

Jury News

By G. Thomas Munsterman

The Top Ten “Interesting” Jury Web Sites

This past July, I spoke on “Jury Technology Improves Equal Treatment” at the National Association for Court Management Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon. The theme of the meeting was “Justice for All: Serving Diverse Communities” which I found fairly easy to address given that the jury system is mandated to provide diverse panels of prospective jurors. As the digital divide narrows, the benefits of using the more advanced technologies increases. During my presentation, I demonstrated a number of Web sites that illustrate the use of technology in furthering this diversity mandate.

At the same meeting, Chris Crawford of Justice Served gave me a card that listed this year’s winners of the “Justice Served’s Top Court Web Sites.” As with all of these top 10 lists, I always feel badly for number 11. Then I wonder if these lists don’t really make one really good friend for the author and nine lukewarm friends who really question his judgment.

Later, in a more reflective moment, I asked myself what would be the top 10 jury Web sites? Would they necessarily have to be the best 10? As a fan of walking tours, I thought, why not look at the most interesting Web sites, or what the Web surfing jury fan should see as good or interesting examples. I was looking for Web sites that go beyond the usual basic information on jury service, frequently asked questions, maps and reporting assistance – no matter how well those elements are done. In fact, this basic level of information should be a standard for all states and courts.

The interesting next step is to consider the Web site not only as a pre-reporting site for summoned jurors but also as a public education site that includes applicable statutes and rules as well as links and references to other online resources. The California Web site, <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/jury/index.htm>, is a good example of this broader approach. It has a section for employers – separate from the section that prospective jurors can access to get information to tell their employers – that includes information about why employer support for the jury system is important to the business community. The California Web site also features a “System Improvements” section, where citizens interested in jury improvement efforts, or perhaps frustrated jurors, can find task force reports with recommendations and progress reports.

One thing I find frustrating is how hidden the juror information can be on some sites. Is it located under the clerk of court, or under the court itself? And which level of court? If I can’t locate it after a quick look on the court’s homepage, I go directly to the search function. If jurors are a major portion of those seeking information from a courts’ Web site, why make it so difficult? Web site activity reports, which I am told lurk in all good Web software packages, can provide data to help convince your Web master to locate juror information just a click away from the homepage.

And so I propose ten or so interesting Web sites for your consideration.

1. One must start at **Maricopa County Superior Court**, Phoenix, Arizona, at <http://www.superiorcourt.maricopa.gov/>. Before you look at the juror information

option, check out the high profile list found under the public information heading. Notorious cases, which are defined as those cases generating media interest, are listed as to the latest action on the case and the next event scheduled in the case. Think of all the calls from reporters that this information would eliminate.

The Maricopa Web site has something for all jurors. First and foremost is that, after receiving their summonses in the mail, jurors can take care of all further communications with the court via this Web site. Can we eliminate this first mailing and summon jurors via e-mail? Recall the Internet hoax reported here a few issues back. Maybe not yet. In Maricopa County, the jury summons includes the juror's identification number. To sign on to the Web site, prospective jurors use this juror identification number and their date of birth, which for security reasons is not included on the summons. After signing in, the juror can complete the qualification questionnaire, request to be excused, claim a disqualification, or ask for a new reporting date. The Sacramento site discussed below has an interesting variation on the sign-in procedure.

The main juror Web page includes a number of useful functions such as court locations, frequently asked questions, and even a juror newsletter – an idea that the court borrowed from New York (see Number 2, below). The juror can also download and print a letter from the court to the juror's employer, which provides information the employer should have concerning jury duty.

2. **New York's jury system** is centralized and their Web site provides general information as well as links to the individual county sites and information for jurors reporting in the various counties. The New York Juror Orientation videos for grand and petit jurors can be found on their Web site at <http://www.nyjuror.com/>. The petit jury orientation video, "Your Turn," is probably the best orientation video I have ever seen. Diane Sawyer and Ed Bradley are the narrators. The opening sequence – a brief history of the jury system – is quite compelling. Following that is an interesting discussion of what jury duty is really about, complete with film clips of classic jury television shows as well as some very direct and honest comments from citizens about jury service both before and after serving. Chief Judge Judith Kaye also uses the video as an opportunity to tell jurors how the New York courts have improved the jury system and why jurors' ideas and participation are so important. The grand jury video is one of the few available. For those of you with broadband Internet access, give both videos a viewing.

On the New York Web site, jurors can even find out how to volunteer for jury service in New York State. No, it does not violate the concepts of randomness, for it only has real application to persons not on the five source lists used in New York. It merely adds the names to the master list and does not give anyone a priority in selection. The rules and laws pertaining to juries are also found on this site, a feature many states are now including. The back issues of New York's Jury Pool News can be accessed via this Web site.

