

Bargain Shopping

Free and low-cost legal research options.

BY **KENTON S. BRICE**

There are now more opportunities than ever for lawyers to perform online legal research at a lower cost. Here are several free, freemium,¹ or inexpensive resources that Texas attorneys can take advantage of.

Fastcase (Free). Fastcase is a legal research tool that the State Bar of Texas provides to its members for free. The system features robust databases of federal and state statutes and cases, as well as access to some law review articles as part of a collaboration with HeinOnline. Fastcase also includes a heat map illustrating how a case has been cited. Attorneys can access Fastcase through their My Bar Page at texasbar.com.

Casemaker (Free). Another platform similar to Fastcase, Casemaker is available to State Bar members for free. Included with the usual federal and state databases, Casemaker also provides its own citator system, which highlights citing references and treatment for a case. One of the unique features of Casemaker is CiteCheck. This tool allows attorneys to upload pleadings and automatically get a cite check report on the reliability of the citations. Casemaker is accessible through an attorney's My Bar Page at texasbar.com.

Casetext (Free). Casetext is a next-generation platform that is a blend of legal research and social media. It features case, statute, and regulation research combined with the ability for users to share annotations and comments. There are even practice-based communities of attorneys and professionals for targeted discussions on various legal issues. In addition, Casetext provides a crowdsourced citator called

WeCite, in which users indicate where and how cases have been cited. Available at casetext.com.

Ravel Law (Freemium). Ravel Law is another innovative service currently centered on caselaw. With the free basic plan, searching for cases provides immediate visualization and analytics. Reading cases are a joy, as cases are formatted for online reading with various analytics presented, including information on how individual paragraphs have been cited or used by other courts. A paid subscription to Ravel Law provides users with valuable judicial analytics, including the ability to view a judge's rulings on previous motions. Available at ravellaw.com.

Google Scholar (Free). Google has been in the game of case research for a few years now, and Google Scholar does not disappoint. It provides a wealth of cases, completely free, with an integrated citator, which is basic and does not provide for the treatment of a case but does cite cases and some law reviews. Access Google Scholar at scholar.google.com and select the "Case law" option under the search window.

Cornell's Legal Information Institute (Free). The Legal Information Institute has been around for a while now. It provides free access to a vast library of federal and state caselaw, constitutions, regulations, and statutes. As LII is merely a platform for accessing its libraries, there are no citators or annotated content, thus limiting its use as a true legal research tool. However, it is still a stalwart among free legal resource libraries with amazing coverage. Available at law.cornell.edu.

TexasBarCLE Online Library (Low-cost and Free). The State Bar of Texas's CLE Department has an online library where Texas attorneys can find resources for the more practical side of legal research. It features TexasBarCLE materials from 1998 onward in an easy-to-use online format. Yearly subscriptions are inexpensive and are free if you are part of the Pro Bono College. Available at texasbarcle.com.

O'Connor's Online (Low-cost). Most Texas attorneys know about the great publications that O'Connor's has provided for various practice areas in Texas; a lot do not know that it now has a viable online platform. Although not free, O'Connor's Online gives access to all of its resources for Texas practice through a system that is easy to read and navigate. Subscriptions range from \$50 to \$75 per month. Available at oconnors.com.

Texas State Law Library (Free for Texas residents). Lastly, no article on free or low-cost legal research is complete without mentioning the Texas State Law Library's Research from Home portal. The TSLL has an abundance of legal resources that are free to use online, including access to the Aspen Treatise Library, HeinOnline, and Stevenson's Legal Forms & Practice Guide for Texas, to name a few. Users must register for a library account to access these resources. Available at sll.texas.gov/about-us/public-services/research-from-home. **TBJ**

Notes

1. Freemium is a term used to describe resources in which "[u]sers get basic features at no cost and can access richer functionality for a subscription fee." Vineet Kumar, *Making "Freemium" Work*, Harvard Business Review, May 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/05/making-freemium-work>.



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