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White Paper

Quickscribe: A Comparison and Evaluation Report

Prepared for Stem Legal Web Enterprises Inc.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report has been commissioned by Stem Legal Web Enterprises Inc. on behalf of Quickscribe to provide an objective comparison between Quickscribe and QP LegalEze. The report is meant to highlight the differences between the two services, and identify areas that could be improved as well as directions for future development.

Quickscribe is a small British Columbia-based business founded in 1984 to meet the needs of those seeking economical and reliable access to B.C. legislation as an alternative to legislation made available by government sources. President and CEO Mike Pasta has steered the company towards developing an online B.C. legislation service that rivals others in the marketplace.

QP LegalEze is the government offering, produced by the British Columbia Queen's Printer in partnership with the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legislative Assembly. The website indicates access by the public is made available through B.C. public libraries, government offices, and courthouse libraries. Unlike most other provinces, the British Columbia Queen's Printer provides this service on a user pay basis because it is run as a cost-recoverable operation.

Quickscribe advantages

Advantages of Quickscribe include pricing as well as timeliness of information, delivered both inside the subscription service and via its free RSS feeds. Quickscribe's

service is easier to navigate, has superior current awareness services, and the customer service at Quickscribe is very accessible for those who need extra assistance. Quickscribe offers a free trial for anyone wishing to make a comparison.

Suggestions for improvement

The following are suggested areas for improvement:

- **functionality**: make the fonts more uniform; add a "bread crumb trail" for search results for easier navigation; remove the scroll bar for updated legislation on the front page;

- **currency information**: add a date of currency to legislation, especially for printing of current legislation and documents in the Archives; add notes on legislation that have changed names;

- **customer service**: add a help telephone number to the top toolbar; consider increasing customer service hours slightly to distinguish Quickscribe from the competition;

- **making researchers aware**: make those who publish legal research guides aware of this service so they can include it as an alternative;

- **a human face**: Mike Pasta should leverage his small company profile creating a blog to communicate with clients and potential clients;

- **visible pricing**: publish the pricing schedule; superior pricing is an advantage of Quickscribe, but because it does not publish a price schedule as the competitor does, this benefit is largely hidden from the potential customer.

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Future of digital legislation

Quickscribe currently plays the important role of bringing competition to the British Columbia legislation publishing landscape. As such, they need to stay a step ahead of the government alternative which is higher in profile and may inadvertently be seen as more authoritative by some. Quickscribe is already forward-thinking in its use of RSS and providing a portal-type experience in that the service remembers work done by the individual on previous visits. They might leverage what they have in these respects:

- **mobility**: many professionals are relying on mobile devices to access data; Quickscribe should work towards providing a mobile interface alternative;

- **widgets**: Quickscribe has built a fantastic set of RSS feeds, but many do not understand what these are or how to take advantage of them; make coding available so that clients can easily drop the RSS feeds onto their intranets and portals. This would increase clients' access to the service;

- **joint offering of niche products**: work with other small publishers to provide niche products on industry areas such as forestry, transportation and environment, and academic topics such as would be covered in law and other social science studies would help distinguish Quickscribe from its government competitor;

- **accessibility**: evaluate the service according to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This is good both for certain clients who may have visual impairment and for generally all clients to ensure they can easily read the site. Quickscribe may already be compliant; it is helpful to have some indication of this on the website;

- **environmental concerns**: add a statement to the website outlining how the company addresses these concerns internally in producing the service, and give clients an idea of how their use of Quickscribe fits in with their "carbon footprint."

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Services in comparison: Quickscribe and QP LegalEze

Quickscribe and QP LegalEze are both online tools for accessing and researching British Columbia statutes and regulations. Both are subscription fee-based services.

Quickscribe

Quickscribe is a small British Columbia-based business founded in 1984 to meet the needs of those seeking economical and reliable access to B.C. legislation as an alternative to legislation made available by government sources. President and CEO Mike Pasta has steered the company towards developing an online B.C. legislation service that rivals others in the marketplace.

QP LegalEze

QP LegalEze is the government offering, produced by the British Columbia Queen's Printer in partnership with the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legislative Assembly. The website indicates access by the public is made available through B.C. public libraries, government offices, and courthouse libraries. Unlike most other

provinces, the British Columbia Queen's Printer provides this service on a user pay basis because it is run as a cost-recoverable operation.

Both services

Statutes and regulations from both services are made available for the convenience of subscribers; documents provided by both services are not considered official for the purposes of use in court. Both are based on official government legislation sources.

