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Hein-On-Line: An Image-Based Collection of Legal Periodicals

*By Paula Lichtenberg, Librarian
Keker & Van Nest LLP*

There are many sources from which to retrieve periodical articles electronically. The huge collections of Lexis or Westlaw are the most logical places to turn. Web-based periodical collections, such as Ingenta, www.ingenta.org, are another possibility. In addition, several journals are making their publications available on their web sites. Another source more and more legal researchers are becoming acquainted with is Hein-On-Line <http://heinonline.org>, the most recent winner of the American Association of Law Libraries New Product Award.

What distinguishes Hein-on-Line from other electronic periodical databases is that it is image-based and provides access to pre-1980 volumes. William S. Hein & Co., Inc. will scan a journal from its first issue to the most recent completed volume, giving you electronic access to older issues not available electronically anywhere else. The image-based articles look like a print copy of the periodical, with the footnotes on the same page where they were cited and containing graphs, photos or tables that likely were omitted from the other products. Pages are provided in pdf format (giving you the exact image of the original article) and in HTML (from which you can search full text or cut and paste into word processing and other programs).

Hein-On-Line is user-friendly and doesn't require much training. Using IP recognition, everyone in the firm can sign on without having to keep track of yet another password. Help lines are available via e-mail or an 800 number (which unfortunately at this time is open only until 5 EST Monday through Friday).

Cost and space may be issues of concern only to the librarian and those responsible for the budget, but to them, Hein-On-Line will be a definite plus. For a law firm, there is a flat fee (based on the number of attorneys), so you no longer will have to worry about how long you were online or whether a particular database is in your plan. No more waiting two weeks for the Interlibrary Loan (that you asked for on a rush basis) to arrive. Not to mention other costs, such as ILL fees, the cost of a subscription or fees for running an online search. And if you are desperate for space – and aren't we all – this on-line access to older issues of a journal gives you the choice of getting rid of those volumes.

Although Hein-On-Line was developed with academic and court libraries in mind, many private law firms are also now subscribing to the two-year-old service. (Many of the young attorneys joining firms will already be familiar with this product, because over 85 percent of law school libraries have Hein-On-Line.)

One major drawback is that currently it has only about 200 journals, but they are increasing the list of titles at a rapid pace. Hein-On-Line hasn't reached its full potential, but even now it has many happy subscribers. It is not a substitute for Lexis or Westlaw, but it definitely complements them. It seems to combine the best of both worlds (print and electronic): easy to read, searchable and easily e-mailed or copied into documents.

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