

By Carole Levitt and Mark Rosch

# Finding Entertainment Law Online, from Scholarship to Scandals

## Entertainment lawyers can go online to free and pay sites for what they need to know

Type “entertainment” into the Google search engine, and 32,800,000 results appear, led by E! Online. Type “entertainment law” into the Google search engine, and 63,500 results are listed, with the *Hastings Communications and Entertainment Law Journal (COMM/ENT)* listed first. From the lowbrow to the highbrow, these searches offer an excellent summary of the range of online sources that entertainment attorneys use to stay informed. More specific questions can be addressed by refining one’s search techniques.

To begin researching an entertainment law question, a good approach is to locate and peruse law review articles, because they provide an overview of the area of law and cite to leading cases and laws. The *Hastings COMM/ENT* site lists articles ranging from communications, entertainment, and intellectual property to Internet, telecommunications, biotechnology, multimedia, broadcasting, and constitutional law. While the journal does not offer its articles online with full

text, its free searchable index of articles (from 1978 to 1994) offers citations and abstracts.

If an attorney is seeking background information about entertainment in general, especially its people, the best places to start may be consumer entertainment sites. It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish E! Online’s news from its gossip, but this site offers full-text searching of its extensive Hollywood coverage. It also boasts a useful hyperlink feature. Users reading an article can click on a celebrity’s name to retrieve a biography or a career chronology, a credit list, links to related E! Online stories, and links to multimedia clips and fan clubs.

Reading entertainment trade publications in print is a morning ritual for most entertainment attorneys. The online versions, however, are useful for their archives of past stories and their currency. The *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety* update their sites continually, and they may also post stories that are longer than those found in the print versions. The *Hollywood Reporter*’s subscriber site includes current news, archives (going back to early 1991), the Blu-Book Production Directory, a news scroll, box office charts, production listings, and script sales.

The first 10 full-text displays of news stories, archived items, and production listings are free, with displays that exceed this limit costing 10 to 25 cents piecemeal. Full access sells for \$14.95 monthly.

Access to *Variety*’s site is free to print subscribers. The cost of an online-only subscription is \$259 per year, or \$24.95 per month, or \$3.95 per day. A free 60-day trial subscription is also available. *Variety.com* has resources similar to those of the *Hollywood Reporter*, but its archive goes back much further—to 1914. *Variety.com* subscribers can register for various free e-newsletters, with topics ranging from film news to box office numbers. Also found at *Variety.com* are credits, classified ads, obituaries, and photos. On the legal pages, users may browse for free for jobs related to entertainment law. At both sites, nonsubscribers can read the headlines and abstracts of articles for free.

### Other Journals

Attorneys with clients in the television or radio industry may also subscribe to *Television Week* (formerly *Electronic Media*) and/or *Broadcasting & Cable*. Both cover broadcast and cable television, but *Broadcasting & Cable* also covers the radio industry, while *Television Week* also covers the interactive media industry. Like the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Variety*, both host sites ([www.tvweek.com](http://www.tvweek.com) and [www.broadcastingcable.com](http://www.broadcastingcable.com), respectively). Every Monday, top stories from *Television Week*’s weekly print edition are added to TVWeek.com. The site is also updated every day with breaking news. Subscribers to the print version can search the Web archives back to 1999. Subscriptions run \$119 per year. Nonsubscribers can read the full-text stories of the last five days.

*Broadcasting & Cable*’s site offers nonsubscribers abstracts of the print publication’s news and feature stories. Full online access is free only to subscribers of either the print edition (at \$179 per year) or the online version (at \$14.95 per month). A free trial is available. The site also offers a free daily e-mail newsletter of top headlines.

