The Federal Lawyer In Cyberia

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More Interesting Web Sites for Cyberians to Consider

Every now and then, we do a column on interesting Web sites. It's been a while since we've done so, so let's remedy that now. Remember, sometimes we focus on sites that are very useful for lawyers, sometimes we center on sites of a more general interest, and sometimes we look at sites that are just plain fun.

First, you should consider designating www.LawyerExpress.com as your home page. It is an amazingly flexible portal site for lawyers, with resources running out of its electronic ears. Merely by registering (there is no fee), you gain unlimited access to any and all "Practice Area" resources and receive a simultaneous registration to all other Express sites, including WiredCEO. The site offers the following:

- ability to customize your LawyerExpress home page, adding and deleting your favorite links;
- ability to add files from your laptop or desktop computer to your LawyerExpress page;
- assurance that your personal links follow you to any Express site you use; and
- access to the LawyerExpress "Great Sites Archive."

Second, you should think about joining a site called www.mail.com. The essence of what the site does is it allows you to invent novel e-mail addresses and have messages forwarded through them to your "real" e-mail account instantly. For example, given that my name is Mike Tonsing, I use the very easy to remember e-mail address on my letterhead and business cards: mtonsing @lawyer.com. You can also reach my same AOL account by sending a message to mtonsing @consultant.com. The possibilities are seemingly endless.

My e-mail address is not—but, because I'm a lawyer based in San Francisco, it *could* be— mtonsing@sanfranmail.com, mtonsing@doglover.com, or (one I absolutely lack the nerve to try) mtonsing@toothfairy.com. (On second thought, that might get me some traction when settling cases.) The names and the forwarding are free. If you want to be appearing from your electronic nom de plume, rather than from your boring real e-mail address, you can order up that service for a modest annual fee. OK. Go crazy.

As if that were not enough to lure you in to their lair, www.mail.com also has a gift-giving portal that suggests gifts you might want to give based on the recipient's profile, then helps with the online shopping by doing price comparisons from several online sources for the gift that you're considering.

A site you might want to visit for a number of reasons is www.insightexpress.com. The core competence of this site lies in helping companies better understand themselves and their clients/customers through research. And the site's customer list is impressive; it includes Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream, Houghton Mifflin (the publishing house), and MTV. When the time comes for introspection, give the site a look. Its ultimate goal is to help you retain more clients.

There is also a very interesting site that can help you deal with the hard drive that you're about to haul to the city dump (or, I hope, to a more ecologically friendly disposal site) when you discard your old computer in favor of a more powerful and more capable new one. This site will teach you how you can easily turn a hard drive that is currently in a clunky computer into a high-speed portable storage device. The developers of the site actually sell, over the Internet, a variety of enclosures that will allow you to play movie files on your television set, share the hard drive on your network, and back up your computer system with the touch of a button. Portable power solutions for people on the go and encryption technology for securing sensitive data on the hard drives are also available. If you need help on how to create an external hard drive using your old internal hard drive, you've come to the right place. Go to www.xpcgear.com/enclosurecase.htm, and it is all there—from parts to hand-holding.

If you, like me, have been a longtime user of the well-known compression/decompression utility known as "WinZip," you might also be especially interested in a new product from that company. According to the site, every year, 43 percent of computer users lose irreplaceable files. And, 300,000 laptops are stolen annually. We've talked in this column before about data loss protection, but here's another product worth considering. It is called Carbonite Online Backup. Carbonite is a WinZip product and is available only to WinZip subscribers. WinZip is owned by Corel, the company responsible for Word-

Perfect, among many other products. Carbonite is available to WinZip users on a 14-day free trial basis.

As we've noted here before, if you back up on CDs, DVDs, or an external hard drive that are stored on the same site as your computer is, you're not really protected. Earthquakes, fires, and other natural disasters could still wipe you out, as could theft. For $49.95 per year, Carbonite provides unlimited backup for all your files, no matter how much you need to back up. Carbonite Online Backup provides private and safe file backup at its secure data centers. If something happens to your computer, your files remain secure and accessible. Secure is good; secure and accessible is much better.

With Carbonite, restoring files is quick and easy. A few clicks from your desktop (assuming it is still there and functioning) or Carbonite's Web site is all it takes to start restoring your files. Carbonite encrypts those files as you upload them twice before backing them up securely off-site. Only you can see your password-protected files. You can add an additional layer of security for very sensitive files by—what else?—zipping and encrypting them with WinZip before backing them up. Go to www.carbonite.com.

And, I can wholeheartedly direct you to www.zdnet.com. Sign up for a free account and get instant and unlimited access to one of the largest databases of white papers, webcasts, and case studies anywhere. Your membership allows you to download an unlimited amount of content, including classic and current white papers, case studies, webcasts, freeware, and shareware—and more. You can also track the content on your chosen topics of interest and receive targeted e-mail alerts when your favorite content is added.

The only downside of this site, if this is a downside for you, is that you must agree to allow ZDNet, which is a very reputable company, "to share your information with companies that produce products or services featured in the library—so that such companies may contact you with information and offers regarding their products and services. This enables us to keep the library a free service. As a library registrant, you will receive a complimentary subscription to the ZDNet white paper newsletter and e-mail Must-Read News Alerts. You can unsubscribe from these at any time." To me, the service is worth the agreement. To give one small example: Given the size of the keyboards on both my laptop and my desktop computers, I am plagued with inadvertent punches of the "Caps Lock" key. ZDNet has a half-dozen freeware programs that will remedy this annoyance. My advice? Go for it.

Finally, do you want to sample an Internet confection that is just plain delicious (unless you're working in a cubicle or in a situation where a firewall could be a problem). Try www.pandora.com. Pandora is a music discovery service designed to help you enjoy music you already know and to help you discover new music you'll love. Pandora is the online result of the most comprehensive analysis of music ever undertaken: the Music Genome Project, a somewhat crazy project started back in early 2000 with the goal of capturing the complex "musical DNA" of songs. The project was born with a group of musicians and music-loving technologists who came together with the idea of creating the most comprehensive analysis of music ever.

This group set out to capture "the essence of music" at its most fundamental level and ended up assembling literally hundreds of musical attributes or "genes" into a very large "Music Genome." Taken together, the folks at Pandora say, these genes capture the unique and magical musical identity of a song—everything from melody, harmony, and rhythm, to instrumentation, orchestration, arrangement, lyrics, and of course the rich world of singing and vocal harmony.

To the Pandora creators, the song's identity is not about what a band looks like, or what genre it supposedly belongs to, or who buys the band's records—it's about what each individual song sounds like. Members listened to the songs of tens of thousands of different artists—ranging from popular to obscure—and analyzed the musical qualities of each song one attribute at a time. Of course, this task is never ending, and the members endeavor to include all the new music coming out of studios, clubs, and garages around the world.

The bottom line is this. Tell Pandora what you like, or name a few artists you like, and Pandora will build an online streaming "radio station" that mimics your interests. When the free songs start playing, you have the opportunity to click on icons that give thumbs up or thumbs down reactions so that, over time, the repertoire of your hand-crafted station will become more and more like just what you want. And, if your musical tastes are eclectic, you can create multiple stations, each with its own specific focus. And, it is all free.

Conclusion

I can't remember doing a Cyberian column with such a bewilderingly broad set of interesting sites. Bon appetit! **TFL**

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