

Product Review:

Reuters with Newsroom Service

Since LexisNexis became the exclusive provider of Factiva content to law firms worldwide in 2005, there has been a fairly restricted choice of news aggregator databases. In recent months, however, the Reuters with Newsroom service from Thomson has emerged as a serious contender to Nexis.

Law firms' requirements will obviously vary considerably when it comes to the provision of a news service. The following remarks reflect how the service matches our requirements at Berwin Leighton Paisner LLP. The content and functionality of the database is compared with Nexis.com, our main news service. I have also outlined a number of areas for development and it will be interesting to see which service takes up these challenges.

Search functionality

The Reuters service compares very well with Nexis in many respects. The search functionality offers the range of operators needed to cope with the variety of search requests and the volume of material in the database. These operators differ subtly from the Nexis operators, but at least accord with the Westlaw legal operators. Other options include the ability to run case-sensitive searches (vital for some company names, e.g. Boots, and institution names, e.g. AIM). You can also specify the number of times your search terms should appear in a document and choose the length of the articles that will be retrieved.

There are three search options to suit a range of experience in online searching – natural language, a structured search template and a terms and connectors option for experienced researchers. As with Nexis, the documents are indexed by industry, company, subject and location and these can be easily incorporated into searches. Unlike Nexis, there is not a weighted indexing option. This is probably not so much an issue for ad hoc press searches, but we certainly find the Nexis weighted indexing extremely useful for press alerts on industries and companies which receive large numbers of mentions in the press.

The results screen is well set out. I particularly like being able to view the article details in the left hand screen, while the full text is displayed in the main section. I hope this feature is retained if the Reuters Newsroom service is taken off the old Westlaw platform at any point. Reuters also handles duplicate stories very well, by not including them as separate hits, but providing

hypertext links to duplicate versions of the same story. This is useful if you want a sense of how widely a particular story has been covered and crucial if you are checking to see how often your firm is being quoted in the press.

Another very intelligent feature of the database is having two separate date fields – drawing a distinction between the publication date and the date on which the article was loaded on the system. This has been a bugbear with Nexis alerts for years. The option of setting up alerts so that you are not deluged with old stories when a newsfeed of back issues is loaded on the system is very attractive.

The search function is not, however, perfect and there are technical problems which need ironing out. The edit function is currently poor and has a habit of deleting elements of the original search when you return to it for editing. The language filter is also not entirely reliable, and foreign language stories are occasionally included in search results and alerts.

Cost

Whether the cost of this database appears as a strength or a weakness clearly depends on your budget, but this product does score highly on having a straightforward pricing model, based on the number of lawyers in the firm and the number of alerts you are likely to require. This is certainly a refreshing change from the bewildering array of factors such as the notional charging of alert usage and third party royalty payments which always complicate pricing discussions for Nexis

Content

In terms of number of sources, Nexis wins hands down with its 36,000 sources to the 11,525 journal and newspaper titles on Reuters. In many cases, however, the crucial issue for law firms is not the number of titles on the database, but whether the key business papers are included. In this respect Nexis again scores more highly by virtue of having the *Wall Street Journal*. Reuters also does not currently have access to *The Guardian* and its file of RNS announcements is not complete. As these sources are available elsewhere on the web, this might not be a deal-breaker, but it is a drawback if you are hoping to use Reuters for a comprehensive news alerting service. In terms of non-news sources Nexis also has the

upper hand, with its considerable collections of company directories and market reports.

While not having as extensive an archive of back issues for all sources, Reuters still has impressive coverage in this regard and in some cases is as comprehensive as Nexis. *The Times*, for instance, is covered from 1985, and the *New York Times* from 1980. Even where coverage is not as good, many of the sources go back to 2001, which should be sufficient for the vast majority of enquiries.

As with Nexis, regular users of Reuters are likely to want to set up their own sets of sources. It is relatively straightforward to do this, although the source directory could be easier to browse. In addition, the default home page contains a selection of pre-set source lists, and Reuters have responded to feedback in making these more relevant.

Help desk support

The support provided by Reuters has been excellent, with named contacts who are specialists in the product, rather than a general helpdesk. The challenge for Reuters will be to maintain this level of service as they sign up more customers.

Alerts options

There are two different alert options with Reuters – Westclips and Westlaw Watch. Many users of legal databases on Westlaw will be familiar with Westclips. They are straightforward to set up on Reuters, appearing as an option when you receive your results list. As with Nexis, there is plenty of flexibility for specifying the timing of the alerts and their formatting. Having trialled some alerts for six weeks, I found them as reliable as my Nexis alerts.

Reuters also offer a more sophisticated alerting software – Westlaw Watch. As with the Nexis Publisher software, this enables the user to distribute news alerts automatically to pre-set distribution lists and to republish news stories on the firm's intranet. It works well for alerts which can be set up to run automatically with a high likelihood of producing a high percentage of relevant hits. A search on a company name, especially a distinctive company name, would be a good example. Westlaw Watch is not, however, as good as Nexis in handling alerts which are quite broad in scope. If, for instance, you wished to set up a press alert monitoring trends in the Renewable Energy sector, you would probably construct a search with a range of terms, renewable energy, water power, hydroelectricity, biomass, biofuels, etc. Given that this is a fast-changing area you would run the risk of missing important stories if you were too restrictive in your searching. A broader search, however,

increases the number of irrelevant results and you would probably want to edit the results list, before it was sent out to the lawyers.

