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# LAW LIBRARY BRIEFS

The College of William and Mary  
Marshall-Wythe Law Library



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### "GUERRILLA" STYLE RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

The process of legal research, like any other research, is often time-consuming, challenging and sometimes frustrating. However, it can be enjoyable and fun as well. The difference between frustration and enjoyment usually lies in the strategies adopted by the researcher with particular needs. The point is: you must understand your circumstances and apply the most efficient approach to get what you want. Recently, I had to track down three pieces of information, and the strategies that I used can be best characterized as "guerrilla" style research.

**1. Getting a Citizen Petition.** The first piece of information I needed was a citizen petition filed with the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In October 1996, Cancer Prevention Coalition, the petitioner, submitted a request to the FDA where it asked the agency to require that makers of cosmetics containing a cancer-causing agent carry a warning label to inform consumers about the

effects of such agent. A looseleaf service, *Food, Drug, Cosmetic Law Reporter*, was the source where my petition was mentioned, but it only gave a brief summary of the petition without indicating where the full document could be uncovered. Common knowledge tells me that the FDA would be the depositor of such records. However, knowing that getting the information through a federal agency like FDA would be time-consuming at best and frustrating at worst, I decided to try an unconventional alternative, i.e., calling the petitioner itself. Using a reference book *Encyclopedia of Associations*, I found the entry for Cancer Prevention Coalition listed in the book, which gave a description of the organization, its membership and publications, and address and phone number. I then made a phone call to the headquarters of the association in Chicago. Within a few days of my phone call, a copy of the petition, along with other helpful information, came on my desk.

**2. Another Citizen Petition to Acquire.** A second citizen petition that I had to obtain was also filed with the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). In this case, the petitioner called upon the government to make it mandatory that manufacturers of over-the-counter drugs print their drugs' expiration dates in a contrasting color in a location on the immediate container that always remains visible. This document was harder to get because it was filed by an individual, instead of an organization. Had the petitioner been a corporate entity, I could have simply replicated my successful story from the first petition pursuit. Though the name of the individual who filed the request was provided for in my citation, I could not find the address or any

information about the individual by searching the Internet "white pages." So what I had to do was to go back to the source of my citation, i.e., *Food Drug Cosmetic Law Reports*, and use the cross-references in the service to track down the docket number and date of filing associated with the record. Now the government came to mind as my ultimate source of information for the document, and I decided to give it a try. Looking in two directories, i.e., *Federal Yellow Book* and *Federal Regulatory Directory*, I could identify the FDA's Dockets Management Branch as the agency responsible for keeping citizen petitions filed with the agency. I then placed a phone call to the agency, and was told that the document I was after must be obtained through another FDA agency as required by the Freedom of Information Act. I asked for the exact address of that agency, and sent it a request for a copy of the document (as of this writing, I am still waiting to receive this record).

### **3. Tracking Down a Conference Presentation.**

The third piece of information that I had to get was a paper presented at an annual meeting of the Academy of Management. At the Academy's 1995 annual meeting in Vancouver, Canada, a presentation was made about a study of corporate executive payoffs arising from mergers and acquisitions. The study presented was done by two persons, one of whom was Donald C. Hambrick, a professor of business at Columbia University. A summary of this presentation was printed in *Harper's Magazine*, but it was unknown whether and where the full study had ever been published. My task was to get it.

Experience tells me that an academic or professional society often publishes one or more journals where its conference proceedings, studies, and other information are printed. With this idea in mind, I first looked in the same reference I enlisted before, i.e., *Encyclopedia of Associations*, located the entry for the Academy of Management, and identified the journals

published by the Academy. I then searched the library's online catalog LION to see whether we subscribed to any of those journals. It turned out that while the Law Library subscribed to none of the publications, Swem Library had subscriptions to four of the journals. The problems were that I had no access to cumulative indexes to these journals, and asking a Swem librarian to help with the search would be too much to ask without knowing that the article was actually published in one of the periodicals. Then it came to me again that I could go the source of the paper for help. Since I knew that Donald C. Hambrick, co-author of the paper, was a professor of business at Columbia University, I searched a Gopher site on the Internet where directories of academic institutions were kept, and got the author's office address, phone number, and e-mail account. I first sent him a request by e-mail, then followed up by a phone call. A copy of the full study arrived at my office just a week after I spoke to the professor.

The examples above illustrate some unconventional approaches which may prove necessary and successful for effective research. The point from all three stories is this: whenever you have certain information needs, analyze your situation carefully, think about all the avenues available to you, and choose the best path which solves your information needs most efficiently. That being done, your research process can be fun and enjoyable.

...HH

### **IN BRIEF**

Inclement Weather. When the College and/or Law School closes due to snow or ice, campus police will open the law building and library for student use at regular opening times. Although circulation and reference services will be unavailable, students may use the computer lab and law materials. Security will close the building at the normal closing time of 1:30 a.m.

Security System Problems. Please report problems encountered using your ID card to access the building or library to the Circulation Supervisor. We may be able to correct the problem without your having to go to the ID office.

### "GET PINNED" IN THE LIBRARY!

**T**hursday, January 30th the circulation Staff will show you how to add excitement to your life by using your "PIN" number to check your library records at any LION terminal. So even if you can't have the boyfriend or girlfriend of your dreams, its o.k., you can still "get pinned".

To check your records: 1) Click on FIND, 2) Click on YOUR RECORDS, 3) Click on VIEW YOUR RECORDS, 4) In the ALT ID field, type your social security #, 5) In the PIN # FIELD type the last six digits of your social security. The records appear in order by the date you checked them out.

To change your pin: 1) Click on FIND, 2) Click on YOUR RECORDS, 3) Click on CHANGE YOUR PIN, 4) In the ALT ID field. type your social security #, 5) In the PIN # FIELD type the last six digits of your social security, 6) Type your new PIN #, 7) Confirm your new PIN #. If entered correctly, your pin # will be changed to the new pin and LION confirms with "RECORD UPDATED". ...PK

### HELPFUL HINTS FOR INTERLIBRARY LOAN

**W**elcome to the Spring semester. Here are a number of valuable hints to facilitate your use of ILL as a means of borrowing materials that are not in our collection.

Check LION and our shelves carefully to see whether we have the material you require. Be

sure to include Swem Library's holdings when you search LION. If neither library owns the material, or it is missing from the shelf, please make use of our interlibrary loan service.

1. Stop by the Circulation Desk and ask for an ILL form;

2. Run a search through the FirstSearch database and attach the printout, including the location codes of those libraries which own the material, to your ILL form;

3. Fill in the form as completely and legibly as possible. If the item was not located on FirstSearch, the more comprehensive the information, the easier it will be to find the material requested. The name of a publisher is particularly helpful;

4. Pay specific attention to the section on the form regarding possible charges for periodical articles;

5. Only request fax delivery if it is really essential. Should a fax be obtained from an out-of-state library, a charge may be incurred;

6. Be sure to include your current telephone number, in case questions arise.

It will be my pleasure to serve you and to do everything possible to ensure timely and inexpensive delivery of the information you require. ... JP

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