Westlaw UK – a Review of the New Platform

Introduced in 1999, the Westlaw database rapidly became one of the most commonly used sources in online legal research. This online database covers legislation, case law, journal archives and legal news, and provides access to UK, EU and US information. For the purposes of this article, it is the UK and EU that I will be concentrating on. Westlaw UK is currently undergoing some dramatic changes and all users will soon be using a new platform to access UK and EU information. This review will take a look at the new platform and aim to highlight its pros and cons.

After a three month beta testing programme, Westlaw began migrating customers to the new platform towards the end of 2006. First impressions when signing into the new platform is that is so much more pleasing on the eye than its old counterpart. The interface has been de-cluttered and now presents a much fresher and more modern feel. With regards to the general search page (this is the first page the user comes to after logging in), there can be no confusion as to which sections one is searching in as there is just one search box on offer. Once the user has typed in their search terms, they have the option below to select or deselect Cases, Legislation, Journals, Current Awareness or EU. At this point, the user can search for 'Terms in Context'. Searching terms in context allows the user to see a short abstract of the documents in their results list showing examples of where the terms are in the document. It is generally easier to gauge the relevance of the document when the search terms are visible in a short abstract. This saves time clicking into the full text of a document which may be of no use.

Within the separate sections (i.e. Cases, Legislation, Journals, etc) listed horizontally at the top of the page, the option to browse is now a much more user-friendly feature and has a more logical layout than on the old
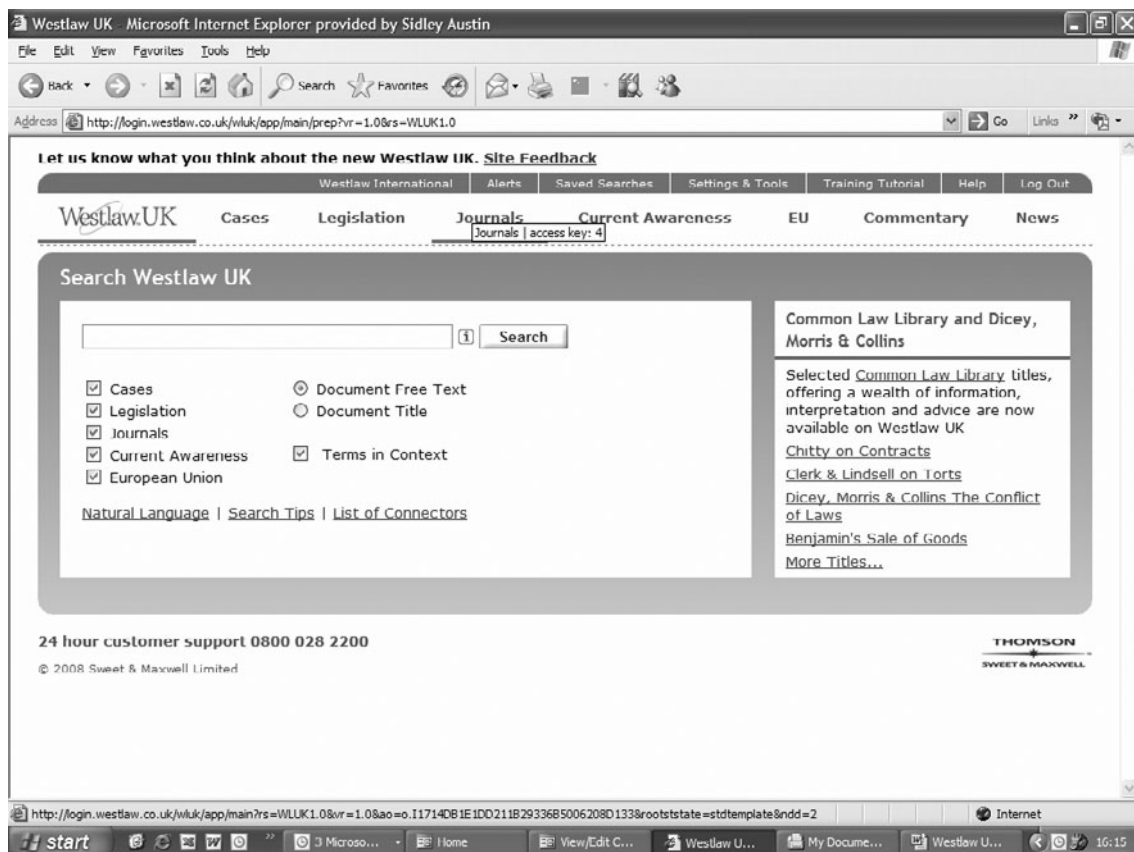

Figure 1: Search Westlaw UK

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platform. Sources can be browsed alphabetically and a specific title and volume can be selected using the hypertext links provided. The browse function is a quick and easy way of finding out if Westlaw UK takes a particular title. In addition, it is particularly useful for the Current Awareness section, where you can browse the main events of the day or highlights of the past week. Likewise, the browse function works in the same way for the News section.

