Update to Researching Law on the Internet with the Resource Discovery Network

By Steven Whittle

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Summary

This paper offers an introduction to a UK national Internet project called the Resource Discovery Network (RDN), focusing in particular on work to develop a Law Gateway with international scope and relevance, utilising web database technologies, metadata standards and specialist site evaluation.
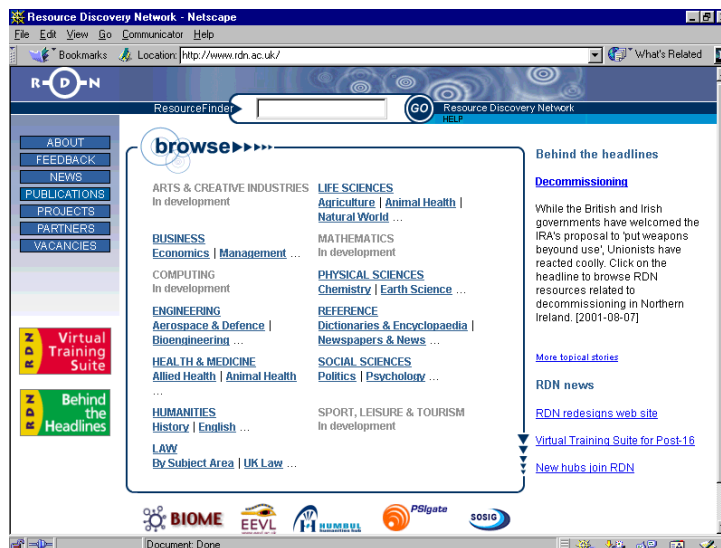
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Aims and structure of the Resource Discovery Network

The Resource Discovery Network (http://www.rdn.ac.uk) is a collaborative service supported by UK Higher Education funding bodies[1] to provide easy and effective access to high quality Internet resources for the learning, teaching and research communities. The RDN offers a variety of Internet quality filtering facilities tailored to the needs of specific subject communities, complemented by an interdisciplinary and collaborative approach. The RDN portals provide access to many free Internet-based resources, helping academics and professionals uncover an ever-expanding range of web resources, now including much primary and secondary legal material. The service began in 1999 as a three year development project, taking a national view on subject-based information provision within the web environment. Funding for a further five years has been agreed in principle, subject to an annual review. All services are publicly available and are free at point of use.
The Resource Discovery Network consists of a number of Hubs with subject responsibilities based at higher education institutions in the UK. Each Hub provides access to freely available Internet Resource Catalogues, delivering detailed descriptive records of over 40,000 international web-based resources. The Hubs are developing subject-centred portal services in a number of fields: BIOME (Health and Life Sciences) led by the University of Nottingham, EEVL (Engineering, Maths , Computing) led by Heriot-Watt University, Humbul (Humanities) led by University of Oxford, PSIgate (Physical Sciences) led by University of Manchester and SOSIG (Social Science, Business and Law) led by the University of Bristol.[2] Distributed teams of experts in other institutions and organisations contribute to these services as part of their professional work. The overall project is co-ordinated by a Network Centre (RDNC) based at King's College, London.

The RDN Internet Catalogues maintain comprehensive independent metadata and intelligence about each resource indexed. Resources are described objectively by a network of subject and electronic information specialists based at top educational and research organisations in the UK academic community. Keywords, subject specific classification schema and thesauri are used to ensure that users can access data quickly and efficiently.

The constituent subject portals have a pathfinding and prospecting role in helping researchers make use of the Internet, filtering the wealth of information the web has to offer and guiding researchers to reliable sites and materials. Each of the core Internet Resource Catalogues is enhanced by a range of customisation, current awareness and community-building services developed by the participating Hubs.

A strength of the RDN lies in the integrated range of search and browse features offered to users at the Resource Network and subject specific levels. The service combines powerful search options with classified browsability. Users can focus or expand their research accordingly, search for specific items or browse to collect more ideas and sources, raising their awareness of the type and quality of resources available.

A search tool called "ResourceFinder" allows users to query RDN component Internet Resource Catalogues simultaneously. It is a full text keyword search supported by basic boolean logic functions, looking for matches in resource titles, descriptions and subject fields. Through ResourceFinder, RDN services are aiming to offer subject communities web search facilities that provide more precision and relevant coverage than can be achieved with Internet-wide robot driven search engines.

