Legal Information Management, 10 (2010), pp. 76–78
© The British and Irish Association of Law Librarians
doi:10.1017/S1472669610000149

Product Review: JustCite

Librarians develop a knowledge of acronyms, titles and their corresponding publishers which is not necessarily shared by the lawyer or student. After all, why should a lawyer want to learn that the P&CR are the Property, Planning & Compensation Reports published by Sweet & Maxwell and therefore only available on the parent Thomson Reuters Westlaw platform? The lawyer wants the content of the law report not the publishing details!

Michelmores LLP is probably not unusual in investing about 75% of the library budget in electronic sources of information. We are keen to capitalise on this investment by making sure that the lawyer finds the correct authoritative information in the quickest time. Databases such as Jordans, Justis, LexisLibrary, PLC and Westlaw all have their advantages and disadvantages – they also have both overlapping and unique content. The interface, user-friendliness, and search engine, all play a part in the choice of the individual's favoured database. Familiarity of use is an additional factor in the lawyer's selection of electronic resources. I am talking here about the lawyers who do use subscription databases. How many lawyers now bypass the databases that are the result of huge investment, by both publishers and law firms, and go straight to Google?

What is JustCite?

JustCite creates an index from the content of various databases. The search engine allows the user to search the index to multiple sources simultaneously, without the need to know which database to search or how to search that database. The user then links from the JustCite index to the full-text content within the given database. The index also provides cross-referenced material. The service was launched in 2001 and a new platform appeared in 2007.

An item record within JustCite is referred to as the 'Document'. The first hypertext link, the 'Reference', within the JustCite 'Document' presents alternative links to the full-text of the item. The 'Reference' links can be customised so that you can only click on links to which you have access i.e. free websites and your subscription sources. The customisation overcomes the irritation of being presented with a page stating that you do not have access to the content. The customisation of the 'Reference' link can also include an email link so that an email can be sent to Library staff for publications held in a hard copy collection.

The JustCite 'Document' also presents, at a glance, value-added information relating to the case or legislation concerned. The 'Document' includes information relating to whether a case has been considered or overturned, or if the legislation is in force or repealed. There may also be links to the legislation considered by a case, or to cases interpreting a piece of legislation. The user can then link to either the JustCite 'Document' for the cross-reference or to the full-text of the cross-reference.

Coverage

The content indexed is extensive, covering over 300,000 cases, UK legislation, EU legislation and cases, around 100 journal titles, PLC precedents and growing coverage from other jurisdictions. New material is indexed daily and additional content is added on a regular basis. Currently content from about 90 publishers is indexed. As of Summer 2009, JustCite links to the new Westlaw platform.

Indexing is mainly of a selective editorial-based decision, although some content is automatically generated. The cross-references within the 'Document' for an individual case are selected for their relevance by the JustCite editorial team.

Interface

JustCite has a good clean search interface and navigation between pages is intuitive and simple. Terminology is clear on the whole, with content-sensitive help pages for the occasional term used which may not be obvious in meaning.

Search functionality

The 'Quick' search engine is easy to use and forgiving in terms of recognising the varied ways in which search terms are entered. The user can enter part of a name or part of a citation. The search engine automatically assumes an 'and' between search words. The user can also search by subject. The 'Quick' search covers all the content indexed by JustCite. There is an alternative search page to search across a narrower area of content, such as cases or legislation, and this search offers multiple field search options. The search engine also supports all Boolean operators, phrase searching, proximity searching, date searching, wildcards and parentheses.

Although the majority of the records for cases include 'Subject matter', this is not true of all of the content indexed which means the 'Subject search' is not comprehensive. JustCite state that a synopsis, the JustCite Digest, has been written by an in-house team for every case post 2007.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669610000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Search results

The results page is ordered by relevance and there are visual indications to show strength of relevance. The results can be re-ordered to reflect the title or year. The results can be further modified by use of a 'Filter' or 'Group' selection of particular results.

I think there is room for improvement with the 'Document' page as I find the coloured lines separating the content are a visual distraction, but this may be a left/right hand brain thing! The ability to navigate to a particular section within the 'Document' is a useful tool.

Sample searches

I ran a by no means scientific sample of searches based on requests received at work on JustCite, LexisLibrary and Westlaw to compare the results. The small sample of searches was for particular cases and sections of legislation. For the case search, I primarily kept to the 'CaseSearch' within LexisLibrary and the 'Case analysis' within Westlaw. The full-text of the cases and legislation were accessible through all three services, with one exception for a case in Westlaw. Westlaw consistently retrieved the highest number of cross-references to the subject record. JustCite and LexisLibrary scored equally in supplying the next highest number of cross-references. The difficulty of determining the quality of the cross-references is demonstrated by the following case and legislation searches. The search results were examined by the following criteria: the ease of retrieval of the object, the full-text availability of the object, the number and quality of cross-references.