Note about free B.C. legislation

British Columbia also makes legislation freely available from the Queen's Printer website; however, it is not as current as the other services (at the writing of this report it is over a year out of date) and does not have the search capabilities.

Value added elements of digital legislation

Fast updating

Legislation in digital format can be more easily updated than paper, so therefore tends to be much more timely. It allows for easier consolidation of changes than with paper, so electronic sources tend to have both original legislation and consolidated (updated) versions. Subscribers to digital legislation therefore avoid the time-consuming process of manually compiling updated print versions using numerous annual or sessional volumes of legislation.

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Searchability

The digital format also lends itself to fast searches for specific words or subjects. How this is accomplished depends upon the platform in which the digital legislation resides. Most electronic services include a search function that allows for complex searches in which terms can be combined to conduct very specific research. In comparison, paper versions of legislation may be parsed using table of contents or index, but do not lend themselves to flexible searches. As well, electronic systems allow for searches across numerous pieces of legislation at once, even all statutes, regulations or bills of a jurisdiction.

Automated alert services

Electronic systems providing legislation are, increasingly, providing alert services that allow monitoring for new legislation or changes in certain areas. Some of these are provided as email services and others are provided as electronic (RSS) feeds.

Customization

Electronic services allow subscribers access to larger collections of legislation, while at the same time allowing them to just download electronically or print off what they need to work with or carry with them.

Who is using digital legislation

Canada has a number of Internet-based legal research systems available that make legislation available, but each one serves a particular market or group of markets.

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Large law firms and solo lawyers

Commercial legal research services such as Quicklaw from Lexis Nexis and WestlaweCarswell from Thomson Carswell are geared towards large general legal practice firms, although solo lawyers are using them if they have no other choice. These large commercial services tend to be prohibitively expensive for smaller organizations, industry specialists needing only a selected number of the documents, and researchers needing occasional access to online legislation.

Legal practitioners and general public

On the other end of the spectrum are freely available legislation systems such as those available from some government websites and CanLII. These, while used by legal practitioners, are meant to bring access to the law to the general public and do not always have all the functionality needed by the expert practitioner. For British Columbia legislation, the free sources are not up to date.

Industries and smaller law firms

Members of specific industries and smaller law shops are therefore not left with a lot of choice unless their professional organizations pool resources and construct something. Fortunately in British Columbia, two systems compete to serve lawyers and industry: Quickscribe and QP LegalEze.

Role of librarians and new technologies

Librarians in a number of settings help those in law, industry and academia, as well as the general public access the law. Some librarians are given very specific research on pointed questions, while others do general monitoring of legislation and even provide an updating service.

Products like Quickscribe and QP LegalEze are essential for helping librarians on ever-tighter schedules stay current with regard to legislation and for providing current aware-ness services. It is also often the role of the librarian to stay current with the technolo-gies used to deliver legal information including legislation and help the end users find what they are looking for. Therefore, librarians often become "trainers" of sorts or re-source people for those using the service in addition to being intermediaries for those not conducting research themselves.

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Comparison of Quickscribe versus QP Legaleze

Comparison and Evaluation Summary Chart

Criteria	Quickscribe	QP LegalEze
Pricing	Starting from $295.	Starting from $415.
Look and Feel	Good layout; documents have clean layout and are easy to navigate; number of fonts should be reduced.	Drill-down menus are familiar but sometimes confusing; number of fonts should be reduced;
Content	Focus on new legislation and current research.	Focus on creating archive for historical research.
• Source(s)	Official Source	Official Source
• Comprehensiveness	• B.C. and selected federal statutes and regulations since 2004 or earlier • Orders in Council since 2004 • Bills since 2002 • selected federal legislation • forestry guide books	• Statute consolidations back to 1995 • regulation consolidations since 2003 • source regulations since 2001 • Orders in Council since 2002 • Hansard since 1992 (also available on free website) • current Private, Special and Local Statutes • B.C. Corporate Registry Notices back to 2003 (selected subscriptions only)