Law librarians at entertainment law firms are often asked to obtain contact and background information about companies or people in the entertainment industry. The firms may be conducting background research on a potential client or an opposing party, or they may simply need an address to serve a complaint. For contact information and biographical data, entertainment librarians favor two subscription sites: [Baseline.Hollywood.com](http://Baseline.Hollywood.com) and the Internet Movie Database (IMDB, [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)), which offers a professional subscription that gives subscribers access to 24,000 contact and agent listings and box office statistics for 18 countries (including weekly and daily tallies for the United States). Subscriptions for individuals range from \$12.95 per month to \$99.95 per year. Businesses considering subscriptions need to contact the site. Nonsubscribers can access some information for free, assuming they are able to wade through the continual pop-up advertising. Free information at IMDB includes searchable archives back to 1997, celebrity news, box office information, reviews, a picture gallery, and a film glossary. Nonsubscribers can view more detailed information (but not as much as sub-

Carole Levitt and Mark Rosch, principals of Internet For Lawyers, provide Internet research seminars for MCLE credit.

scribers) if they register, which costs nothing.

Baseline's databases contain 1.5 million records, including 7,000 biographies; credits of 900,000 actors, producers, directors, and crews; and contact information for companies, executives, and talent. Baseline also includes archives of Kagan movie data, the *Hollywood Reporter*, and *Variety*. Updates about films and television programs in development and production, as well as current entertainment news, can be viewed in a daily e-mail message. Other information and statistics, including the Star Salary Report, are also available. The cost of Baseline is \$99 per year for companies and \$69 for individuals and nonprofits, plus a per-document fee that can range from \$1.25 for current *Weekly Variety* stories to \$79 for the Star Salary Report.

### What Two Attorneys Use

When I asked Susan Kaiser (<http://www.skmedialaw.com/>), an attorney who has represented network-owned radio and television stations and negotiates and drafts agreements and contracts, which resources she uses in her entertainment law practice, she responded: "Probably the resource I use most is Google—to search opposing counsel, talent names, potential clients, and law firms." Searching Google makes sense when an attorney is trolling for any and all information, because Google, which indexes more of the Web than any other engine, casts a wide net. It is not surprising that her first line of research is a general search engine instead of an entertainment-related site.

Similarly, the vice president of legal and business affairs and general counsel at a major cable television network informed me that a nonentertainment site is his first line of research: findlaw.com and its search engine, lawcrawler.findlaw.com. Digging into Findlaw, one can discover that it has a rather large entertainment law and news component at its Entertainment and Sports page (found at [www.findlaw.com/01topics/12entertainsport/index.html](http://www.findlaw.com/01topics/12entertainsport/index.html)). Attorneys can also subscribe to free weekly entertainment and sports law newsletters, which are delivered via e-mail by signing up at <http://newsletters.findlaw.com/sample/elegal.html> and <http://newsletters.findlaw.com/sample/sports.html>.

Transactional entertainment lawyers spend a lot of time drafting agreements and forms. Finding a good source of sample forms can speed the process. For general business forms, the 'Lectric Law Library (found at <http://lectlaw.com/form.html>), a site with forms that can be accessed for free and according to a fee structure, is favored by the network vice president. For entertainment-specific forms and agreements, the sites of the major Hollywood creative guilds should

be consulted. The Directors Guild, the Screen Actors Guild, and the Writers Guild offer their agreements and signatory agency lists online. The DGA and WGA also make their minimum pay scale available. The WGA and SAG offer searchable databases to determine whether a production was produced under a contract from the respective guild (although the results do not include the name of the guild signatory that produced the work). The DGA also offers a variety of forms, such as deal memos, signatory compliance forms, and residual reporting forms. Additionally, the site offers a searchable database of guild members.