Looking at each of the sections individually: the Cases section offers a clear and easy to follow search screen, much as you would expect from a service of this kind. The 'information' buttons on this screen, as with many of the screens, are not particularly informative. Once the user realises that clicking on the little 'i' does not bring up some snippets of wisdom to aid the search, then that's fine. Everyone has different ways of working, however, and it took me a few tries before realising all you get when you hover over the 'i' is a rather simplistic example. The introduction of 'Status icons' is helpful. Status icons show the status of a case, allowing users to immediately see whether a case has been overturned, reversed or superseded.

The Legislation section offers the norm, including the option to do a free-text search or search a specific title. If, like me, you often forget which service covers what, the Help and Coverage function in this section is particularly informative and provides a good level of detail for both novices and experienced researchers alike. The advanced

search gives the user the option of searching for historic law in addition to current law. As in the Cases section, status icons show users the status of a legislative provision, alerting them to any relevant changes.

The Journals section could possibly be improved. Again the 'i' button lets the user down. Unless the user leaves their mouse hovering over the 'i' button long enough, they will miss the fact that the Financial Journals Index was only updated until March 31st 2006. The option to search within a particular journal would be beneficial. The option to browse is useful, but unless you know the year and issue it is going to be a time-consuming process. However, if you do know exactly what you need, there is a table of contents provided for every volume (that Westlaw have access to), with hypertext links taking the user straight to a chosen article instead of having to look through the whole edition.