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Criteria	Quickscribe	QP LegalEze
• Currency	• Amendments to legislation posted immediately • new legislation posted within days of proclamation • recent changes appear on front page • Amendment Tracker feature for selected legislation	• Amendments take longer to be posted • new legislation takes longer to post during busy times
• Consolidated legislation	• Current consolidations available from the main page • previous consolidated versions available immediately in the archives	•Archived consolidations made available approximately twice a year. •"Point in time" information also available.
• Historical	• Bills back to 2002 • Orders in Council back to January 2004 • archives section with past point-in-time consolidations and repealed legislation • link from current legislation to flagged previous versions • pre-2000 legislation from Quickscribe's historical paper records available to clients by calling customer service	• Table of Repealed, Replaced and Renamed Public Statutes since 1897 • list of Defunct Regulations with link to defunct regulations since August 2003 • directional notes for legislation that has changed names
Search and Results		

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Criteria	Quickscribe	QP LegalEze
• Search	• Quick search from front page, left side-bar • advanced search including Boolean search, word search, specific document search, document title search, and amendments in last two months	• Quick, advanced, Boolean and field searching • field searching allows for search of only one field at a time • specific document search
• Search results	Results are in list of legislation; click through for keywords highlighted and in context	Results list have various keywords in context ("KWIC") options
Usability		
• Learning curve	• Can be learned without much instruction • may look confusing for first-time user, but easy on subsequent visits	• Can be learned without much instruction • looks easy to use but not all the apparent navigation works, so can become confusing later in the search
• Instruction availability	• Quick Video Tutorials • step-by-step instructional screen shots on using RSS feed • RSS demo video • free personal telephone tour	• Complimentary training sessions • video tutorials on selected topics
• Portability - printing	• Easy to print either selections or full text • attractive printouts with amendments listed at the top and footers indicating source • not an official version; printouts not admissible in B.C. courts	• Easy to print full text; printing selections is by copy and paste • attractive printouts with currency indicated • not an official version; printouts not admissible in B.C. courts

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Criteria	Quickscribe	QP LegalEze
• Portability - copy and paste	Easy to copy and paste selections into other documents.	Easy to copy and paste selections into other documents.
• Portability - saving documents	PDF version easily saved but may not be obvious.	Print Preview version easily saved but may not be obvious.
Features		
• Free trial availability	Free trial available from the front of the website.	No indication of free trial, but short-term passes are available for purchase.
• RSS, alert services	• RSS feeds track new B.C. statutes, regulations and amendments, and selected federal legislation; links to text as it read before and after the change • RSS available free from the main website; password needed to access full text of documents	• Monthly alert service: Word document via email listing recent statutes and regulations • RSS available free from website, but not kept up to date
• Customization	• Clients can select legislation for their own needs under "My Account" • previous research remembered by the system • content management system under development will allow clients to upload and maintain own non-legislation related content to the server	• Custom Content Collection service available
Support		
• Help information online	Recently made available.	Not available.

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Criteria	Quickscribe	QP LegalEze
• Contact information for live support	• Easy to find contact information; toll free number available • support hours 8:30 am - 4:30 pm PST	• Easy to find contact information; toll free number available • support hours 8:30 am - 4:30 pm PST
• Responsiveness and helpfulness	helpful person answered telephone call, owner Mike Pasta usually answers the customer service line	voicemail answered the call; call returned within half hour; question could not be answered
Communication with clients	regular newsletter via email with service development notes and important changes to legislation	periodic email messages
Privacy	privacy policy available at: http://www.quickscribe.bc.ca/privacy_statement/	privacy policy not posted
Cancellation policy	not indicated on the website	not indicated on the website

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Pricing

Quickscribe does not publish pricing information on its site, but there is a form available for obtaining a price quote. A "Full Access" licence to Quickscribe Online starts at $295 per year making this the more affordable of the two services.

QP LegalEze offers two packages outlined on the website: Complete and Deluxe. Annual pricing at the time of writing this report ranges from $415/$575 for one licence to $1,575/$2,300 for ten licences. Access can be given to an entire organization while paying just for the major users. One day, ten day and monthly passes are also available for those who do not need a full year licence. As well, BC Gazettes and Corporate Registry Notices are available separately on annual subscription.

Look and feel

When first signing on to Quickscribe, the main website has an attractive, clean design. That feel, however, only carries over to the main subscription site to some degree:

- overall the start page has a good layout, but it is a little busy with too many fonts. It is a balancing act, since Quickscribe is trying to make a number of different features stand out at once, but they are unfortunately all competing for attention of the researcher;

- once in a document, the legislation is laid out in an easy-to-read and parse manner. Definitions are easy to access from a button at the top, as are table of contents, a PDF version of the document, and the search buttons;

- when signing back in, the researcher sees updates to legislation selected in previous visits. It is managed with a window inside the front page that has its own scrollbar for long lists. On some computers this can be awkward. It

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might be better to have the first few changes listed, with an option to click through to the full list on a separate page. That would give a cleaner look, too.