Intellectual property law, especially in copyrights and trademarks, is a large component of entertainment law. For a basic trademark search, Kaiser searches the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office site ([www.uspto.gov](http://www.uspto.gov)). Although she would not file a trademark application after searching only this site, a starting search at the trademark office gives her a sense of whether it is a good idea to conduct a full search at a pay site such as Thompson & Thompson ([www.t-tlaw.com/allsearches.shtml](http://www.t-tlaw.com/allsearches.shtml)). Those delving into copyright issues, such as registrations and ownership documents, have a Web-based alternative to the dreaded dial-up LOCIS search system. The Web-based system, found at [www.loc.gov/copyright/search](http://www.loc.gov/copyright/search), comprises three databases: 1) a catch-all of books, film, maps, music, etc., 2) serials, and 3) documents (for assignor or assignee searches). The databases go back to 1978, but it may take recent registrations several months to appear. The book and serials databases are searchable by author, title, and claimant, among other categories. For further inquiries, users can send e-mail or chat with the library's virtual librarian at [www.loc.gov/rr/askalib](http://www.loc.gov/rr/askalib).

Attorneys in the music industry can bookmark the following sites to link to countless music publishing, U.S. copyright and licensing, and songwriting and music rights resources: the National Music Publisher's Association's links page ([www.nmpa.org/links.html](http://www.nmpa.org/links.html)), Kohn on Music Licensing (<http://kohnmusic.com>), and Worldwide Internet Music Resources at the Indiana University School of Music (at [www.music.indiana.edu/music\\_resources](http://www.music.indiana.edu/music_resources)).

The sites of performing rights organizations such as ASCAP and BMI have databases of licensed song titles that can be searched for free. The ASCAP site ([www.ascap.com](http://www.ascap.com)) can be searched by title, performers, or writers, and it will display the contact data of the appropriate publishers. BMI's site offers a similar online tool ([www.bmi.com](http://www.bmi.com)) that may be found on the page's top left side (use the drop-down menu

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under the Repertoire tab).

Government Web sites and trade association sites are useful sources for uncovering laws and regulations. For example, Kaiser recommends the FCC Web site for links to basic broadcast regulations ([www.fcc.gov/oet/info/rules](http://www.fcc.gov/oet/info/rules)). A search of the agency's site (rather than the entire Code of Federal Regulations) is a more targeted and efficient manner of searching for regulations. Most of the legal documents on the site of the National Association of Broadcasters are for members only, but the NAB does provide access to its filings in recent FCC dockets. The NAB also has an extensive links page for broadcast and telecommunications industry Web sites. This page is available to non-members (at [www.nab.org/irc/virtual/broadcast\\_industry\\_sites.asp](http://www.nab.org/irc/virtual/broadcast_industry_sites.asp)).

Litigators who need to keep abreast of rulings, motions, new filings, and appellate decisions affecting the entertainment industry can subscribe to the Entertainment Law Digest site ([www.entlawdigest.com](http://www.entlawdigest.com)) for \$495 annually (discount trial subscriptions are available at <http://www.entlawdigest.com/subscribe.cfm>). This site is based in Los Angeles.

Entertainment attorneys who regularly make phone calls to people outside the United States should bookmark [timeanddate.com/worldclock](http://timeanddate.com/worldclock). The cable network vice president calls offices worldwide, and he touts this site because it saves him the embarrassment of calling in the middle of the night. Mere embarrassment is not the worst that can happen; people have been fired for calling a celebrity in the middle of the night.

Finally, for some entertainment rather than news of the entertainment industry, users can visit Findlaw's FBI celebrity files (<http://news.findlaw.com/>), Mugshots.org for postings of celebrity mug shots (<http://mugshots.org>), and the famous Smoking Gun site ([www.thesmokinggun.com](http://www.thesmokinggun.com)), which "brings you exclusive documents—cool, confidential, quirky—that can't be found elsewhere on the Web." For example, read the contract riders of various performers: Kansas demands prune juice; Janet Jackson must have an arrangement of tulips, roses, gardenias, and lilies.

Finally, entertainment lawyers who are seeking employment should visit two entertainment gossip sites reporting on employment opportunities. The first site is a blog (a personal web journal) known as Dishings.com, and it focuses on the television business. Ifcome.com is more diverse, covering job openings and job changes in business and legal affairs in television, entertainment, motion picture, Internet, new media and dot-com companies. ■

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