The RDN browsing interface consists of a table of subject headings arranged in ten broad subject areas covering: Business, Computing, Engineering, Health, Humanities, Law, Life Sciences, Mathematics, Physical Sciences, Reference and Social Sciences. Areas in development include: Arts and Creative Industries, Geography and Natural Sciences, and Sports, Tourism and Leisure. Hypertext links lead to the classified subject centres and collections of evaluative site records and links. Minimum graphics are employed through out to aid global access and delivery. A set of 40 complementary subject specific interactive tutorials has been produced to help users develop Internet research skills and exploit web resources. The tutorials are freely available on the web in the RDN Virtual Training Suite (http://www.vts.rdn.ac.uk/index.htm)

A new feature called Behind the Headlines (http://www.rdn.ac.uk/news/headlines/) provides background references and information sources to topical news stories across the disciplines.

Responding to information climate change

The Resource Discovery Network is part of the UK response to dramatic developments in information technology and transfer, with growth in the capacity and capability of the web driving and being driven by globalisation in economics, business and politics. Such globalisation promotes an international outlook, increasing the need for rapid and reliable access to truly multi-national materials, sources for many

jurisdictions and topical areas that can support comparative academic and professional work.

Many information professionals are seeing a major shift taking place in user preference and reliance on electronic rather than print resources. Law and legal materials are ever-changing and the web provides an ideal means of handling that change. The web also offers convenient desktop access and freedom from restrictions of physical location or opening hours. As a result web-based materials in particular have rapidly become the first choice source of information for users who resort to hard copy sources only in the absence of a reliable electronic alternative.

The Internet is becoming an increasingly valuable source of legal information and materials. Global expansion in both electronic publication and public service publication on the web now offers researchers a wide range of legal materials and law-related resources. Initiatives such as AustLII (http://www.austlii.org/), BAILII (http://www.bailii.org/) , CanLII (http://www.canlii.org/) HKLII (http://www.hklii.org/), PacLII (http://www.paclii.org/), WorldLII (http://www.worldlii.org/) and Cornell's Legal Information Institute (http://www.law.cornell.edu/) share a family resemblance and commitment to public service publication that in turn encourages others, including Governments, Courts, universities, and publishers, to raise the level of coverage in the public domain. There is now more legal information than ever online, waiting to be found.

According to a report published by the Internet service company BrightPlanet (http://www.brightplanet.com/) and subsequently discussed in a number of articles and recent books, the web contains over 550 billion pages – much of which is hidden in what has been called the "Deep Web or "Invisible Web". See Diana Botluck's LLRX article on the invisible web[3]

Despite the continuing development of Internet-wide search engines, a high percentage of the information available is hidden, not indexed and not evaluated for quality, so users cannot always afford the time required to trace relevant sites and consider their authenticity, currency or coverage. Complex site structures and multimedia content are not reached and never evaluated by the search robots. For every single page potentially indexed by the top search engines there are another 549 pages of content missed. Longer pages can be skipped and some engines present results containing cached information, effectively 3 to 4 weeks behind events.

The fact that the web enables almost anyone to publish almost anything, bypassing traditional filtering procedures and editorial scrutiny in turn raises quality and trust issues. It is very important that serious users have a means of accessing the quality of the information offered and the credibility of its source – so they are able to spend their time finding and using not just seeking and searching.

The need to organise access to this information iceberg and survey the 99.8 % below the surface offers challenges that reinvent and reinforce the role of the law librarian and legal information manager. Law has traditionally required the specialist skills of information professionals to help find, collect, update and interpret legal sources. Many of the most active people involved in portal and gateway work have been librarians and teachers with proven abilities to manage and organise information. There is a much-needed advisory role, helping to foster good practice through focused selection and careful evaluation. The human factor, the application of professional judgement is important in helping to distinguish between substantive resources and sites of limited academic value. RDN services take account of these requirements and aim to employ appropriate technologies and skills to deliver the necessary Internet research tools.

Role of the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG)

Within the UK's RDN initiative resource discovery and delivery in the field of law are the responsibility of the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG) (http://www.sosig.ac.uk), allowing the service to set law within an increasingly important socio-legal context.

SOSIG is hosted and run by the Institute for Learning and Research Technology (ILRT) (http://www.ilrt.bris.ac.uk) at the University of Bristol in association with a number of other UK academic institutions with a reputation for excellence in their field. SOSIG provides the network with access to carefully selected business, government, parliamentary, social welfare and legal sites and materials available on the Internet. The Internet Catalogue contains over 19,000 descriptive records of selected web-accessible resources worldwide classified under more than 1000 subject headings, supplemented by an automatic search tools linking to several 100,000 other sites.

SOSIG has grown from a pioneering project site in 1994 to become a leading RDN portal service, re-launched with a new interface, more content and a number of extra features early in 2000 and moved successfully to a faster new server in 2002.

The SOSIG main page gives an overview map of all SOSIG subjects, presenting links to browsable subject sections and sub topics, with search facilities, help options and buttons and links to more information about the service.