QP LegalEze uses a system of folders with "drill down" menus familiar to those who have used other legal research systems:

- it suffers from the same interface problem of too many fonts, although they have fewer features evident when first signing in so it does not feel as "busy";

- the drill down menus do not always behave as expected, which can be confusing;

- opened documents sit inside the menu system and use HTML links for navigation;

- the client accidentally shutting down the browser without signing out, runs the risk of not being able to sign back in due to the concurrent licence limit being exceeded. For example, with a one-licence subscription to access the service, the user has to wait until 30 minutes of apparent inactivity forces an automatic sign-out before being able to sign back in again.

Content

Quickscribe includes British Columbia statutes and regulations, bills, and Orders in Council as well as selected Federal legislation. Its focus is making new legislation and amendments quickly available for current research.

QP LegalEze has British Columbia statutes (including Private, Special and Local Statutes), regulations, bills, Orders in Council and Hansard. The Hansard is also available free and just as current from the B.C. Legislative Assembly website with a comparable

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search tool and additional content including video. QP LegalEze's focus appears to be less on providing current information, and more on creating an archive of historical legislation.

Source(s)

Both services obtain their documents and additional data from an official source.

Comprehensiveness

Quickscribe places the following into its Archives for historical research purposes:

- statutes and regulations that have been repealed or replaced since 2004 as well as selected "active" legislation dating as far back as 1997;

- Orders in Council back to 2004;

- Bills back to 2002 (Third Reading back to 2002; First Reading back to 2006);

- selected federal legislation;

- forestry guide books.

QP LegalEze archives legislation and related documents as follows:

- statute consolidations back to the Revised Statutes of British Columbia (R.S.B.C.) 1996 with a consolidation created each year (twice a year in recent years);

- regulation consolidations back to April 4, 2003;

- source regulations published in *The British Columbia Gazette*, Part II back to Volume 44, 2001;

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- *B.C. Regulations Bulletin* containing Orders in Council back to mid-September 2002; *Bulletin* back to 1999 without full text of Orders in Council;

- Orders in Council in full text back to 2002, *Resume of Orders in Council*, Volume 29, Number 8;

- Hansard (Debates of the Legislative Assembly) back to March 17, 1992; note also freely available back to 1970 on the [Legislative Assembly of British Columbia website](#);

- current Private, Special and Local Statutes;

- British Columbia Corporate Registry Notices from January 2003 (not published anywhere else since March 29, 2004) - available in Deluxe Package subscription or in a separate subscription.

Currency

Quickscribe seeks to differentiate itself with more current legislation:

- posts amendments to legislation immediately;

- posts new pieces of legislation within days of proclamation;

- makes new legislation easy to monitor by making recent changes to legislation immediately available from the front page of the service once one is signed in. During the period in which this report was written, legislation was usually updated within a day;

- also has a detailed "Amendment Tracker" feature that allows one to select a date range in which to check for changes to legislation, and select statute or regulation to be updated.

QP LegalEze, on the other hand, was slower to post updates:

- new amendments still were not posted a few days later;

- during busy times when a lot of legislation is proclaimed at once, new legislation takes longer to be posted.

Consolidated legislation

Quickscribe consolidates amendments into current legislation, available from the main page. Consolidations from previous points in time are made immediately available from the archives.

QP LegalEze has "archived" consolidations, consolidated now usually twice a year. The most recent was consolidated February 7, 2008. In the case where a piece of legislation is amended more than once between consolidations, it is more difficult to use the current and previous consolidation for comparison purposes. They also offer "point in time" legislation, listing individual sections as amended through time. All versions of all sections appear in one document, so one cannot aggregate all of the sections at just one point in time for easy reading.

Historical research

For the purposes of historical research, Quickscribe has:

- Bills back to 2002;

- Orders in Council back to January 2004;

- an Archives section that includes legislation as it appeared in the past (point-in-time legislation) as well as repealed legislation. Includes a link to the current legislation. Some is in PDF format;

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- link from current legislation to previous versions via a coloured amendment flag;

- access to historical British Columbia legislation in paper that pre-dates 2000, in most cases made available free of charge to clients on a rush basis by calling Quickscribe's customer service.

