

Internet Newsletter for Lawyers - Irish Extra

Edited by Delia Venables

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Legal Research Products for the Irish Market: A comparison of First Law, Justis.com, Lexis Nexis Professional, and Westlaw IE *by Nuala Byrne, Librarian in the Law Library, Dublin*

A series of articles on the above electronic legal services was written for the *Internet Newsletter for Lawyers* during 2003 and early 2004 - see the end of this article for a full set of references. Here I would like to compare the products in terms of their content, searching and reliability and also highlight any developments that have taken place during 2004.

It is difficult to compare them directly as although similar they fulfil different purposes. Also this is a subjective view and as such my experience may differ from others.

Content

In order to compare the content of each product a brief comparison table is shown below. Lexis Nexis and Justis are geared to providing a wide range of information sources and are not limited to or focussed exclusively on Irish legal information. Westlaw although itself a major player in the provision of information worldwide has differentiated Westlaw IE to cater exclusively to Irish legal content. Its sister product Westlaw UK does the same with British legal content although Westlaw UK is a much more developed and well-rounded service than its Irish counterpart. First Law is a niche product that caters exclusively for the Irish legal market and is a much smaller player in the world of information provision.

Content	First Law	Westlaw IE	Lexis Nexis Professional	Justis.com
Caselaw Irish Other	X X	X	X X	X X
Legislation Irish Other	X	X	X X	X
Journal Articles		X	X	
Current Awareness	X	X		

Without repeating what has already been set out in the previous articles, it is worthwhile examining this a little further.

First Law, www.firstlaw.ie, provides access to the statutes and statutory instruments from 1999 onwards, the unreported judgments of the superior courts including: Supreme Court, High Court, Special Criminal Court, Court of Criminal Appeal, as well as from the Court Martial Appeal Courts, Selected Circuit Court, Competition Authority Decisions, Employment Appeal Tribunal and European Court of Justice. Much of this information, although not all, is freely available from the Legal Information Institute for Britain and Ireland BAILII www.bailii.org and its complementary website IRLII www.irlii.org. The IRLII website provides an index of High Court, Supreme Court and Court of Criminal Appeal judgments from 1st January 1997 to date. It also gives access to the IRLII Periodical Index, which compiles fifteen secondary legal sources from 1997 to date including, *The Bar Review*, *Dublin University Law Journal*, *Irish Criminal Law Journal*, *Irish Journal of Family Law* and the *Irish Law Times* among others.

There is some overlap in content between First Law and Westlaw IE. Westlaw IE gives access to the unreported judgements although they do not appear to be comprehensive. A limited number appear for 2000 and 2001 and although 2002 and 2003 may be complete, 2004 is certainly not up to date. First Law in comparison to Westlaw IE is much more reliable for unreported judgments than Westlaw IE.

Westlaw IE, www.westlaw.ie, gives access to some of Thomson Round Hall's key Irish legal resources but disappointingly much of the promised content has not been included on the database so far. No more new journals have been added nor have any additional looseleaf services. The *Irish Current Law Statutes Annotated (ICLSA)* is there but the Preliminary Tables have not been included. Possibly the most valuable resource on Westlaw IE is the *Irish Law Reports Monthly*, the *Irish Law Times* and the *Employment Law Reports* as these are not available electronically elsewhere. Westlaw IE has

the potential to become a very valued research resource for Irish practitioners. It does have some good content but does not appear to have improved since it was first launched. UK legal information is very relevant to Irish practitioners and perhaps having access to Westlaw UK as part of a Westlaw IE subscription would make the service more attractive.

Lexis Nexis has a vast array of information sources available. This is only limited by the amount one wishes to pay. It is often considered to be the largest business database in the world. News, company, legal, market research and directory sources can be accessed from it. In terms of caselaw it provides access to all common law jurisdictions including Ireland and Northern Ireland, England, the Commonwealth and the United States. It contains Irish case law including cases reported in The Irish Reports from 1950. Unreported judgments are included from 1985 onwards. Although not a complete collection, many of the judgments have been chosen because of their relevance or importance to the development of Irish case law. In order to get a comprehensive overview of the products and services offered by Lexis Nexis go to their websites at www.lexis-nexis.com or www.lexisnexis.co.uk.

Justis.com, www.justis.com, which is supplied by Context, includes a range of databases under the broad headings of case law, European law and statute law. It does not contain US material although it has a reciprocal arrangement with Quicklaw Inc, Canada's largest online legal publisher. Two press release databases and a construction industry database are also included. More databases have been added to Justis.com during the past year and the content is listed below.

Case Law: Irish Reports and Digests, UK Law Reports, UK Weekly Law Reports, UK Law Reports Digest, Family Law Reports, Industrial Cases Reports, Times Law Reports, Daily Cases, Mental Health Law Reports, Prison Law Reports, Electronic Session Cases, Police Law Reports

European Law: CELEX, ECJ Proceedings, Official Journal C, OJ Daily

Statute Law: UK Statutes, Statutory Instruments and Civil Procedure Rules

Human Rights: Case Law, Legislation and Companion Databases (Vol 1: The Convention; Vol 2: The Cases)

Press Releases: HERMES and RAPID

The **Irish Reports** contains the full text data of published cases from 1919. The Digests provides a reference to each case reported in:

- *The Irish Reports* (1917-1999)
- *Northern Irish Reports* (1925 – 1999)
- *Irish Law Reports Monthly* (1976-2000)
- *Irish Law Times Reports* (Volumes 53 – 114)
- *Irish Jurist Reports* (1932 – 1965)
- *Irish Law Journal* (1931 – 1934)

Again there would be overlap between what is available on Justis.com and Lexis Nexis. Lexis Nexis provides access to US material whereas Justis.com is more UK and European focussed, notwithstanding the addition of Quicklaw Inc.

