indexing Legal Material: Development of a Conceptual Index

The notion of conceptual indexing, where material is classified into concepts or themes for ease of retrieval, was introduced. An example of a project using this type of indexing developed by the Law School at the University of Western Australia (The Planning Law Conceptual Index) was outlined.

Issues in the Use of Internet Legal Resources by Law Firms

Philip Argy of Mallesons Stephen Jaques spoke of his firm's experiences in utilising the Internet. Issues examined included access alternatives, access limitations, training of staff, legal research dilemmas and citation problems. Policy issues relating to confidentiality, privilege, and message integrity were discussed.

Innovation Diffusion Theory, the Internet and the Legal Office

Innovation diffusion theory has been used to explain the spread of new ideas and technology. In this paper the speakers apply this theory to Internet use in Australian legal offices, outlining categories of person in the innovation cycle such as pioneers, early adopters, majority, laggards and computer phobics. Another category, the champion, usually a powerful member of the firm in a position to encourage pioneers and ensure they have access to resources to allow them to experiment with the new technology, was introduced.

Delivery of Law Firm Information Over the Web

This paper gave an outline of the aspects involved in establishing, maintaining and planning for a Website. Management issues such as workflow issues, piracy and advertising the site are covered

'Never Ending, Still Beginning' - A Defence of Electronic Law Journals

Electronic journals are, in terms of materials, very inexpensive to produce. E-Law has only cost \$3,600 to date. The down side is that it has taken hundreds of hours of volunteers time. The journal format is still relevant. It is not sufficient for academics to just put up their own Webpages. As well as the referee component of a journal, the shared discourse and debate presented by the journal format is valuable. Journals still have an important role to play in the work of legal academia and the legal profession.

Teaching Law using the Internet

At Griffith University in selected subjects in the Law course, the course outline is mounted on a Webpage. The objectives, in terms of skills and knowledge, for each week of the course, are also on the Webpage. Both electronic and print resources are specified. The student is thus guided through the entire course from the Webpage.

There was a debate on whether it is better to teach Internet skills as a separate component in courses, or whether to integrate them with other skills. Opinion was divided. Some lecturers spoke of a surprising reticence on the part of students to participate in email discussion groups. Another lecturer spoke of the problems encountered in marking 200 assignments delivered by email or on disc. Print versions are much easier to deal with in this context.

Papers from the conference are available for purchase from AustLII for \$100

Ambermind achieve Australian precedent in law by having Legal Animation admitted as Evidence in Court

Ambermind is pleased to announce that we have recently achieved an Australian precedent in law by having legal animation admitted as evidence in court. The case *Zayler v City of Stonnington* was a building dispute whose judgment (in our client's favour) has been handed down.

In what is an historically conservative industry, normally opposed to the introduction of anything new, Ambermind Legal Animation is leading the field in initiating cutting edge technology into law. We are the first and only Australian company specialising in *legal animation*, which combines computer imaging with solid legal practice, and replaces simple courtroom illustration and sketches. Using two and three dimensional computer animation, lifelike scenes are re-created. Completely realistic and accurate simulation of events can be produced and displayed from any angle, reducing hours of lengthy discussion to seconds.

Applications of legal animation include:

- Accident reconstruction - vehicles, buildings and construction sites
- Building and architectural disputes
- Crime reconstruction - murder, burglary, arson
- Product liability, defective products and manufacturer's liability
- Personal injury
- Environmental law
- Intellectual property

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