QP LegalEze includes:

- a Table of Repealed, Replaced and Renamed Public Statutes since Revised Statutes 1897, but does not include the legislation itself;

- a listing of Defunct Regulations, including links to the defunct regulations, since August 1, 2003 hidden under "List of Updated Statutes and Regulations."

QP LegalEze also includes a directional note for legislation that has changed names, pointing one to more current legislation. For example, in looking for *Municipal Act*, the researcher is told it is now entitled *Local Government Act*. A comparable service was not found in Quickscribe; the *Municipal Act* was not found in a search, a directional note was not included. Furthermore, *Municipal Act* is not found in Quickscribe's Repealed Documents section or in the Archived Documents section.

Search and Results

Search

For the purposes of running searches, Quickscribe has:

- a quick search box from front page, left side-bar;

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- more advanced search capability (with additional Boolean search options) under "Search" button in top bar. Advanced search allows for various word search options. One can also limit searches to specific acts or regulations, bills, and Orders in Council. Searches can be conducted on entire documents, the document titles, and--a feature unique to Quickscribe--sections that have been amended in the last two months.

In QP LegalEze, the search functionality is not right up front as with Quickscribe, but is under the tab "Search" at the top. There are choices of :

- Quick,

- Advanced,

- Boolean and

- Field searching.

The Boolean and Field search screens include tips on use. One can only search one field at a time in the Field search; there does not appear to be Boolean searching with more than one field. Searches can be restricted to certain types of documents by checking off the corresponding check boxes in the left drill-down menu.

Search Results

When running a search in Quickscribe, the results come up as a list of legislation. Clicking on the legislation of interest brings up the search results with keywords highlighted and in context. This makes it easy to click through to the results. However, clicking on the link "Return to search results" takes the researcher back to the legislation results list rather than the keywords in context (the previous screen) as expected. The "return to search results" link should either be redirected, or a second link added

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so that the researcher can go back to either level. A breadcrumbs trail would help re-solve this.

QP LegalEze provides results as key words in context (also known as "KWIC") in the main window, giving the user the ability to select short, medium or long document ex-cerpts around the key words. This feature can also be turned off to show just a list of legislation titles. One clicks into the legislation and is put into a section under the "Document". One can then navigate between words found and various documents from links "Previous Match", "Next Match, "Previous Doc (with Match)" and "Next Doc (with Match)" at the top of the screen.

The interface in QP LegalEze is confusing since one cannot access results by clicking into the drill-down menu of legislation on the left. Also, tabs "Document," "Results," "Search," and "Preferences" show at the top whether they are applicable to the par-ticular stage of the search or not. The results have check boxes beside each piece of legislation, but it is not obvious what these are for.

Usability

Learning Curve

Both Quickscribe and QP LegalEze can be learned without much instruction. Quick-scribe's initial layout, as previously noted, is a little busy and may be a bit confusing for the new user. It is, however, easy once the researcher becomes initially oriented and overall is the most "user friendly" of the two systems.

QP LegalEze looks easy at the start, but the search and results interface can be confus-ing with various tabs that may or may not be useful at various points in the research. Also, its drill-down menu does not have the same functionality as legal researchers have come to expect from similar research products from other publishers.

Instruction availability

Quickscribe has a number of Quick Video Tutorials covering most aspects of the service available from the Help section inside the subscriber area of the service. Quickscribe's RSS notification tool has step-by-step instruction with clear screen shots on using their RSS feed, supplemented with Quickscribe RSS Demo video. Quickscribe also offers a personal tour of the site over the telephone. This is quick and informative, and allows the customer the opportunity to ask questions for customized learning.

QP LegalEze offers complimentary training sessions through their customer service department. They also offer Video Tutorials on *Table of Contents Navigation* and *Printing* from the public-facing website, and a note indicates more tutorials will be added.

Portability - printing of documents or portions of documents

Documents in Quickscribe are easy to print:

- select the "View PDF" button at the top of the document to access the complete text for printing. Possibly this should read "Print" or "PDF for Print" instead to make it even easier. There is, fortunately, no fussing with a separate print function;

- click on the PDF icon beside a section of legislation to open a page from which the selection to print can be made. Quickscribe may want to make the "Print PDF" link more prominent, perhaps along the left margin in the same line as the check boxes, and possibly make it look like a button or change the colour;

- printouts from the PDF documents are attractive, in a font that is large and easy to read. Headers identifying the legislation are on each page, as are page numbers and the source (Quickscribe) in the footers. The layout is ex-

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tremely clean, has little wasted space, and avoids some of the footnoting features that some of the other commercial publishers use for legislation and which some practitioners do not like. One addition to the printout would be a note indicating currency of the legislation. If the full document is printed, it includes a list of amendments at the top; however, if a document was printed out last month there is nothing indicating date or currency for reference.