Section editors for Law

Since September 1999 the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies Library (University of London) (http://ials.sas.ac.uk) has had key responsibility for the law section, working in partnership with the original section editors at the Wills Memorial Library (University of Bristol) (http://www.bris.ac.uk/is/locations/willslibrary/) and ILRT. As a result the SOSIG Law Gateway is now very definitely international in scope and has over 2800 law section records. We add approximately 15 records each week as well as updating existing records and repairing broken links. The work is conducted by a half-time project post and project manager with support from the IALS Library's Reader Services team.

The IALS was founded in 1946 and is one of the ten Institutes which constitute the School of Advanced Study of the University of London and which function as open environments for research and study by scholars and other specialists from all over the United Kingdom and beyond. The Institute is a leading centre for legal research and provides national research library and information services in law.

IALS Library was amongst the first of many libraries to develop a collection of links to Internet resources for law on its own website. Those simple web pages evolved into an index of links called eagle-i (electronic access to global legal information) (http://ials.sas.ac.uk/links/eagle-i.htm). The IALS eagle-i service characterises much of the parallel work undertaken in the late '90s by academic, government and law firm librarians devising and sharing hypertext links to sites.

Such services have often been created as flat HTML pages, offering quick links perhaps in country and subject arrangements with some brief annotations on content and possibly a local search option. As the Internet has grown and continues to grow it has become less practicable to manage and rely on static HTML pages of this type

for routes to the Internet. The Resource Discovery Network was formed to help rationalise, consolidate and co-ordinate this effort in the UK by introducing suitable web and database technology backed by agreed standards on selection, evaluation and description.

Technical Infrastructure - ROADS

SOSIG is built on the ROADS (Resource Organisation and Discovery in Subject-based services) (http://www.roads.lut.ac.uk) suite of web database software and tools, providing the necessary technical architecture for a project on this scale.

ROADS was originally developed as part of the UK Electronic Libraries Programme (eLib) by a consortium including the Institute for Learning and Research Technology at the University of Bristol, and the UK Office of Library and Information Networking at the University of Bath, with the bulk of the software development being done by the Department of Computer Science at Loughborough University. ROADS is utilised by a number of projects in the UK, Europe and around the World.

ROADS is a set of free, open source software and standards designed specifically for Internet gateway development. ROADS is written in Perl to run on any UNIX or LINUX based system. WHOIS++ and Z39.50 are used to link distributed databases and provide interoperability between services.

ROADS offers a configurable interface for users and contributors. The systems facilitate distributed working so the database can be accessed and edited remotely from any authorised PC with a web browser. Browse subject sections are automatically generated from classified database entries, boolean searching and web interface administration are also available. ROADS provides automatic housekeeping tools to ensure reliable performance and systematic update. There are facilities to identify duplicate records, check the currency of links, track and repair broken links, prompt for record review and generate search statistics. About 5% of the database is involved in review and repair each week.

ROADS has offered an adaptable infrastructure on which to build the law section of the Social Science Information Gateway.

The SOSIG Law Gateway

The SOSIG Law Gateway (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/law) has been designed to provide access to quality law related resources on the Internet, presenting detailed site profiles, content assessments and well-maintained links to sites in a structured web database. In particular the service offers expert descriptions and links to sites

publishing primary and secondary legal literature and to specific documents of legal interest.

The Law Gateway is designed specifically with legal people in mind, aiming to help law students, law teachers, researchers and the legal profession with their studies, research, teaching and current awareness needs. It provides a framework for handling and meeting legal information needs, can help identify and locate sources and then facilitate evaluation of appropriate sources. It offers features to help locate core legal materials, to browse for similar and related materials and to keep up-to-date with new additions and innovations. It aims to make it easier for researchers to find useful sites for a full range of legal subject areas and jurisdictions world wide.

Integrated components

The SOSIG Law Gateway includes a number of integrated components:
- The main element is an Internet Catalogue - containing over 2,000 descriptive records and entry points for legal documentation and law related Internet sites, selected, classified and reviewed by legal information specialists.
- A Social Science Search Engine is also provided - this is a limited area search engine drawn from a supplementary database of over 100,000 links gathered by a web robot which visits each of the quality websites featured in the Catalogue (including all the Law section sites) and follows any links it finds for those pages and automatically indexes the content.
- A Grapevine service - allowing users to establish professional contacts and search or browse details of university departments, trace like-minded researchers, conferences and courses relevant to their field.
- A personalised account and current awareness service called "My Account" - allowing users to register freely on the service and to publish their own information, customise their use of the Gateway and receive e-mail alerts with notifications of new information on the system from the full range of legal jurisdictions and subject areas.
- Options to search across the whole SOSIG database containing business, government and political sources relevant to socio-legal studies or extend a search to the whole Resource Discovery Network.

