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Useful and free online resources for the sole practitioner

As you close yet another long day at your desk, take a pause before the trek home. Gaze back at your computer screen for a few moments more and check out these nifty websites for the sole practitioner. They can make for a better tomorrow.

Keep current with myShingle.com

MyShingle.com is the brainchild of Carolyn Elefant, an experienced and resourceful sole practitioner from Washington, D.C.

The website offers numerous articles and posts discussing current trends affecting solos and small firms with tons of practical advice for newbies and seasoned counsels alike.

Visit the "topics" page and peruse articles touching on more than a hundred subjects — everything from leaving your present job to choosing the name of your new practice, marketing ideas, networking and cybersecurity.

Although most of the content is available through casual surfing, free online registration gives access to additional features, including e-books and an in-depth recorded class on starting your own firm. A useful garnish for your practice.

Listen up at solopracticeuniversity.com

Solopracticeuniversity.com bills itself as "[a] community dedicated to helping you build your very own solo law practice."

Although the site offers paid, single Continuing Legal Education

courses and packages, a substantial number of no-cost lectures and blogs, on important topics, are available as well.

Proceed to the "free" section and listen online or download for later use. Learn how to make social media work for you, create an effective Web presence or get some ideas on how to set up your fee structure.

It is valuable content at no cost. Bookmark this page and improve your firm with advice from bright and enterprising solos across the country.

Don't forget the American Bar Association at americanbar.org

The American Bar Association continues its tradition of solid support for sole practitioners.

Among other offerings, the ABA maintains a SoloSez page which houses popular "threads" — questions and answers exchanged by solos nationwide — on a variety of interesting and provocative subjects.

Those are just a few of the free online offerings that can boost your solo practice.

Although direct participation in the discussions requires a paid membership (a good investment regardless), there are hundreds of freely available Q&A features among practitioners nationwide.

Visit SoloSez and benefit from candid conversations among your peers on some important subjects.

SOLE SPEAK



GLENN E. HEILIZER

Glenn E. Heilizer of Heilizer Law Offices is a veteran litigator and sole practitioner based in Chicago. He handles commercial disputes in the federal, state and appellate courts in Illinois and Wisconsin. He welcomes all comments and may be reached at glenn@heilizer.com.

Take advantage of free online legal research

Although free online legal research comes with the standard warning — not recommended as a complete substitute for more robust paid subscriptions — there are several excellent websites to supplement your research efforts.

Google Scholar at scholar.google.com is a good one.

The Google Scholar site maintains an impressive array of reported decisions from the state and federal courts.

Just select the "case law" option, choose your jurisdiction(s) and search

away. Click the arrow to the right of the search box for advanced retrieval functions. Certain boolean searching features are supported as well.

Skip over to the "articles" option, and a careful search technique will yield helpful law reviews, journals and periodicals.

American Bar Association (americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/legal_technology_resources/resources/free_journal_search.html) is yet another.

The ABA offers a free database that includes more than 400 online law reviews and law journals with academic articles and certain congressional records to boot. The searchable works are listed and go well beyond basic law school collections, including subject-based publications and foreign journals. A wealth of material is at your fingertips.

Here are some other helpful websites:

Findlaw (lp.findlaw.com). Locate the "legal professional" site maintained by Findlaw (not the public site for non-lawyers) and enjoy free case searches for the U.S. Supreme Court, federal appellate and Illinois state courts going back 10 years. The U.S. Code and Illinois Compiled Statutes can be accessed and searched as well.

Illinois courts (state.il.us/court/SupremeCourt/Rules). Lastly, keep current on all Supreme Court Rules with this handy database that organizes the rules into 10 expandable articles. To track the numerous rule changes in recent years, navigate to the site's "amendments-by-year" page, which covers the past five years of revisions.

Those are just a few of the free online offerings that can boost your solo practice.

If there are other no-cost online sites that you frequent, please forward to my attention at glenn@heilizer.com for a possible future column.