Westlaw Current Awareness covers a broad range of useful sources. It includes items from the broadsheets, as one would expect, in addition to other resources such as notices from Government departments and journal articles. With regards to the results list, unless you've already looked in the coverage, there is no indication which results are full text and which are abstract. The Browse function in this section is a little misleading, as once you drill down to the relevant subject area, you will still need to do a keyword or free-text search. Due to the volume of content in this section, a pure browse function would
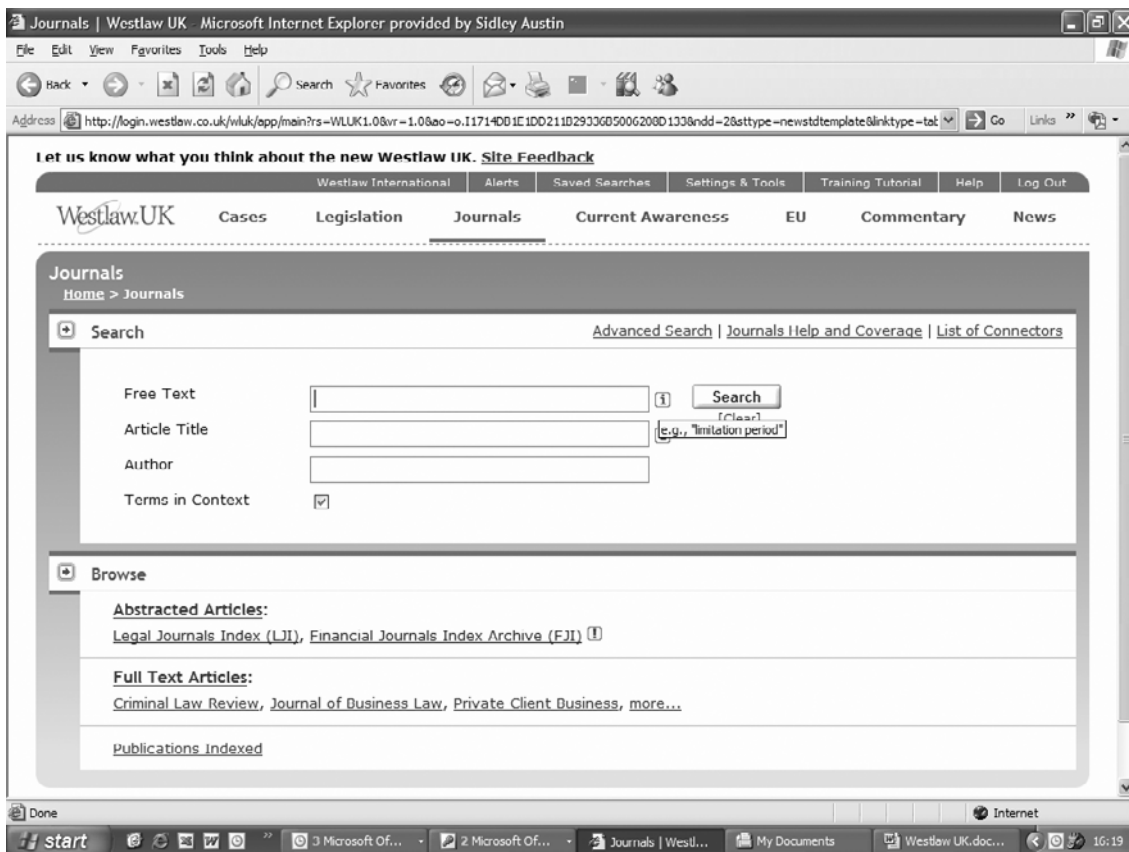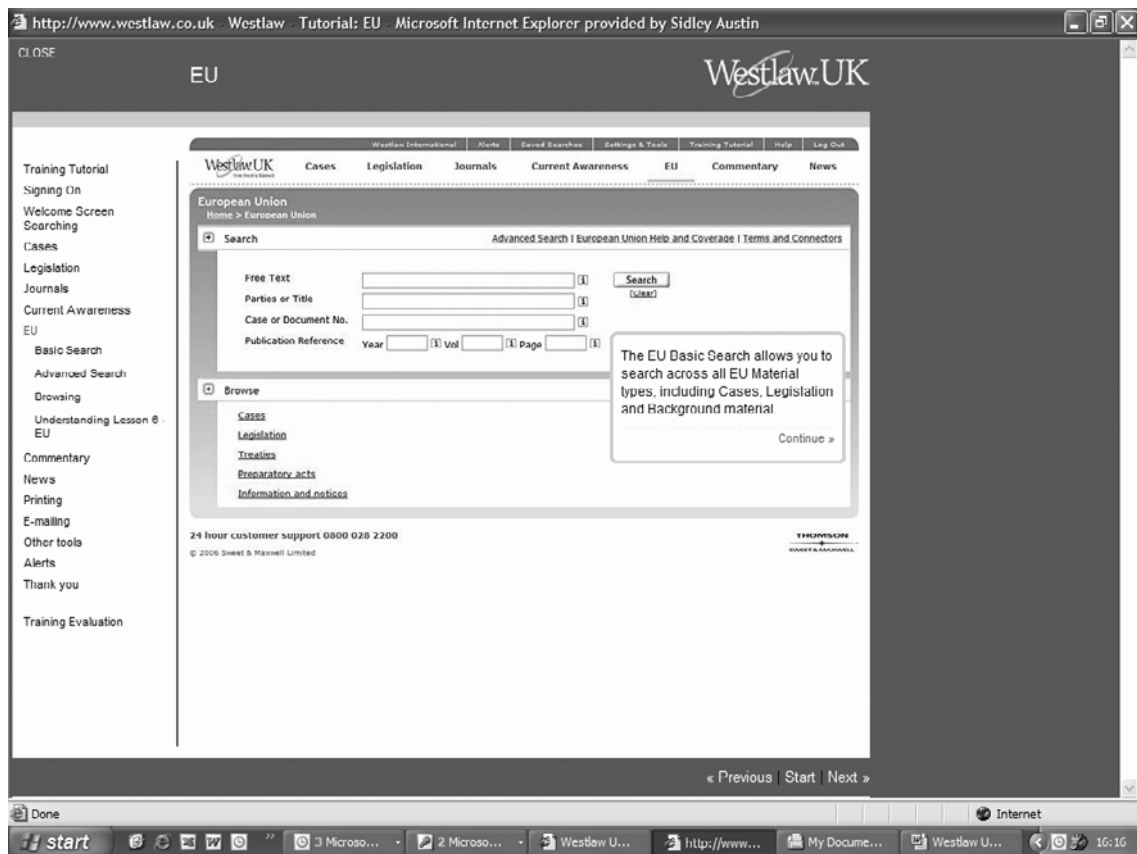

Figure 2: Search Journals

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Figure 3: Search European Union

be inappropriate. The current set-up does work, but it would be advisable to make it clearer.

The EU section provides information on Legislation, Cases, Treaties, Notices and Preparatory Acts. The Legislation search only works effectively if you know the actual name or number of what you are looking for. The search does not take into account the names by which the legislation is often known. For example searching "reinsurance directive" or "payment services directive" as phrases will return no hits. Searching these two phrases without quotation marks will return numerous results. It is very rare that a fee earner will know the full/correct title of the legislation they are asking for, so a list of commonly used acronyms for EU legislation would be a very useful addition. Other than that, the section seems fairly comprehensive.

The training tutorials offer clear and basic guidance. They help the user work through real examples showing where and how to search in order to get the most relevant results. This offers great practical tips to those new to the service and also some helpful hints for those old timers! Whilst most of the 'Understanding Lessons' you could work out for yourself, it did show you the most efficient way to find answers, which is always a help for those of us with time constraints.