Law Gateway Contents

SOSIG aims to include quality sources of timely and historic significance. We target our efforts to develop the catalogue in particular subject areas and jurisdictions, giving priority to sites offering substantive content from authoritative sources. Attention has been given to quality tested sources of: primary legal documents (legislation, law reports and treaties); governmental bodies (law reform commissions); government documents, research reports and consultation papers; professional organisations and societies (bar councils, law societies); regulatory bodies (publishing codes of practice, standards and rules); electronic journals and texts; current legal news; companies (solicitors' and barristers' sites); legal publishers and online databases; learning and teaching resources (including educational materials, course outlines and bibliographies). Websites explaining the work of Academic departments, research Centres or Projects, and in some cases publishing the products of their research are also evaluated and included in SOSIG. Site profiles on SOSIG are designed to uncover and increase access to such material.

Using the SOSIG Law Gateway

SOSIG enables users to search as well as browse for Internet sites included in the catalogue

- Search by keyword
- Search with advanced form facilities
- Browse by jurisdiction, subject and resource type
- Search and browse via a legal thesaurus
- Set up a personal account to customise use of the gateway and receive email alerts.

Search options

The search box is a natural starting point for many users. A search box is featured at the top of each browsing screen. Users can choose from a set of simple or advanced search options. The search can be scoped to restrict a query to the law section or extend it to the full gateway to retrieve records catalogued in other subject sections (such as Politics or Eurostudies) as well. Searches within subsections are dynamic, automatically limiting or extending their scope according to the section in which they are initiated. The default search is free text. Phrase searching and standard Boolean logic connectors (AND, OR and NOT) are supported. A Search Results screen indicates the number of hits, presenting relevant records and options to link to each appropriate site, batched in sets of 10 records, ranked by the number of occurrences of the search term in each record with the term highlighted in bold.

Advanced searching (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/advanced.html) facilitates more precise and powerful searches of the database. Users are offered a form in which they can specify a particular field to search or limit a search to a particular type of resource, such as Documents:Legislation – sites which SOSIG identifies as providing full text legislation on the Web.
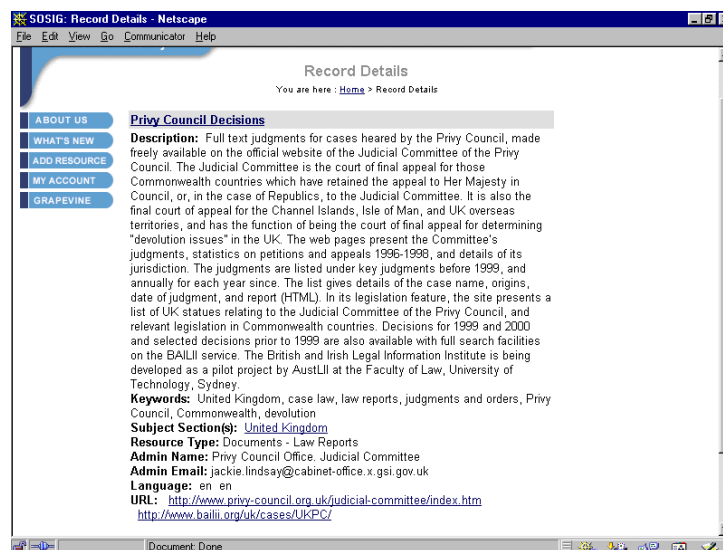
An outline taxonomy of legal termsdevised by specialist Christine Miskin[4] and kindly lent to the project serves as the authority file for the keywords assigned to each record in the Law Gateway. If a user's search fails to retrieve any results, the system prompts with an option to check the legal thesaurus. The outline taxonomysupplied by Granite and Comfrey (http://www.infoengineers.com/) is being integrated with SOSIG at present so users will be able to search or browse the thesaurus to find broader or narrower terms and then link directly to records using those terms.

Onscreen help gives background and hints to searching with an explanation of how to combine search words with Boolean operators, adjust ranking and truncation settings.

Database records

Structured templates help us create descriptive records in the database for each of the quality law and legal interest sources traced on the web. Record details include mandatory fields indicating the site title, keywords, url and a description. The default presentation is a brief display generated from these core fields which may be switched to a full display to reveal information about contacts, classification codes, subject sections, resource type and language(s).

SOSIG records list and link to multiple language versions of a site and the description tells you about different languages used on the site and its component documents. Variant urls are also included to handle framed and unframed site versions or mirror sites. Where an important primary resource is available from more than one location (such as Privy Council decisions) SOSIG presents a comparative record, describing alternative sources in one record and quoting links to each of the variant services.