3. Orange County, Florida, or more correctly the **Ninth Judicial District of Florida**, always seems to be on the best Web site lists, and in the jury area they are present again. And who can forget their address: <http://www.ninja9.org>? From the streaming video orientation to the banner announcements of which jurors should report, this site contains a great deal of information. Note the description of the new in-court childcare facility,

known as A Place for Children, which is available for juror's children as well as all others having business in the court.

4. In addition to many very useful Web pages for jurors, **Missouri's web site** provides a page on which the individual counties can post specific instructions for jurors reporting to their local courthouse. From the Missouri Judiciary homepage at <http://www.osca.state.mo.us/index.nsf>, click on the link for circuit courts, then juror guide, then local jury offices. I suggest you check out Cedar County. Maybe then you won't think you have facilities problems.

5. **Cobb County, Georgia**, deserves a nod for what was the first online video orientation and juror qualification questionnaire. The video can be viewed at http://www.cobbcounty.org/video/sup_jury.ram. Now you can see what a jury summons would see, if a summons could see, when the mailbox door is opened and the would-be juror looks in. This is a new perspective to be sure. Cobb County had the first on-line qualification questionnaire. Rather than mail the questionnaire in, the juror can complete the same form online. It may not be the most sophisticated implementation, but it beat everybody else by years, and it works.

6. **Sacramento Superior Court** at <http://www.saccourts.com/index/jury.asp> provides, among many things, the call-in information in a tabular format. The panels on call are grouped and, depending on the day you check this page out, you may see just about every variation of a call-in message possible. Some panels report, some call again tomorrow after noon, others call again in the morning, and still others in a few days. This shows the court's continuing effort to bring in panels only when needed. Jurors requesting to be excused, deferred, or postponed are first given the rules or statutory basis for each action. Then they complete the request form and submit it to the court. This approach seems more open, which I like. Rather than signing in and discovering the limits of options available, jurors focus on the details of the specific action concerned. The general information page also has a request form for assistance such as hearing assistance devices and interpreters. This positive approach is the preferred method under ADA. Rather than what it takes to be excused, what does it take to make it possible for you to serve?

7. Several issues ago I wrote about the jury system in Great Britain and the recent work of Lord Auld and his suggested reforms. Notable for us this time is the variety of information provided on their Web site at <http://www.criminal-courts-review.org.uk/>. You can access not only the report, but also an executive summary, press releases, progress reports, and research papers prepared in support of Lord Auld's findings and public responses to the report.

8. I thought I should have at least one non-court sponsored Web site that promotes education about the jury system – not that there are a lot to choose from. Try the Constitutional Rights Foundation of Chicago at <http://www.crfc.org/americanjury/about.html>, which provides teaching materials, links to other sites, and references for further work. I have not considered any Web sites that are issue related – that is, promoting a particular change in the jury system or statutes. It should not surprise anyone that there are far more issue-related jury sites than there are general educational sites.

9. Speaking of jury education sites, check out the Council for Court Excellence at <http://www.courtexcellence.org>. Under the heading of jury reform you can view and download the reports of the District of Columbia's Jury Project. The jury video and teaching materials that the council developed are offered for sale via this Web site. The video contains an abbreviated trial based on an actual case. It is condensed into 30 minutes, including the jury instructions. Students form several juries and then deliberate and bring in their verdicts. The result of the usually varied verdicts provides a wonderful course on the jury process. The council's Web site also has some excellent information on "Steps to Consider When Planning a Jury Public Awareness Campaign." Recall that it was the council that originated the idea of a Juror Appreciation Week.

10. I have reserved this last spot for the site – and I am sure there are many – that I do not know about yet. I ask for your suggestions as to other Web sites that should be included in this list. In the spirit of equal access, a forthcoming issue will include all those sites suggested, subject to my standards, of course.

I have not included the National Center for State Court's Center for Jury Studies Web page at www.ncscoline.org (and another click under Center for Jury Studies), and I ask for your ideas as we continue to improve it. We have added a sort of "What's New in Jury Systems" there and invite your contributions to me at tmunserman@ncsc.dni.us. In fact, if you don't want to re-key all the Web sites I have mentioned in this article, I will post the list there. Previous Jury News columns are on the NCSC Web site as well.

I would also like to call your attention to another Web site not necessarily jury-related, at least not yet. Those of us named Tom are particularly sensitive to the seeming voyeurism of viewing public records which the Web provides. Now available are the handwritten pleadings of accused terrorist Zacarias Moussaoui. They can be found under notable cases/docket at www.vaed.uscourts.gov. On that somber note, I wish you "interesting surfing."