

From tom@barratry.law.cornell.edu
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Date: Mon, 20 Nov 1995 08:56:12 -0500 (EST)
From: "Thomas R. Bruce" <tom@barratry.law.cornell.edu>
To: lii-all -- Brian Shelden <shelden@lii.law.cornell.edu>,
Jeannette Barney <jbarney@lii.law.cornell.edu>,
LII BULLETIN-NY correspondence editors -- Bill Gameros
<gamechaw@law.mail.cornell.edu>,
coloricj@law.mail.cornell.edu, mayejoehr@law.mail.cornell.edu,
Linda Majeroni <majeroni@law.mail.cornell.edu>,
Michael Peil <mpeil@lii.law.cornell.edu>,
Peter Martin <martin@lii.law.cornell.edu>
Subject: Who does what (vis a vis users, long)

At this point, we take more than 30,000 hits per day on LII-developed resources which range from the wholly dependable to the somewhat flaky and experimental. The users who access those resources likewise range from the wholly dependable to the somewhat flaky. While we have tried to channel feedback from them (problem reports, errata reports, etc.) to a variety of e-mail channels in ways which seemed useful at the time, our systems for handling user feedback have grown overly complex and duplicative. This situation is further complicated by the fact that users tend to throw feedback over the first available transom without reading the name on the metaphorical door.

This memo (yes, a real managerial memo, probably the first in the history of the LII) is an effort to straighten out the situation, in two parts: a proposed rerouting of existing LII mail channels, and a description of who should be handling what given that users often can't or won't respect those channels anyway.

A few words on timelines and such: As I write this, the Thanksgiving holiday looms at the end of the week, and there are a couple of major projects to undertake at the beginning of next week. I would propose that we aim to have all this in place on 1 December, the following Friday. Some things which need to happen (and should probably happen all at once, at least from the perspective of our users):

- 1) People responsible for maintaining data need appropriate permissions.
- 2) Mail aliases need to be reworked and some list owners revised.
- 3) I need to write appropriate HTML pages for feedback, adding some forms-based stuff as required.
- 4) Various conversations between Brian and others need to take place vis a vis handover of things he is doing now.

Any questions, suggestions or irate comments to me please.

The grim details:

Rerouting of mail channels

The most important rerouting we can do is to prevent the mail from being sent to us in the first place :-). To that end I propose that all public links which are meant to give the user an opportunity for feedback be rerouted to a page which will:

- 1) Tell those who want us to do their legal research for them that we don't do that, and give them some starting points for doing it themselves, and
- 2) Tell those who are seeking legal advice that we don't do that either, and make some suggestions about finding lawyers and other kinds of help, and
- 3) Break out our remaining addresses by function, eg. "I want to report a broken link/correct an error in your materials/offer another point of view" etc. etc.

When we took similar prophylactic measures with our listserv traffic (by adding terse help at the end of each message sent) it cut traffic in half.

The second part of rerouting should ensure that messages go as directly as possible to those who should be fixing the problem, and only to those people (ie. we need to eliminate one-to-many aliases on feedback). This will necessitate some passing-around of stuff internally, but will be much cleaner for users and leave us all with a better sense of what we individually are responsible for. I propose the following routings:

webmaster@www.law.cornell.edu : Jeannette, with her taking the initiative to seek help from Brian as needed. Ditto ftpmaster, gophermaster, telnetmaster.

lii@law.mail.cornell.edu : autoforward to
lii@lii.law.cornell.edu, with a note back to the user requesting that they use that address in the future.

lii@lii.law.cornell.edu : Peter Martin or Tom Bruce (one or the other, but not both). Note that this will be eliminated from all of our documents as a general-purpose address, but instead be rerouted through a 'contact-info' page as described above.

feedback@lii.law.cornell.edu: Same as lii@lii.law.cornell.edu

Specialized addresses which will be routed from the 'contact-info' page:

admin@lii.law.cornell.edu : Linda Majeroni
broken-link@lii.law.cornell.edu: Michael Peil, for now

errata@lii.law.cornell.edu : Peter Martin
cello-info@lii.law.cornell.edu : Tom Bruce
bulletins@lii.law.cornell.edu : the bulletin corresp.editors
orders@lii.law.cornell.edu : Linda Majeroni
law-review@lii.law.cornell.edu : whoever.
licensing@lii.law.cornell.edu : Linda Majeroni
admissions@lii.law.cornell.edu : whoever.
library@lii.law.cornell.edu : whoever.

