

USING THE “NEW” INTERNET FOR THE JUDICIARY’S COMMUNICATIONS



AS THE MEDIA REINVENTS ITSELF, THE ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE UNITED STATES COURTS IS EXPLORING NEW WAYS TO REACH THE MEDIA AND THE PUBLIC AT LARGE. THE PRIMARY COMMUNICATIONS TOOL IN THIS EFFORT IS THE EXTERNAL WEB SITE WWW.USCOURTS.GOV, WHICH IS UNDERGOING A MAJOR REDESIGN.

The new site will offer updated information architecture and an enhanced user experience, including the latest multimedia and Web 2.0 features. The goal of the redesigned site is to educate and inform users about the federal judiciary and its functions. The site’s new media features should make it more attractive, accessible, and useful to its diverse audience. (It is projected that www.uscourts.gov will register more than 34 million visits to the site in 2009.) The judiciary’s redesigned Web site, which is scheduled to go live at the end of 2009, includes a number of useful features.

E-mail Delivery Service

Interested users already can subscribe to www.uscourts.gov to receive e-mail updates. When the judiciary creates or updates news releases, newsroom information, notifications of new publications, emergency notifications, and other significant content on www.uscourts.gov, a notification is sent directly to subscribers’ e-mail addresses. Each subscriber can choose to receive alerts on topics of interest or alerts for all updates. This subscription is free and can be canceled or updated at any time. The results have been highly successful in terms of both increased user demand and ease of use.

Multimedia Features: Videos, Podcasts, Photos, YouTube Channel

The use of multimedia on the federal government’s Web sites is commonplace, having increased significantly in the last few years. Videos have been available on www.uscourts.gov for several years and have focused on high-lighting news. Recently, the focus was expanded to feature

two informational video series: “Bankruptcy Basics” and “Working for the Federal Judiciary.”

Audio podcasts of federal rules hearings also have been added to www.uscourts.gov in the past year. Offering these podcasts enables interested listeners to download the files and listen to the hearings at their convenience.

The use of multimedia will be expanded on the redesigned Web site to include areas for video and podcasts as well as photos and a link to the judiciary’s YouTube channel, which is in development.

RSS Feeds

For the past year, RSS feeds on www.uscourts.gov have been providing information on newsroom updates, video news, *The Third Branch* newsletter, federal rulemaking, and emergency notifications. The number of subscribers continues to increase steadily. The site’s RSS feed is being expanded to cover additional content areas and to feature RSS icons on many pages as a way to encourage users to subscribe.

Bookmark and Share Features

To encourage visitors to return to the site and to share information they find useful, the new Web site will contain links to allow users to bookmark pages and share content on each page. Users who want to access a favored page again can click on an icon to bookmark that page. Those interested in passing along the information they have found can take advantage of the share feature. When they click on this icon, it will bring up an option for e-mailing or posting the content to another site. **TFL**