The delivery of information on this platform is fairly straightforward. A user can print, email and save documents with ease. Legislation can be selected in PDF format, making all of these processes easier, but don't hit the back button whilst emailing until 'Your request is complete' has appeared on the screen. This may be obvious but, if it is a long document being sent, you are given the impression from the wording on screen that you can carry on with other searching on the platform. Documents can be saved as Word or PDF files and text can be cut and pasted.

The 'Tools' on the current platform remain on the new saved searches. A user can still set up alerts and save searches with relative ease. The ability to trail how much the service is being used is great for those information services who need to monitor usage for their statistics, or keep a track of the volume of searching being done under client matter numbers. Being able to view what users are searching is also advantageous for statistics, as well as being able to offer help to those who may not be finding any relevant results. In this section, there is also the ability to run the search and to view the results of that search. Viewing individual search strings can be extremely useful for training purposes, as a more experienced researcher may be able to identify any weaknesses in the search and thus advise a user on how to search more effectively to gain more relevant results.

Overall this product should prove to be a very useful resource for legal librarians. The platform provides a clear and practical layout. Searching is generally straightforward and there is a substantial amount of help provided to the new user in the form of coverage guides and online tutorials. Document delivery options are flexible and fairly speedy.

Book Reviews

In the past, other services have undertaken this arduous task of launching new systems and platforms and a few have been somewhat problematic, causing users unnecessary confusion due to lack of communication and understanding. However, Westlaw have taken steps to try to avoid these problems. Before the migration process begins, customers are being asked to provide information with regard to their migration needs. For example, customers are asked to specify, amongst other things, when they require advance access for key users and when they would like the full migration to take place and their training requirements. Due to Westlaw's consultative approach, the migration process has been staggered and will continue throughout 2008.

The correct processes for migration appear to be in place, but it remains to be seen whether Westlaw can complete this migration to a new UK platform with minimal disruption and inconvenience to law libraries and their users.

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Book Reviews

TAYLOR, Liz *Knowledge, Information and the Business Process: Revolutionary Thinking or Common Sense.* Chandos Knowledge Management Series; Oxford: Chandos Publishing (Oxford) Ltd, 2007. ISBN: 1843341042 (pbk.): £39.00, 142 pp.

Surprising though it may be to a number of legal librarians, working in a law firm is working for a business. A good law firm is a profitable one that follows sound business processes. This book provides a good starting point for many business ventures considering knowledge management (KM) as a tool - whether or not the business is in the legal field. Although it has application to academic, public sector and not-for-profit organisations, its main thrust is aimed at business and this is where its application is most salient.

The book is designed as a practical guide on the implementation of key KM concepts and principles, and in particular the integration of intellectual capital with business processes. It provides practical guidance on analysing business processes (including products and customers) from a human and systems capital perspective. In addition, it has practical frameworks that enable readers to implement the suggested strategies regarding the development of intellectual capital around business processes.

The book is a manageable 134 pages, with a succinct and useful index and bibliography. Its contents are structured in a clear and concise, way, beginning with the definitions of intellectual, human and systems capital, before moving on to their application to the business process, and concluding with the management of expectations. The figures and tables which "pepper" the book throughout provide useful illustrations to accompany the points that the author makes, and the logical progression of looking at the theoretical aspects of KM, and applying it to business practice, is clear and obvious.

Throughout the book, the author is keen to illustrate that intellectual capital and human capital are key elements, amongst other factors, in KM. Intellectual capital is defined in practical terms as being the facts, data, information and wisdom of a business; human capital is the personnel running and working within the business. No chapter stands on its own, since the subject relies on the inter-relation of human, systems and intellectual capital to form the basis of KM.

At the outset, the book appears to be like many other KM books on the market. However, it stands apart from other books when the author begins to provide many practical "action points" that generically apply to businesses starting out and implementing KM programmes. Key, practical and apposite directions (should I say suggestions?) are made and allow theory to be put into practice by the reader. For instance, the author suggests that a KM manager should find out "to what extent learning takes place throughout the process?" A deceptively simple question, but one that is essential to implementing KM in a law firm, for instance.

When theory can became a little involved and difficult to understand, the illustrations in the book are invaluable. For instance, I was floundering a little in understanding the application of knowledge and the information hierarchy. Instead of going into great detail in prose, the author provided a clear, simple and useful diagram that instantly made it clear. I was also impressed by the pedagogic devices the author uses. For instance, she seemed to anticipate many of the questions that came to mind during my reading by actually asking them within the text and then answering the questions herself.

Practical books appeal to me more than theoretical ones. Inevitably one cannot dispense with theory, but a book that integrates theory with practice is most welcome. I therefore have no hesitation in recommending this book to