In terms of accessing content, Context, who supply Justis.com, have made some exciting new developments through JustCite (see later). Suffice it to say that JustCite will enable the content of some, if not all, of the above databases including BAILII to be searched through the Justis website. It may become the one-stop shop for legal research. Rumour also has it that Irish Legislation may become another addition to Justis.com.

Searching

Whether or not a search capability is user friendly, intuitive, straight forward or just easy is really subjective. There can be broad opinions as to the relative levels of difficulty associated with various services but often when one becomes familiar with searching in a particular way then that becomes the "easy" way. It is known that some librarians and information specialists were upset to see online searching as carried out in the early days of services such as Dialog or even Lexis Nexis change to what we have now. With the advance of technology and the "Google effect", expectations are that searching should be easy and that one search should cover all possibilities. This of course is not the case although little by little commercial suppliers are trying to deal with this concept.

For descriptions of how to carry out a search check out the original articles. Here I will comment on the services overall.

First Law has the appearance of being straightforward. There is however very little onscreen directional information or guidance. There is minimal information about its content and coverage and if something cannot be found or if the service does not work as expected there are no help screens or tips. Generally the service has been underdeveloped and suffers as a result. First Law do provide initial training and it is possible to email or telephone them with any queries.

Westlaw IE has a modern look and feel to it. It is intuitive to use and does not require a large amount of training. The screen layout is clear, providing multiple access points to the different options. The display at the top of the screen remains the same regardless of where one is in the database. Online help is provided although this is fairly basic. It is not context specific. If one gets into difficulty a help desk is available from Monday – Friday from 8.00 a.m. – 6.00 p.m.

Due to its size and variety of content, Lexis Nexis is not as user-friendly or intuitive to use. Training is required not only to understand the search process but also to understand the structure and content of the database. Lexis Nexis provide this training free of charge and it is well worth doing. The advantage is that once the search process is mastered an enormous body of material is available on your desktop.

Justis.com is a well-designed product with lots of help available on screen. The Help option is very detailed and it is context specific. Justis allows multiple access points for finding information and incorporates many useful features for the user. The J-Link feature is a particularly useful one. Searching within one of the Justis databases such as The Law Reports, a reference to information contained in another Justis database may appear. By using the J-Link option it is possible to link directly to the document without opening up the other database. The Floating J-Link feature allows one to do the same even if the reference or citation is listed in a Windows application such as Word. Context also operate a help desk which is available from 9.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Monday to Friday.

Reliability

In terms of reliability all the services discussed above are commercial services and reliability of content is key to their survival. Should any errors or omissions be identified these should be notified to the suppliers immediately for correction.

The First Law service is very reliable in terms of its content. It is updated frequently and its information is current. Its reliability and currency are its strength.

Westlaw IE's strength is the accessibility to the Round Hall published material, particularly the *Irish Law Reports Monthly*, *The Irish Law Times* and the *Employment Law Reports*. *The Irish Current Law Statutes Annotated (ICLSA)* does not contain the Preliminary Tables and Binder, which is possibly the most useful section of the *ICLSA*. This is not obvious until one begins to search this source. The unreported judgments section is not current. Coverage is patchy and probably not a source to be consulted first for unreported judgments.

Possibly due to its size, it is not easy to access an index of the content held on Lexis Nexis. For example, unreported judgments appear on Lexis Nexis from 1985 but it is not clear which judgments are there and which are not. The only way to find out is to carry out a search. In most instances, content is current and updated frequently but even Homer nods. It would appear that the most recently published Irish Reports are not on the database. As with every information source whether print or electronic it is imperative to check content against another known source.

The Justis.com database is also updated frequently and its content is current. The Help section provides information on using Justis.com and gives user guides to all its databases. Within the guides there are Coverage notes that give detailed information of the content of the databases. It is therefore possible to know in advance what should appear on the database.

New Developments

The major new development has been with Context's development of JustCite www.justcite.com. JustCite can also be accessed through the Justis.com website. Originally it was developed as a case citator but has developed into a service that provides a one-search interface to multiple information sources. It provides a fully cross-referenced index to UK, Irish and European legal information but in addition it indexes and links to material not just from Justis but also to the content of other publishers such as BAILII, Lexis Nexis, Westlaw, and others. To get more detailed information on what is indexed click on the links from the JustCite homepage www.justcite.com. To access the full text of this material, where applicable, one must have a subscription to the service but it is also a good way of checking print sources.

As you can see the nature of legal research is changing. A fuller, more comprehensive access to material is being provided through suppliers developing their products to avail fully of the possibilities provided by technological developments. In the long run it can only lead to decisions made being based on fuller, more comprehensive information.

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References to the Complete Series of Irish Reviews

The complete series of articles about major online legal services in Ireland by Nuala Byrne can be found at the following web locations in either html or pdf versions:

*** Comparison of Legal Research Products for the Irish Market (this article)**

www.venables.co.uk/n0407irishreview.htm or
www.venables.co.uk/n0407irishextra.pdf

*** Westlaw IE May/June 2003**

www.venables.co.uk/n0305westlawie.htm or
www.venables.co.uk/n0305westlawie.pdf

*** FirstLaw July/August 2003**

www.venables.co.uk/n0307firstlaw.htm or
www.venables.co.uk/n0307irishextra.pdf

*** Review of Electronic Irish Reports and Digests on Justis.com November/December 2003**

www.venables.co.uk/n0311justisirish.htm or
www.venables.co.uk/n0311irishextra.pdf

*** LexisNexis Professional January/February 2004**

www.venables.co.uk/n0401lexisnexisirish.htm or
www.venables.co.uk/n0401irishextra.pdf

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See www.venables.co.uk/n0407sim.htm for the main July/August newsletter online.