Evaluative site profiles

Evaluative site profiles are an important feature of each RDN service. SOSIG Law Gateway descriptions provide an informed and objective assessment of the resource, with a view to revealing the full qualities of the site. The profile confirms the authority of the site, gives details of who is taking responsibility for authorship, administration and publication, gives an indication of the contents of the site, any date limits on the information included, and says whether the site covers a specific subject or range of topics or refers to an individual jurisdiction or country or is international in scope. The profile will tell you about the dates of coverage and note that the text of acts contained on the site are as originally passed (without amendments or repeals) or are consolidated texts current to a particular date or that some amending material is also available onsite.

The description uncovers hidden materials, sources of legal texts, online guides and official reports with a note of any special file types, download options and plug-in software requirements. Every word in the description is included in the simple search, helping users to trace less obvious materials from more remote locations.

An additional evaluation feature allows key sites of special interest to be assigned "Editor's Choice" status, highlighting their qualities for users and giving them priority at the top of the browsing list

Methodology and quality control

Policies have been devised and adopted across the RDN to help with selection and management issues. Constituent gateways follow well-defined collection development policies. Scope guidelines, selection criteria and a set of cataloguing rules based on Dublin Core (http://mirrored.ukoln.ac.uk/dc/) metadata standards are applied to maintain consistency and quality across the range of disciplines and services. The background documents for SOSIG are available for consultation on the site. (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/about_us/sitemap.html). The general strategic, information management and technical issues drawing on the experience of European gateways and portals have been documented by the DESIRE project (http://www.desire.org/handbook).

Strategies for law resource discovery

We follow agreed strategies to identify new resources to feature in the Law Gateway. We join and monitor email discussion and distribution lists in the field of legal information, higher education, web and internet developments; sign up for notification services; actively search the Internet with the more efficient search engines like Google; and browse key sites, sites that regularly list new resources; we also review and follow up leads in non-Internet sources such as professional journals and newsletters; and increasingly receive user suggestions and recommendations.

We look for scholarly rather than popular sites. We include resources with substantive content relevant to learning, teaching and research, sites particularly likely to satisfy users' information needs. Wecheck trustworthiness, currency and user-friendliness. We include resources that are particularly likely to satisfy users' information needs. We exclude sites that demonstrate political bias, excessive personal opinion or where content is limited to promotional material.

Classification

As in traditional libraries, the virtual libraries forming the RDN's Internet Resource Catalogues have employed formal classification schemes to give a systematic arrangement and ready access to materials. Within an interdisciplinary project there is a balance to achieve between practical consistency and specialist subject requirement. SOSIG uses over 1000 subject headings and has followed a flexible approach accommodating both UDC, Universal Decimal Classification and DDC, Dewey Decimal Classification schemes to match the needs of specific subject sections. UDC helps structure the browsing arrangement in the Law Gateway.

Browse options

Hypertext links lead users through the browse screens, providing them with an overview of the size and scope of the Law Gateway's Internet Catalogue. Users can choose to display all resource titles within the subject and subsections and view resources in alphabetical order within sections sorted by resource type category such as Documents: Legislation (descriptive records and links to sites providing acts and regulations), or Documents: Law Reports, or Governmental Bodies amongst others. Alternatively users can sort the titles into a single A-Z listing regardless of resource type.

The main browse options are:

- Browsing General Law
- Browsing United Kingdom
- Browsing European Union
- Browsing individual jurisdictions
- Browsing International Law
- Browsing by subject area

The "United Kingdom law" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/uklaw.html) section presents UK-wide resources with links to subsections offering sites specifically related to England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and other parts of the British Isles:the Channel Islands and Isle of Man.

A "European Union law" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/eurlaw.html) section is developing links to quality sites covering European Communities law, providing ready access to treaty texts, regulations, directives, case law and comment as well as access to key bibliographic databases such as European Documentation Centre sites and the European Commission Libraries.

If you need to research law for a particular country SOSIG provides a useful starting point. As governments around the world recognise the importance of the Internet, the web is becoming an important source of materials for a growing number of both established and developing countries. SOSIG collects relevant links for a particular country together. A section for "Other Jurisdictions" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/juris.html) contains link collections for a growing number of individual countries, jurisdictions and regions world wide, concentrating on officially published legislative and court materials. The section lists over 190 countries and regions world wide with some coverage for all the Australian states, Canadian provinces and US states. You can find out more about a country by using browse sections and subsections to gain an overview of just what is available in a particular jurisdiction. A hierarchy shown below the title at the top of the screen helps you navigate back and forth from parent section to subsection and display the relevant resource titles carried in each section.