Example case search

ES v Chesterfield and North Derbyshire Royal Hospital NHS Trust [2003] EWCA Civ 1284

I used the terms "ES" and "Chesterfield" for search purposes. The judgment was easily found in both JustCite and Westlaw, but less so in LexisLibrary, due to the exacting requirements of the LexisLibrary search engine. The results for both LexisLibrary and Westlaw were different depending on the search screen options used within those services.

Citation: JustCite provided 2 citations for the case; LexisLibrary 3 citations; Westlaw 4 citations

Cases considering ES v Chesterfield: JustCite listed 1 subsequent judgment that had cited ES v Chesterfield; LexisLibrary lists 1 judgment; Westlaw lists 3 subsequent judgments. The case listed by JustCite was not included by either LexisLibrary or Westlaw.

Cases considered by ES v Chesterfield: JustCite provided 1 judgment considered by ES v Chesterfield; LexisLibrary 1 judgment and Westlaw 0 judgments. However the JustCite case listed was not actually referred to by ES v Chesterfield. JustCite gave the reason as a possible error in the third party material supplied and quickly corrected the entry.

Articles: JustCite provided 1 article; LexisLibrary can be used to link through to book titles (via 'Find related commentary'); Westlaw provided 16 articles.

Example legislation search

Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 s.33

Cases considering s.33: JustCite provided 1 case; LexisLibrary 0 cases (via 'Find related cases'); Westlaw provided 9 cases.

Articles relating to s.33: JustCite provided 0 articles; LexisLibrary can be used to link to book titles (via 'Find related commentary'); Westlaw provided 0 articles from the Legislation page (but provided 1 article if the search was made within the Journals section).

Additional functionality

The MyJustCite facility allows the user to view their research trail, saved searches and searches undertaken against a client code. Email alerts are not available.

Cost

JustCite is priced on banded number of users. Bandings for solicitors start from 1-20 and for barristers from 1 and then 2-10. Academic institutions are charged a fixed price per institution for unlimited usage.

Online help and helpdesk support

The Help & Information pages on JustCite are presented by way of a novel drop-down within the page and are simple to use. I received responses to queries sent by email and telephone on the same day.

Areas for development

Lawtel is the notable exception to the sources indexed by JustCite. The reasons given for this are technical, relating to the unique id numbers given to documents in Lawtel to which JustCite are unable to link.

Although the journal content coverage includes over 100 titles, the archive is still quite small for a number of these titles – about 70% start from 2006 or later. It would be useful to extend coverage to the full archive of the journal titles available on the services indexed for JustCite to be a fully fledged one-stop shop.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669610000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press

JustCite sometimes has two 'Documents' for one case – this is due to citations being added both manually and automatically. The JustCite editorial team are tidying up the duplications as found and are extending the team to speed up this process. The team amalgamated an example of duplication sent to them on the same day.

Conclusion

I think Justis are to be congratulated on negotiating agreements with the big publishers, although the publishers must have also bowed to the inevitable – just as individual book titles have ceded to the omnipotence of the database, the behemoths of LexisLibrary, Westlaw et al are more useful when opened up to wider searching.

There are of course still very good reasons for searching within individual databases to identify content – certain field searching cannot be run other than within them and the full exploitation of indexing terms can only be made within the individual databases. The user would also expect to find comprehensive law report citations (but not necessarily the links to the full-text) for a particular case on Westlaw, whereas JustCite will provide the citations only for those law reports indexed by JustCite. The content within other sites is indexed quickly, but with a delay, so very recent cases may not necessarily be included. For example, the BAILII content is indexed every two days.

The expansion of legal information products on offer and the development of existing products are in themselves creating a problem of identifying and searching the appropriate service from a rich diversity of competitive 'solutions' so that the multiple solutions can become part of the problem! JustCite provides a tool to better exploit the investments made in multiple databases. I would suggest that the experienced researcher will continue to select the appropriate database to search. The inexperienced, or infrequent, user of databases is likely to find JustCite very beneficial as a quick route to a given piece of information, avoiding the frustrations of identifying the right database to search and how to search it.

The service is also useful to identify freely available sources of cases and legislation when supply from databases to third parties may fall outside the licence terms and conditions.

The response to anomalies identified in the service is rapid and Justis are very receptive to suggestions for improvements to the service.

Conclusion

In summary, JustCite is excellent when looking for a particular case or piece of legislation. However, I would still use the field search and indexing terms within a particular database when trying to identify cases or legislation relating to a particular subject. It will also be interesting to see if recent developments to the Google Scholar search engine evolve into a search tool to compete within the UK arena.

Helen Watson
Librarian
Michelmores LLP

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669610000149 Published online by Cambridge University Press