The primary reason to create so many special purpose addresses mapped (in some cases) to one person is to permit future division of labor without re-editing pages; all of these will be aliases. Once more CLS departments/offices begin putting material up I'm sure there will be many, many more.

How to handle particular things:

Feedback falls into these categories (mostly):

- 1) Complaints about function of LII resources, eg. server down, can't access something which ought to be there, etc. A more detailed breakout of "it's busted"-type problems is below.
 - 1a) "It's-busted" complaints about things we don't own, but link to, eg. a broken resource at www.law.indiana.edu. Users are not too good at sorting this out, which is one of the great virtues of a seamless hypertext environment (sigh).
 - 2) Queries about availability of things which one might reasonably expect that we have, but we don't. These are hard to distinguish from 3) below, sometimes, so be careful. Examples include caselaw outside the date range of resources we mount (NY Court of Appeals decisions pre-1990, for instance). By the same token, we often get questions about the provenance of things we mount, eg. "how up to date is your copy of the US Code?"
 - 3) Legal research questions, for example, "I can't find the Soldiers and Sailors Relief Act of 1899, where is it?". Sometimes these look a lot like type-2) questions, but often they're reasonably expert. They can be difficult to distinguish from type-4) feedback as well. If you can re-frame the question as "Where on the global Internet is X document?", you've probably got a type 3.
 - 4) Requests for legal assistance. The dead giveaway here is that the user will generally describe their situation/problem without respect to a particular document, eg. "My dog just died from eating a whole bag of Doritos and I want to sue Frito-Lay".
 - 5) Expert notices of errata and omissions, or legitimate disagreement with some legal judgment call or opinion piece

that we've written/mounted.

5a) Like 5), but directed at resources we don't mount but link to.

6) Questions related to Cello

7) Questions related to NASDAQ

8) Kudos (rare, but gratifying).

9) Questions about LII Folio/Disk materials. We can expect an upsurge of these once the ProfResp CD is out; they can be anything and everything from orders to informational requests to tech-support questions.

10) People who believe that the military /government /Martians /gun lobby /Supreme Court /organic granola farmers are implanting electrodes in their brain/ experimenting on them with chemicals/ taking over the country/ changing the capitalization in original legal documents.

We generally send these people admissions packets and/or referrals to the faculty appointments committee. You can estimate our success rate by looking around you ;-).

What to do

+Type 1 (it's busted) problems:

-- If the resource is not ours, use the boilerplate called NOT OURS below to reply, or make up your own. When possible, forward a notice to the webmaster responsible. This is usually, but not always, webmaster@the.site.with.the.problem. So if the user is reporting a problem with something on www.law.indiana.edu, try forwarding the complain to webmaster@www.law.indiana.edu as well as responding to the user directly.

-- Other 'it's busted' problems, by software/resource category:

a) Supreme Court

Usually means the server is (or was) down.

Usually this is fixed by the time you get the mail, but sometimes not. Contact Barney, Bruce, or Martin for a restart if it's not running -- you can check by trying to get <http://www.law.cornell.edu/> in a browser and then hitting the reload button to make sure you're not looking at a cached copy. If it's up, reply to user telling them the problem's fixed.

b) Folio Infobases served via the Web -- URL points to www2.law.cornell.edu.

Usually means the server is (or was) down. You can check this via browser. If you can't get it either, contact Bruce, Barney, or Majeroni for server restart. If it's up, respond to user saying problem's fixed.

c) US Code. (URL: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode> or usc)

Sometimes this happens because the server's down, but more often it's because the conversion software is buggy and makes links to things which don't exist, etc. These links need to be fixed by hand. Forward note to Michael Peil (mpeil@lii.law.cornell.edu) for fix and response. Peil needs to talk to Shelden about what should be hand-fixed and what should be fixed in the software and regenerated.

d) NY Court of Appeals (URL: <http://www.law.cornell.edu/ny/>)

Broken link and bad HTML problems should go to Bill Gameros (gamechaw@law.mail.cornell.edu) for handling and response.

e) Anything and everything to do with listserv lists

Send to Jeannette (jbarney@lii.law.cornell.edu) for handling and response. In some cases Jeannette may wish to forward these to the specific list owner involved -- but often these are questions from our list owners.

f) Anything and everything to do with BigEar, or any other resource with a URL containing barratry.law.cornell.edu

Send to me (trb2@cornell.edu).

g) Anything else:

Send to Jeannette.