An "International law" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/intlaw.html) section identifies resources relating to or produced by international, inter-governmental and non-governmental organisations exploring the body of law enabling international relations, trade and communications.

In the "Law by Subject Area" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/subject-listing/World-cat/speclaw.html) section, SOSIG supports topical legal research with a set of browsing sections covering a comprehensive range of legal subject areas including: commercial law, criminal law, environmental law, e-commerce, family law, and human rights.

Material types - RDN resource categories

To aid browsing, resources are grouped and categorised by type. Resource Types include: Bibliographies, Companies, Governmental Bodies, Government publications, News, Organisations and Societies. Essentially the same categories are used across the RDN Gateways to provide interoperability between subject centres.

In the browse screens, users can choose to display resources grouped by category, jump to a particular category or switch to an alphabetical listing by site title.

The category menus are context sensitive, with the choices offered varying appropriately from jurisdiction to jurisdiction or subject to subject. If users are interested in a particular type of source, such as full text journals, they can select that Resource

Type from the left of the screen and jump to the relevant section and either read the site description by clicking on the title or link directly to the service via the arrow icon to the left of the title.
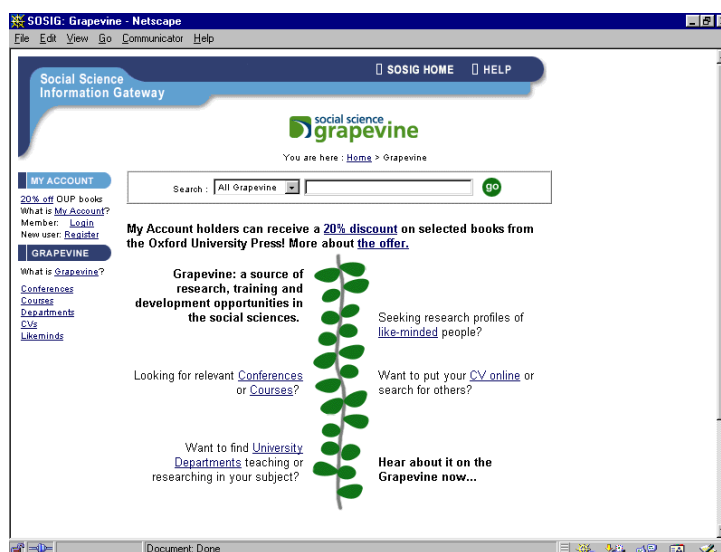
A number of special law categories have been added under the Documents heading to help locate the main forms of legal literature: Legislation, Law Reports, Digests and Treaties.

A "Law on SOSIG" guide card has been devised to raise awareness of the service and aid in its use. Print copies of the guide can be requested from the section editors and are posted on SOSIG as colour and b/w PDF files for downloading or printing (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/about_us/user_support.html).

Community-building services

As well as helping researchers gain maximum benefit from the legal Internet, we continue to gain a sense and understanding of their needs for new features and coverage through feedback and user participation in additional SOSIG services.

Related facilities offered through SOSIG are orientated around the target communities, aiming to support interactive and communal approaches to research. The "Add Resource" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/new_resource.html) feature offers an online form for submitting suggested additions to the site. If users are interested in contributing to the service on a regular basis they are invited to submit suggestions through a "Correspondents Centre" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/correspondents.html). A "What's New" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/roads/whats-new.html) feature enables users to check records that have been added recently either in the Law Gateway or SOSIG as a whole.

Grapevine
The Social Science Research Grapevine service is an optional free facility providing a focus for information about events and career development opportunities, listing conferences, courses and UK HE departments by subject. A simple search box allows users to access the whole of Grapevine data or individual subject sections.

My Account
"My Account" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/grapevine/User) is another free option enabling users to create a personal profile and publish information about themselves on the gateway. They can then find people sharing research interests, find conferences and find courses that match their profile. Users can also set email alerting preferences in self-selected areas of subject interest and keep track of new additions to the Resource

catalogue. The alerting service aims to promote proactive research, help people keep abreast of the subject. There are over 7,000 account holders with encouraging high take-up in the UK, USA and India.

Interactive tutorial

The Law Gateway also links directly to a feature called "Internet for Lawyers" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/subject-guides/law.html/), part of the Resource Discovery Network's Virtual Training Suite. "Internet for Lawyers" is an online self-paced, interactive legal research tutorial written by Sue Pettit, Law Librarian at the Wills Memorial Library, University of Bristol. The tutorial focuses on legal materials on the web offering a series of quizzes, exercises and link saving features designed to help develop essential Internet research skills. The tutorial is arranged in sections suggesting how to: "Tour" key Internet sites for lawyers; "Discover" tools and techniques to improve your Internet searching; "Review" critical thinking required when using the Internet; and "Reflect" on how to use the Internet for studying, teaching and research. There is a set of scenarios for Internet use, including a law student scenario and law teacher scenario.