Printing from QP LegalEze is done through a "Print Preview" button:

- the full document is made available for printing;

- there is no feature for printing selected sections; for printing only selections of sections, one would have to copy and paste into a separate editor which is easy for a few sections but tedious for numerous sections;

- printouts are also clean and attractive; for larger documents, extra space means more paper used in printing;

- QP LegalEze does include currency at the top of its documents to be printed even when it does not appear in the online search results. For example, the Carrier Lumber Ltd. Forest Licence Compensation Act [SBC 2002] Chapter 38 has a note at the top saying "This Act is Current to April 2, 2008" included at the top in the Print Preview version.

It is a shame printouts from both services are not admissible in British Columbia courts, but fortunately a disclaimer is included in each to warn anyone working with these documents.

Portability - ability to copy and paste excerpts

It was easy to copy and paste excerpts from the different levels of results in both Quickscribe and QP LegalEze, although Quickscribe has cleaner formatting that allows for easy editing when inserting quotes into the customer's own documents.

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Portability - saving electronic versions of documents

In Quickscribe the PDF version of a document can be easily saved. In QP LegalEze, the print preview version of a document can be saved. In both cases, this may not be obvious to the customer who is not technologically savvy.

Features

Free trial availability

Quickscribe has a free trial offer available directly from the front of their website. QP LegalEze has no indication of a free trial, although day, 10-day and monthly passes are available for those wanting to try out the service.

RSS, alert services

Quickscribe's real strength is its RSS notification tool:

- tracks new B.C. statutes, regulations and their amendments;

- allows clients to link to text as it reads before and after amendments;

- is available free of charge from the main website without signing in;

- offers feed subscribers the choice of all Acts and Regulations, Acts and Regulations by subject ("category"), or specific Acts and Regulations. Selected federal legislation is also included;

- requires subscription and password to access full copy of documents however.

Quickscribe's whole RSS service is extremely well done. One small suggested change: somehow make the RSS custom generated URL a little more prominent. Perhaps in bold or in a special box? Overall this is a very well thought-out and easy to use service.

QP LegalEze's equivalent does not have as much usefulness as it is only a monthly alert service. At the beginning of each month they send a Word document via email containing a list of Acts and their associated Regulations that came into force and have been amended or added in the previous month.

QP LegalEze also has RSS feeds available free without subscription, but they are out of date rendering them ineffective. The Updated Statutes feed was last updated August 23, 2007. The Updated Regulations and Defunct Regulations feeds were last updated September 12, 2007.

Customization - does the interface adapt to the customer?

Quickscribe clients can select the legislation that suits their needs under the "My Account" feature. As well, legislation found in previous research sessions is remembered in Quickscribe and shows at the top of the left side-bar when signing in for subsequent sessions. Quickscribe is currently developing a content management system (CMS) to allow clients to upload and maintain their own non-legislation related content to the server.
QP LegalEze offers custom content to allow users to build the content they need in their Custom Content Collection service.

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Support

Help information available online

Quickscribe has recently developed help information available while using the service. QP LegalEze has no online help available.

Contact information for live support

Contact information for Quickscribe is easy to find: it is available from bottom of the front page and throughout the service from most pages. A toll free number is available. Hours are 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. PST for telephone and email support.

QP LegalEze has Customer Service numbers available on the front bottom of their website and immediately from the left side-bar when inside the service. The Customer Service number is not listed on the site when one is actually in the search results and might need it. Both a local and toll-free number are available. Office hours are also 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. PST Monday to Friday (holidays excepted).

Responsiveness and helpfulness

As part of the research for this report, both services were called during their lunch hour for simple assistance. Quickscribe had a pleasant person answer the phone. She could answer basic questions about the service, and gave information about when the more knowledgeable help staff would be available. She did, however, know enough to answer the question. This was an exception: in most cases, owner Mike Pasta answers the customer service line and directly provides support.