Westlaw Watch does give you this option, but you need to ensure these have been checked before the time on which the alerts are scheduled to be sent out. Similarly if a news feed is added to Reuters between the time you check the alert and the time it is scheduled to be sent out, all the new results will automatically be sent out to the distribution list. Unlike Nexis, you cannot specify that only those articles you have selected can be sent out. For some firms this may not be an issue, but if you are using Westlaw Watch to monitor industry trends, this could well be a problem.

Areas for development

Reuters with Newsroom has much to offer and compares well with Nexis. In addition to the comparisons with Nexis already mentioned there are a number of areas which offer both services scope for improvement.

Inclusion of graphs, images and tabular information

In many cases, images are very much an added extra and not essential to the online version, but this is not always the case. It is often a huge drawback if graphs or tables are missing from online business articles. A good example is the special reports from the FT, which we find very useful for giving lawyers an overview of a particular industry or topic. The new reports are now available as pdfs on FT.com and it would be very welcome if the news aggregators could also see a way to including such material.

Establishing which sources are really needed

One change I would really like to see the news aggregators make, is a move away from the “we have so many sources on the product” style of presentation, to one which appreciates that for most enquiries and updates, law firms are most interested in a relatively restricted number of sources. Too often in the past I have received a distinct impression that aggregators are focused on numbers of sources rather than the value of individual publications.

I appreciate, of course, that aggregators are not always able to secure licences for some key sources they require, but there is also the issue of how they prioritise the sources they do have. Both Nexis and Reuters manage to do this with the broadsheets and are clear about when the newsfeeds should be added. Both services score highly in meeting these deadlines.

Book Review

Beyond the broadsheets, however, there is very little sense that certain business sources are treated as a priority. It would be great if the news aggregators could prioritise those sources which have authoritative business or market commentary (such as the *Estates Gazette*), and especially those with market-sensitive information (such as the RNS announcements) and ensure these are added as soon as possible. Even publishing the time-frames for the supply of the newsfeeds agreed between the publishers and the aggregator would be a good start.

As aggregators, these services will not be able to meet all our demands for the timely delivery of information: law firms will all differ in what they define as key sources and not all newsfeeds will guarantee supplying their articles within a certain time-frame. Nonetheless, effort spent in identifying the services' key sources and trying to guarantee that market sensitive information is added to the system speedily and within an agreed time-frame would be very worthwhile.

Reuters or Nexis?

Law firms looking to renew their news database contracts in the coming months certainly have more of a realistic choice than was the case 12 months ago. Nexis can still claim better coverage in terms of a wider range of sources, a greater archive and some key business titles currently missing from Reuters. It also has the great advantage of having been the main news source for many law firms over a number of years, so there are still compelling reasons to keep this subscription. In the current market, however, competition can only be a good thing for hard-pressed library budgets and Reuters with Newsroom is a very impressive and welcome alternative.

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Book Review

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SUSSKIND Richard. *The end of lawyers? Rethinking the nature of legal services*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-954172-0

The main title of this book is an attention-grabber, and the subsidiary title is not entirely accurate. In the context of political, social and economic factors, including those that are driven by communications and information technology (ICT), a balanced study of changes in and between the roles of legislature, executive and judiciary in the UK in the early 21st century, would be welcome. There is a book yet to be written concerning the impact of IT on the common law system in the UK, its constitution, on the administration of justice, and its impact on both lawyers and the public at large. Unfortunately, this book is not it.

Law and the administration of justice differ in all three main jurisdictions of the UK, as does the presence – and the significant, long-standing absence – of trained, professional lawyers within those jurisdictions. Before considering the “end of lawyers”, one needs to identify within any jurisdiction both who they are and what they do.

The arena of “legal services” from which Richard Susskind draws most of his examples of the use of ICT is that of the few score or so UK law firms servicing the top few thousand businesses with headquarters or major

branches in the City of London, with some references to their US equivalents. These firms' client base predominantly comprises financial services institutions and suppliers to these. For the past couple of decades these businesses have poured shed-loads of money into ICT in order to improve both their prime products (and their candyfloss spin-offs), their internal business systems, and any category of supplier to them has had to do the same or go under. So, the lawyers in question, who may or may not cease to function, are essentially those in City firms servicing fearsomely competitive City businesses.

In this book the author continues his discussion in earlier publications of what he sees as “a market pull towards *commoditisation* and ... pervasive development and uptake of *information technology*” (page 1). The book contains a useful summary of developments since he published *The Future of Law*. A high proportion of the 300+ footnote references are to systems on both sides of the Atlantic that have been successfully implemented. Others refer to committees and reports, in many of which he has been a participant, recommending further similar implementations. He identifies trends that he considers demonstrate an evolution in ICT systems used in legal contexts, and there are a couple of flowcharts with arrows pointing to the future. One senses an assumption