

Free Resources — Courtesy of the Badger State

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Successful legal researchers do not rely solely upon legal publications in completing their work. Rarely is anything typical about a given day in a law firm library where a researcher may find themselves investigating anything from medical procedures to the latest political happenings in Eastern Europe to the history of a protected species in addition to requests of a legal nature. Faced with the need to locate information about a vast array of subjects, the cost-conscious law firm librarian must often find alternatives to the news and general information sources provided for a fee by Westlaw, Lexis and DIALOG. In Wisconsin, Badgerlink may provide the necessary resources at a great price — free!

Provided by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Division for Libraries, Technology and Community Learning (DPI), Badgerlink is a collection of databases containing citations, abstracts and in many cases full-text access to the contents of over 6000 magazine and journal titles and over 500 newspapers. The other component of Badgerlink very useful to legal researchers is WISCAT which is an online catalog displaying the holdings of Wisconsin libraries participating in the program. WISCAT can be used to determine local libraries holding needed items for interlibrary loan purposes. DPI contracts with EBSCO and ProQuest (database vendors) to provide access to all Wisconsin residents in cooperation with the public, school, academic and special libraries and local Internet Service Providers (ISP). Badgerlink is available at <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/badgerlink/> for users whose local ISPs are registered with the program or by logging in with a Wisconsin library card number if the ISP originates outside of Wisconsin.

Like Badgerlink, EBSCOhost is a suite of 23 databases with a search engine allowing for the databases to be searched either individually or collectively. The databases range from general reference collections to subject-specific databases for public, academic, medical, corporate and school libraries. Of the 23 databases there are several that

are immensely useful for legal research. MasterFILE Premier is a multidisciplinary collection including the full-text of publications including Maclean's, *National Review* and *Fortune*. Academic Search Elite publications are of a more scholarly nature and include *BYU Law Review*, *American Journal of Law & Medicine* and *Political Science Quarterly*. *Accounting Review*, *Taxation for Accountants and Securities Industries News* can be found in Corporate ResourceNet which is designed for companies. Business Source Elite contains scholarly and peer-reviewed business publications like *ABA Banking Journal*, *Healthcare Financial Management* and *Dispute Resolution Journal*.


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Other databases included as part of EBSCOhost are Regional Business News, Health Source, MEDLINE, and Newspaper Source. Although there is some duplication of publications among the various databases and coverage dates vary from publication to publication, the subject-area coverage is extensive. With an easy to use search engine that offers Boolean (AND, OR, NOT) search capabilities as well as a number of different

ways to limit queries by year, publication title, author etc., and the ability to download many articles in pdf format, EBSCOhost should not be overlooked as an option for literature searches.

For locating newspaper articles, ProQuest is an excellent alternative to expensive Westlaw and Lexis searches. Similar to EBSCOhost, the ProQuest resources may be searched in their entirety or by individual database. Especially useful for Wisconsin legal researchers is the Wisconsin Newsstand database which provides full-text access to the *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*, *The Daily Reporter*, *Kenosha News* and the *Wisconsin State Journal* to name a few. Other titles with full-text coverage (dates of coverage vary) within the entire ProQuest collection are *USA Today*, *The Independent (London)*, *Bangkok Post*, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Chicago Tribune*.

Equipped with a very user-friendly search engine, ProQuest offers a basic keyword search that can be limited by date, publication title, document field and publication type. The advanced search option provides for Boolean queries with the same choices for limiters. ProQuest also includes a function by which the entire database may be search for a particular publication. In terms of currency or speed with which new stories are added to the database, although this varies from one title to another, for the most part new stories are added with a few days of being published with some added the same day they originally ran. With very little sacrifice in terms of coverage and access to current stories, ProQuest should be kept in mind for free news searches.

Providing high quality results from reliable sources at a reasonable cost is the goal of law librarians regardless of whether strict budget restrictions have been imposed for research. It is important to keep in mind that fee-based online sources, although they may contain the needed resources, may not be the only option. In Wisconsin, the free resources of Badgerlink are often all that will be needed to quickly locate the required materials. 

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