By contrast, only an automated message was reached for QP LegalEze and a voicemail message was left for someone to call back. A pleasant person did call within half an hour, although he was not able to answer the question about the function of the check

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boxes in the search results, citing he was new to the position and hadn't come across the question before. He was to check and call back again, but he did not. This is, however, anecdotal evidence and service will likely vary depending upon question, time called, and person answering.

Communication with clients

In addition to its RSS feeds, Quickscribe offers a newsletter via email called Quickscribe Reporter with service development notes and especially changes to legislation and links to related documents including news articles, reports, Orders in Council and websites. QP LegalEze does not appear to offer an equivalent vehicle for communicating with clients, although periodic email messages may be sent to customers.

Privacy

Quickscribe has its privacy statement clearly made available where needed, for example when signing up for free RSS service and one's name is collected. The privacy policy is written in plain English. It is currently located at:
http://www.quickscribe.bc.ca/privacy_statement/.

QP LegalEze does not have a privacy policy posted on its main website or inside the service.

Cancellation Policy

Neither service indicates its cancellation policy on the website.

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Technical note

Tests of these services were run using the Internet Explorer 6 browser on a Windows XP 5.1 operating system and on a Firefox 2.0 browser in Mac OS X operating system. Some features were tested in one but not the other. Functionality may vary depending on particular system and browser platform.

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Quickscribe Advantages and Suggestions for Improvement

Advantages of Quickscribe

Advantages of Quickscribe include pricing as well as timeliness of information, delivered both inside the subscription service and via its free RSS feeds. Quickscribe's service is easier to navigate, has superior current awareness services, and the customer service at Quickscribe is very accessible for those who need extra assistance. Quickscribe offers a free trial for anyone wishing to make a comparison.

Suggestions for improvement

Functionality

Making the fonts inside the user interface a little more uniform would make the service even more user friendly. The Selected Documents buttons give quick and simple drill-down access to Bills, Orders in Council, and selected Federal Legislation; a similar button could be added for quick access to a listing of British Columbia statutes and regulations in the main window rather than having them persistently listed down the left side-bar. A "bread crumb trail" in the search results should be added for easier navigation.

For updates of legislation that show in the front window, instead of having a window with its own scroll bar, it would be better to have the first few changes listed, with an

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option to click through to the full list on a separate page. That would give a cleaner look, too.

Currency information

A note with a specific date of currency should be added to legislation to be printed or saved so that readers will know how dated the information is, especially when it is placed in a file for later reference. In the Archives, it would be helpful to indicate on the welcome page the date range for repealed documents: how far back in time one can expect to find repealed documents, and how current the information is. Researchers would find notes on legislation that has changed names (i.e. some direction from the old name) useful.

Customer service hours

As far as customer service goes, Quickscribe currently has live assistance available the same business hours as its main competitor QP LegalEze. Thought should be given to whether customers would find slightly longer hours (such as to 5:30 or 6:00 p.m.) helpful.

Making researchers aware

Quickscribe is currently flying under the radar of many researchers. Work should be done to liaise with prominent researchers and those who publish Canadian legal research guides to have it included as a viable alternative. For example, Ted Tjaden has not included it in the legislation or legal publishers listings in his recently updated _Doing Legal Research in Canada_ guide published in LLRX.com (April 4, 2008). Catherine P. Best does mention Quickscribe in the Researching British Columbia

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Statutes section of her *Best Guide to Canadian Legal Research*, but not in the BC Statutes Summary section.

The human face of Quickscribe

Quickscribe may also have an advantage in that it may be seen as the more "human" alternative; that is, it is not produced by a government--and therefore faceless?--entity. Mike Pasta should consider leveraging this by creating a blog to communicate with customers and potential customers, talking about news about the service, upcoming changes, and possibly highlighting existing customers. Freshbooks, a web-based accounting service, is an example of a service that highlights clients on its blog. This creates a synergy promoting both the service and the clients, and encourages others to try the service. Quickscribe might take advantage of this approach.

Visible pricing

Considering QP LegalEze publishes its pricing schedule, Quickscribe should consider doing the same. Researchers often like to conduct their own consumer comparison before buying into a product, and this would make it easier for them. If Quickscribe's prices are truly more reasonable, this will help sell the product. It may also encourage subscribers to QP LegalEze to also try Quickscribe in tandem and make their own comparison.

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Future of Digital Legislation

Quickscribe's Role

Quickscribe currently plays the important role of bringing competition to the British Columbia legislation publishing landscape. As such, they need to stay a step ahead of the government alternative which is higher in profile and may inadvertently be seen as more authoritative by some. Quickscribe is already forward-thinking in its use of RSS and providing a portal-type experience in that the service remembers work done by the individual on previous visits. The service is smart and efficient, and might find a few ways to leverage what already exists.

