The Democratization of Legal Information

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Overview

- "Democratic" means access.
- Legal information has gotten more democratic, but still needs improvement.
- Access means more than free.
- States vary in their success providing access.
- DC is making progress.

Current state of access to state Codes

In DC...

DCRegs: D.C. Register and D.C. Municipal Regulations
- full text searchable, but with difficult-to-use results
- non-proprietary format no
- choice of granularity no
- static links yes

Lewis, Edens, OpentextDC, D.C. Code
- Lewis official publisher but proprietary format and no static links
- Edens accessible, HTML and non-proprietary format but not up-to-date
- OpentextDC mobile compatibility and static links but not official

Solution?

Crunch Project

- Named after first codifier of District laws
- Goal: open source, official, authenticable, preservable publication of D.C. Code
- Timeline: complete by December 2014
- Next step: Integrate D.C. Municipal Regulations

References

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D.C. Code 1929- "Historical"
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Pre-printing press

“Publication was widespread before the invention of printing and was achieved by reproducing important texts in multiple manuscript copies which could then be disseminated to libraries, officials and others who needed them and could afford them.”

In the American colonies

Laws published chronologically.

Before printing presses were brought, laws were copied by hand.

U.S. 19th century

Laws published chronologically. Some laws of Britain still in effect.

A “labyrinth of toil and uncertainty.”

D.C. Code 1929, “Historical”
U.S. Early 20th century

Codification/Organization by subject.

Substantial improvement in intellectual access.

Surrency, 582.
U.S. 1960s-1970s

Databases.

Another leap forward in intellectual access but only for those who could afford subscription or had access to a law library.
U.S. 2000-2014
Free online publication.
Possibility of full text search, static links.

BUT...

"Despite the great improvements in law publishing achieved through these new technologies, **unequal access to legal information remains a troubling problem** in the administration of justice. However, the availability of an increasing quantity of both primary and secondary legal material on the Internet indicates some **potential for improvement in inexpensive public access**."
Current state of access to state Codes

Full text search

Non-proprietary formats?

Granularity of access

Static links
Full text search

- Text searchable
- No text search
- Search not limited to Code
Non-proprietary formats?
Granularity of access
Static links
In DC...

DCRegs: D.C. Register and D.C. Municipal Regulations

- full text search: yes, but with difficult-to-use results
- non-proprietary formats: no
- choice of granularity: no
- static links: yes

Lexis, Elaws, OpenlawDC: D.C. Code

- Lexis: official publisher but proprietary format and no static links
- Elaws: static links and non-proprietary format but not up-to-date
- OpenlawDC: mobile compatibility and static links but not official
Solution?

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D.C. Code 1929, “Historical”