

2016

# OMG - The Internet is Amazing

Joyce Manna Janto

*University of Richmond*, [jjanto@richmond.edu](mailto:jjanto@richmond.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/law-faculty-publications>



Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#), and the [Legal Writing and Research Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Joyce Manna Janto, *OMG - The Internet is Amazing*, in *Festschrift in Honor of Rick McKinney 78* (2016).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Law at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Law Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu](mailto:scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu).

# OMG – THE INTERNET IS AMAZING

---

**JOYCE MANNA JANTO**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF THE LAW LIBRARY,  
UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND SCHOOL OF LAW

At the risk of sounding like an old geezer, reminiscing about walking to school three miles, in a blizzard, uphill, both ways, I have to say when it comes to legislative research, you kids today don't know how easy you have it. A patron requests a copy of a bill filed in Congress yesterday? You can direct her to Congress.gov, FDsys, or the sponsor's website. And those are just some of the free sources! Or maybe your patron wants to confirm language from a Congressional hearing. Easy-peasy you say, let's hop on over to the committee's website. It wasn't always so.

Back in the day (pre-Internet and the before E-Government Act of 2002), finding legislative materials was challenging. If you wanted a copy of a federal bill, your options were limited. You could go to a library that, as a member of the Federal Depository Program, selected the bills in microfiche. Or you could find a library that subscribed to the CIS Microfiche Library. Unfortunately, it could take months for a bill to appear in microform. If you wanted something right away, you had to call the House or Senate Document Room, which provided copies of bills and legislative documents. If you were truly desperate, you could call your Congressional Representative or Senator's office to request a copy. Finding transcripts of hearings and copies of committee reports was equally frustrating. Committee records required a trip to the National Archives. Transcripts of some hearings were published and could either be purchased from the GPO, found in a depository library, or in a library which subscribed to the CIS set.

And that was the beauty of the *Legislative Source Book*. The original *Source Book*, published in 1992, told you where you could find things. The Union List supplied information on the legislative collections, including already compiled legislative histories, of LLSDC members. It gave ILL policies and

contact information. Even more importantly, it listed key phone numbers. That bill you needed? Here were the numbers for both the House and Senate Document Rooms. Phone numbers for every federal entity that dealt with the federal legislative process were provided. With the *Source Book* as your guide, when you needed to compile a legislative history, you could be confident of finding either the information itself, or at least the appropriate contacts for that information.

The original edition also contained a chart outlining the six (yes, count them -- six) online sources for this material, compiled by Rick McKinney. Back then, you were limited to CCH's Electronic Legislative Search System (ELSS), CQ's Washington Alert, Legis-Slate (a subsidiary of the *Washington Post*), Legi-Tech (a subsidiary of McClatchy Newspapers), LexisNexis, or Westlaw. Westlaw at the time was not the robust source for legislative materials we now have. Instead, it largely served as a gateway to Dialog databases and CQ's Congressional Alert. Oh, and the kicker - most of these systems only covered the current legislative session.

I can just hear it now, the collective sigh of relief from you young'uns that you no longer have to go on these treasure hunts or use a "superfluous" guide like the *Source Book*. Au contraire, grasshopper. The *Source Book* is needed now more than ever. One mantra I have in teaching legal research is to "see if someone else has done the work for you." And with the *Source Book*, Rick and the other members of the LLSDC's Legislative Research SIS have done a tremendous amount of work for you. My other mantra is, "the Internet has made librarians more necessary, not less." If you look at the current version of the *Source Book*, you will discover that the creators have adapted this publication for the Internet era. Now, rather than a static union list, there are curated lists of sources -- compiled by people for whom this work is a passion -- for all manner of federal and state legislative research. Links are provided for websites that can provide accurate, authentic information.

Maybe even more useful than the source lists are the original articles by Rick such as "Federal Administrative Law: A Brief Overview" and "Federal Legislative History Research: A Practitioner's Guide to Compiling the Documents and Sifting for Legislative Intent." These publications are invaluable to both the novice and the more experienced researcher who may not conduct legislative research on a regular basis. They keep

researchers up to date on what can be found where -- either on free or commercial databases. Using the *Source Book* is still a way to save valuable research time.