+Type 2 questions (things we should have but don't):

If this is not a Type 3 (legal research) question, there are several possibilities:

a) The user did not find/did not know how to search for something we actually do have.

Respond directly pointing them to the proper resource. This demands some familiarity with what we do have, of course. At a minimum everybody who's responding to these things should be familiar with our topical list, see

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/topical.html>

and chase through the tree it leads to.

Questions to me on anything you don't know about/are unclear about.

b) The user sez "Why don't you have blah", and we don't, but someone else does.

Respond directly pointing them to the resource if it is one you know exists. If you don't, use one of the form letters below.

c) They say we don't have it, and we don't.

Forward mail to me for handling. I want to track these with an eye toward collection development.

d) It's a provenance question (how up to date is X, where did it come from, which version, etc.).

Most of our information has provenance info attached via the "Context" and "Credits and Conditions" buttons which appear in the appropriate table-of-contents document for the collection they're asking about. In the interest of being polite, respond with the appropriate information -- then tell them how they could have found it themselves had they but known.

+Types 3 & 4 (legal research and legal assistance questions):

Use the All-Purpose Form letter below.

+Type 5: (expert notice of errata and omissions)

Forward depending on the collection involved:

- a) Law Review : law-review@lii.law.cornell.edu
- b) NY Court of Appeals : editors@lii.law.cornell.edu
- c) All others : Martin

+Type 6: Cello questions

These come in a couple of different categories:

- a) Bugs and usage questions

Send to me.

- b) Questions about licensing which contain the words "source code". In fact, anything which contains the words, "source code".

Send to me.

c) Questions about licensing which contain the word "CD-ROM" but do not contain the words "source code"

Send to Linda Majeroni (majeroni@law.mail.cornell.edu)

+Type 7: Nasdaq questions

I am currently working on discovering an address to which these can be sent. For now, send them to me.

+Type 8: Kudos.

Forward CC's to everybody, we could use the ego boost. Make sure a copy is sent to Linda Majeroni for archiving. Also, respond graciously to the sender.

+Type 9: Folio

Everything to Linda Majeroni. We may set up some sort of support infrastructure eventually, but so far it hasn't been necessary.

Boilerplate

+LEGAL RESEARCH

The LII is a publisher, and not a legal research service; time constraints prevent us from answering every query which comes our way regarding the wealth of legal information available on the Net. Here are some starting points we recommend:

The LII's topical index

<http://www.law.cornell.edu/topical.html>

The WWW Virtual Library: Law

<http://www.law.indiana.edu:80/law/lawindex.html>

The Lexis/Counsel Connect LawLinks page

<http://www.counsel.com>

The Federal Web/Federal Court/State Court Locators

<http://www.law.vill.edu/>

Understanding the Federal Courts

http://www.uscourts.gov/understanding_courts/899_toc.htm

+LEGAL ADVICE

The borderline between providing legal advice and providing legal information is a thin one, and one which we are neither permitted nor able to cross. Your best course of action would

be to seek the services of an attorney; most places in the US have a lawyer referral service operated by the local bar association as well as some means of providing legal services to those who cannot afford an attorney. A look through the Yellow Pages will generally locate either or both of these.

"Yellow Pages" for lawyers (both on and off the Net) exist on the Internet, also. We recommend:

West's Legal Directory
<http://www.westpub.com/WLDInfo/lspwld.htm>

Lexis-Counsel Connect Lawyer Search
<http://www.counsel.com/lawyersearch/>

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+NOT OURS

The problem you've reported is a problem with a document maintained on another Web site; we often provide pages, indexes, and tables of contents which simply serve to organize or present information mounted and maintained by others. We've forwarded a copy of your note to those who actually maintain the information, and suggest that you contact them if the problem is not corrected soon.

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| Thomas R. Bruce trb2@cornell.edu
| Co-Director, Legal Information Institute
| Cornell Law School Vox: 607-255-1221
| Myron Taylor Hall FAX: 607-255-7193
| Ithaca, NY 14853
| "Carving clowns with power tools? What could be more fun!"
| -- _Woodwork_ magazine
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