A companion service called "Internet Detective" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/desire/internet-detective.html) is a free web tutorial helping users develop general Internet awareness and appraisal skills. The self-paced tutorial offers guidance on how to evaluate the quality of Internet-based information. It offers background information on how the World Wide Web works with notes on understanding urls and what they tell you about the identity of the source organisation and country.

SOSIG Law workbook

The SOSIG Law workbook (www.sosig.ac.uk/about_us/user_support.html) is an outline document in MS Word format , freely available on the service, that may be downloaded and customised for local training needs. The Law workbook is designed to introduce the service, aiding practical workshop sessions as well as supporting self-paced learning. It offers examples and exercises to help explore the wealth of legal materials available on the Internet, with suggestions on how to make full use of the SOSIG Law Gateway for law teaching and learning.

The Law workbook looks at the range of materials included in and referenced through SOSIG. It highlights SOSIG features and demonstrates SOSIG functionality. Each section looks at a type of material on the Web, quoting examples and setting questions with possible answers listed at the end of the book.

This group of services and training materials aims to create a virtual community supporting the real community - assist academics planning new research, enable the sharing and exchange of information and ideas, and so stimulate and facilitate practical and collaborative scholarship. By engaging with users through these components, SOSIG can help to build links between different members of the legal community in different professional spheres and different countries.

Collaboration

The Resource Discovery Network is very much a co-operative venture involving specialists at over 60 UK higher education establishments. In particular the SOSIG Law Gateway project has provided an important opportunity for collaboration. An Advisory Group of leading figures in UK legal information management is guiding its development. The project welcomes such feedback and suggestions from current and potential users. Ongoing advice and support from a growing user base within the UK and enthusiastic international responses have underlined the importance of the new service and provide renewed momentum and purpose to the work ahead.

The project has provided opportunities for international collaboration. Presentations at the International Association of Law Libraries (IALL) conference, the German Law

Librarians' Arbeitsgemeinschaft für juristisches Bibliotheks-und Dokumentationswesen (AjBD) meeting and American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) annual conference have been followed by collaboration in principle and practice with AustLII's World Law Service (http://www.austlii.edu.au/links/World/), Cornell's InSITE service (http://www.lawschool.cornell.edu/library/Finding_the_Law/insite.htm) and the American Society of International Law's EISIL initiative (Electronic Information System for International Law) (http://www.asil.org/eisil/intro.htm).

IALS involvement also ensures that the Law Gateway evolves as a natural partner to projects like FLAG (http://ials.sas.ac.uk/flag.htm) (Foreign Law Guide – describing and mapping print sources of law in UK libraries) and services like BAILII (http://www2.bailii.org/), the British and Irish Legal Information Institute publishing online primary legal materials for the UK and Ireland).

Some facts and figures about usage

Indications are that the services are succeeding in attracting and supporting a growing number of users. Analysis of usage and access data has revealed that there are 1 million page accesses per month to SOSIG. Over 25% of this usage is from the UK. 97% of UK Higher Education Institutions link to SOSIG and there are 10,000 links to the SOSIG main page.

The service is establishing itself as a teaching aid for lecturers and law course tutors. Feedback has shown that the Law Gateway is being used to complement teaching and study programs, to help source new courses and assist with inter-disciplinary research. In the first year My Account users were particularly interested in resources relating to: human and civil rights, criminal law and criminology, European Union law, social welfare law, UK law, International law, employment law, environmental law, commercial law, intellectual property, and women and law. Our planning for the next phase of the project will build on this success, focusing especially on reaching new users and discovering their needs.

Planned developments

With the core features in place we are entering an exciting stage for the project. We plan to extend the range of the Law Gateway, to increase its coverage and usefulness, to raise further awareness of the service and stimulate further interest and input from academic, government and professional lawyers and their students.

Expanding subject coverage
A new subject section called "Eurostudies" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/eurostudies/), dealing with European Studies and developed by the University of Birmingham, has been introduced on SOSIG to complement the Law and Politics sections with a focus on the European Union and its Member States.

The RDN will also add new subject coverage with developments in the areas of: Arts and Creative Industries; Geography and Environment; Sports, Tourism and Leisure. The Law Gateway will link to sites addressing the legal aspects of these areas.

A new SOSIG feature called "Expert's Choice" (http://www.sosig.ac.uk/experts-choice/) has been introduced showcasing web site recommendations from over 50 renowned specialists in a range of subject fields – including law.

