

Sense and searchability: developing the SOSIG Law Gateway

Steven Whittle

During the last 18 months a small team of law librarians at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies has been working, in partnership with the University of Bristol, to develop the law section of SOSIG and establish an important service for the legal community within the UK's Resource Discovery Network (<http://www.rdn.ac.uk>).

The Law Gateway (<http://www.sosig.ac.uk/law>) is a freely available web-based database of high quality legal information sources on the Internet. The service provides specialist guidance and ready access to global legal information resources on the net, concentrating on sites that can support academic and professional work.



The service is designed with legal people in mind, aiming to help law students, lecturers, researchers and the legal profession with their studies, research and current awareness needs.

The Law Gateway offers expert descriptions and links to resource sites publishing primary and secondary legal materials and to specific documents of legal interest; helping to make it easier to find useful sites for a full range of jurisdictions and legal subject areas.

Additional service components include the "My Account" and "Grapevine" facilities. These optional features allow users to register personal and professional details on the Gateway, publish information about conferences or courses they are organising as well as their own cv or research interests. An e-mail notification service helps registered users keep track of new additions to the Gateway in self-selected areas of subject interest.

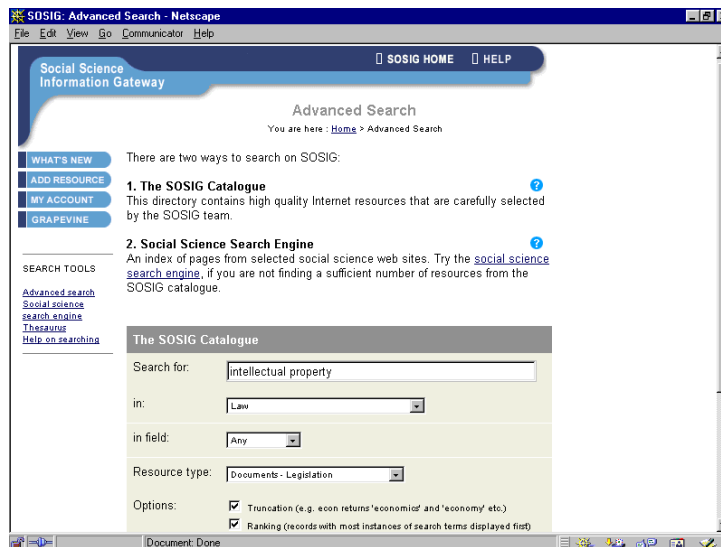
We know that researchers are very familiar with making bibliographic searches of online library catalogues and have applied this approach when searching the Internet via favourite search engines. The SOSIG Law Gateway provides its own search options. A goal of the service is to offer legal researchers search facilities with more precision and relevant subject coverage than can be achieved with Internet-wide search engines.

You are here : [Home](#) > Law

Search in [whole catalogue](#)  [Advanced](#)

All subjects within [Law](#)

A search box with a range of sophisticated search features is included on each browsing screen. Users can type one or more terms in the search box and click go. The search is dynamic, adjusting its scope according to the section or subsection in which it is initiated. A search may be restricted to the Law Gateway or extended to the complete SOSIG Internet catalogue and beyond.



A series of advanced options enable users to search for law specific resources. The search form can be modified to search for a particular type of resource such as Legislation or Law Reports, make field specific searches, create queries using Boolean operators, truncation and alternative terminology from a specialist legal thesaurus.

Users value the descriptive records outlining the qualities of the sites, uncovering hidden materials, sources of legal texts, online commentaries and official reports. Words in the description are included in the default search of the gateway, helping users to trace less obvious material from less likely sources. A full record option confirms the authority and quality of the source, giving quick access to e-mail and contact details for those responsible for the site.

The project is ambitious and rewarding. Intensive efforts in the first year have concentrated on developing the structure and content of the Law Gateway, building on other activities and initiatives at the IALS. An enthusiasm for the venture and belief in its value allowed us to exceed targets in record creation and make real progress in developing the gateway as an effective national resource for legal researchers. Our planning for the next 18 months will build on this success, focusing especially on reaching new users and discovering their needs for efficient Internet research tools in the field of law. With the core features in place we are entering an exciting stage for the project. We plan to extend our range, to increase coverage and usefulness, to raise further awareness of the service and stimulate further interest and input from UK academic, government and professional lawyers and their students.

The aim will be to develop greater integration and operability; to deliver "sense and searchability"; to help people make the wisest use and gain the fullest benefit from web resources; to help ensure that the expansion of the Internet continues to have a positive impact on the professional life and work of UK and international legal communities.

Steve Whittle is Computing Services Librarian and Law Gateway Project Manager, Institute of Advanced Legal Studies.

For further information, email Steven.Whittle@sas.ac.uk or Debra Hiom, d.hiom@bristol.ac.uk, Social Science Information Gateway, Institute for Learning and Research Technology, University of Bristol.