Future direction

Mobility

Today's business and legal knowledge workers are increasingly accessing Internet services using mobile devices including Blackberries and cellular telephones. Many do not carry laptops with them to meetings. Currently many carry hard copy of commercial consolidations with them as a way to avoid the laptop, but this may not meet the needs of all lawyers and industry specialists. Currently Quickscribe provides PDF versions of documents that are used by clients via mobile devices. They may also want to move towards creating an interface for finding the legislation that works equally well "on the go".

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Widgets

Quickscribe has one of the best examples of an RSS feed available for Canadian legal researchers. Unfortunately many in the legal industry and general public do not understand RSS and may not know how to take advantage of this. Quickscribe should think about how these might be used by clients on their intranets and portals, and create a "widget" that clients could install on their intranets to give them easy access to the feed results.

Joint offerings of niche products

They should also think about working with other small publishers to provide niche products on industry areas such as forestry, transportation and environment, and academic topics such as would be covered in law and other social science studies. Working towards joint offerings of topical suite of products would likely fill a void of information not previously available and make them the primary go-to resource for industry and academia. This is something that, again, would distinguish Quickscribe from the government equivalent.

Accessibility

Accessibility is an issue that has played a prominent role in the U.S. corporate Internet landscape the last few years, and is slowly gaining traction in Canada. It is recommended to have the service evaluated according to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. This is good both for certain clients who may have visual impairment and for generally all clients to ensure they can easily read the site. Quickscribe may already be compliant; it is helpful to have some indication of this on the website.

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Environmental concerns

The other area gaining prominence in the corporate world is environmental concerns: companies are looking to "go green" as much as possible. Quickscribe might anticipate this by having a statement on its website in this regard, simply outlining how the company addresses these concerns internally in producing the service and giving individual users an idea of how their use of Quickscribe fits in with their "carbon footprint." This would, of course, have to be written in such a way as to not offend the sensibilities of existing client industries.

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About Crosby Group

Crosby Group Consulting was founded in January 2008 in Toronto, Ontario, by Connie Crosby to help organizations and individuals start their social networking and knowledge management projects. Services include: writing for the web, content creation for blogs and wikis, creation of a web presence, information organization, and both formal and informal instruction on the use of social networking tools such as blogs, wikis, RSS, Facebook and LinkedIn.

About Connie Crosby

Connie is an expert in social networking, communication and information organization. Prior to creating Crosby Group, she was Library Manager at WeirFoulds LLP, a prominent Toronto law firm. She has acted as a leader in the Canadian legal and library industries, blogging, writing and speaking to librarians and lawyers on legal research, social networking, knowledge management and change management.

Connie has served as president of the Toronto Association of Law Libraries and on the executive board of the Canadian Association of Law Libraries. She is a founding member of Slaw.ca, a Canadian law and technology blog, and has been blogging on her blog for law librarians http://conniecrosby.blogspot.com since March 2004. She is also an instructor with the Professional Learning Centre at the Faculty of Information Studies, University of Toronto.

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About Stem Legal

Our expertise is web marketing for the legal industry.

Stem Legal was started in August 2007 by Steve Matthews. From 1998 to 2007, Steve was the Knowledge Services Director at Clark Wilson LLP in Vancouver and the driving force behind the firm's web strategy, including concept development, design, coding, web marketing and SEO operations. The vision behind Stem is to offer an outsourced service for law firms to increase online profile and web-driven business opportunities.

About Steve Matthews

Steve Matthews is the Founder and Principal of Stem Legal, a company dedicated to bringing web visibility to the legal industry.

Steve's involvement online dates back to the early '90's and includes 12 years of in-house law firm experience. His comments on web trends within the legal industry have appeared in a wide range of publications, including the CBA's National Magazine, Lawyers Weekly, ABA's Law Practice Magazine, the Texas Bar Journal and Business in Vancouver. He is considered by many to be an authority on how lawyers can strategically leverage their efforts online.

Between 1998 and 2007, Steve was the Knowledge Services Director for a mid-sized Canadian law firm Clark Wilson LLP. In this role, he was the driving force behind the firm's web strategy, including concept development, design, coding, web marketing and SEO operations. His role also included directing the firm's internal Knowledge Management program and Library Services.

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