Extending access
The ascent of web technologies and digital sources, supported by the development of local websites and WebPac library catalogues provide opportunities which we plan to pursue in the next phase of the project.

We are investigating ways to extend access to RDN services and the metadata information resources they themselves represent, through local annotation facilities and interface with OPACs.

OPAC integration

Standardisation on WebPac is presenting real choices and opportunities as libraries decide how best to organise access to web-based resources. The RDN is working actively in the area of OPAC integration to provide libraries with quality-assured and cost-effective user access to Internet resources via local WebPac terminals.

RDN-include
SOSIG and the RDN can be accessed remotely by any web browser. In addition you can integrate SOSIG and RDN facilities with you own materials on a local website. A facility called "RDN-include" (http://www.rdn.ac.uk/rdn-i) is an XML application developed to install the RDN ResourceFinder search box on your web site, library catalogue, or law firm intranet, so you can search the RDN databases remotely, and retrieve results from the RDN without leaving your own web environment. Rather than overwhelm your OPAC or server with records for offsite Internet resources, you can link your web catalogue to the RDN centre where the databases of descriptive resource links are checked and revised for you. With RDN-Include you can integrate the multi-disciplinary Resource Finder and optionally the RDN top level browse hierarchy into your own site – brining the Resource Discovery Network to your own setting. RDN-include is free to the academic community and available to commercial clients for a fee.

RDNi-Lite (http://www.rdn.ac.uk/rdn-i/lite/howto/) is a simplified mechanism to help people offer RDN search facilities and results on their own site if their knowledge of HTML or access to web server administration is limited. To try RDNi-Lite you just need a web browser enabled to support JavaScript and a facility to edit your own web page in HTML and locate it on a live web server directory.

Sample HTML pages for RDNi-Lite and a working example are featured on the SOSIG Law Gateway Project page (http://ials.sas.ac.uk/library/sosig/sosiglaw.htm) on the IALS web site

The RDN is also look at its potential role as an agent, delivering quality site records for local use in websites and catalogues.

Cross server searching projects
Additionally the RDN and SOSIG are working on links into datasets provided through the UK's Distributed National Electronic Resource (DNER) to offer a single interface for users. The Subject Portals Project (http://www.portal.ac.uk/spp/) has developed a prototype facility for searching across electronic resources available to the UK higher and further education communities. The trial service allows simultaneous searching of SOSIG and:

- COPAC (Combined OPACs of major UK universities)
  (http://www.copac.ac.uk/copac/)
- ZETOC (British Library's electronic table of contents service) [5]
  (http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/)

Such combined search facilities bring the Law Gateway closer to its users and enable them to make use of Internet resources in the context of local library-held

print and electronic sources, raising awareness of the full range of materials available on library shelves and via web workstations.

Conclusion

A project on the scale of the Resource Discovery Network is ambitious and we believe rewarding for users and contributors. A shared enthusiasm for the venture and belief in its value will help ensure that the RDN continues to develop services that are distinguished by their selectivity, quality control, organisation and presentation. In an era of increasing socio-legal action and economic and political globalisation, we believe that the SOSIG Law Gateway is well placed as a specialist subject centre within the wider RDN services to help researchers find the most relevant, accurate and up-to-date resources and ensure that the Internet continues to have a positive impact on the professional life and work of global legal communities.

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Footnotes

1

JISC, the Joint Information Systems Committee (http://www.jisc.ac.uk/)
Supported by:
ESRC, the Economic and Social research Council (http://www.esrc.ac.uk)
AHRB, the Arts and Humanities Research Board (http://www.ahrb.ac.uk/)

2

BIOME (http://www.biome.ac.uk)
EEVL (http://www.eevl.ac.uk/)
Humbul (http://www.humbul.ac.uk)
PSIgate (http://www.psigate.ac.uk)
SOSIG (http://www.sosig.ac.uk)

3

Diana Botluk , "Mining Deeper Into the Invisible Web", Published November 15, 2000 in LLRX.com (http://www.llrx.com/features/mining.htm)
See also:
Michael K. Bergman, "The Deep Web:Surfacing Hidden Value" (http://www.press.umich.edu/jep/07-01/bergman.html)
Gary Price and Chris Sherma, "The Invisible Web: Uncovering Information Sources Search Engines Can't See" , reviewed in LLRX.com (http://www.llrx.com/features/invisibleweb.htm)

4

Christine Miskin, Granite and Comfrey Information Engineers (mailto:christine.miskin@infoengineers.com)

5

COPAC (http://copac.ac.uk)

IBSS (http://www.lse.ac.uk/IBSS/)
REGARD (http://www.regard.ac.uk)
ZETOC (http://zetoc.mimas.ac.uk/)