

SARA EVANS looks at how career opportunities for cyberlawyers regarding the regulation of the internet have developed as the online world transcends social, political and economic barriers

Writing the rules for working in cyberspace

Regulating cyberspace – it may seem futuristic and a role more suited for a superhero character from a Marvel comic book than a solicitor or barrister, but it's a legal activity that's happening now and one that will continue to grow and develop as long as the internet continues to exist.

Becoming the focus for much leisure and educational content, as well as social interaction, the growth of the internet has also had a massive impact on the commercial world. Affecting work patterns, the development and manufacture of goods, consumption and production of related items (such as software and information), the reach of the internet has been so influential that it has been dubbed the "new industrial revolution" by many economists.

And where there's commerce, there's also law. Dr John Baruch, head of Bradford University's department of cybernetics, internet and virtual systems illustrates the point: "It's the very characteristics of the internet which have enabled this 'revolution' to take place. For example, the instantaneity of the internet and its lack of respect for borders challenge traditional forms of legal regulation."

New challenges

Due to its rapid growth, cyberspace has the potential to be a legal nightmare. Law firms are having to recruit specialist lawyers to cope. And the qualities required in these "cyberlawyers"? As well as having a solid understanding of how the internet works, legal firms are looking for specialists who also can understand the necessity of the law to adopt new strategies and perspectives to approach and correctly resolve the growing and changing legal impact of IT developments.

Just as in any business, legal companies need to stay ahead of the game having the human resources to adapt the online world and be fluent in



the new regulatory challenges faced by governments and international bodies needing to reduce the risks of the internet without censoring the opportunities it also provides.

Essentially, the cyberlawyer works in the general law of contract, but with a special emphasis on the problems raised when applied to the online world as well as international law and intellectual property law. There are also opportunities to get involved in jurisdiction and conflict of law, internet service provider liability, domain names, the music industry and trademarks.

Careers in law

All exciting stuff, but how do you actually get to become a cyberlawyer? This is a question William Betts asked himself after deciding that a career in law was for him. Sitting A-levels in law, maths and IT next summer (2006), William was keen to pursue a legal career while, ideally, being able to keep and use his promising IT skills.

"I started researching", says William, "to see if it was some way possible to combine a career in law with my interest in IT. Although I probably won't be able

to practically use my IT skills, I want to combine law with my knowledge of computing. Specialising in internet law seems like a good solution.

"I discovered that many law degrees have a module in internet law which could give you a good start in getting into this specialist area – especially, I imagine, if you do a dissertation or project on it. The other option available is to take a more combined degree that focuses on the internet from many angles including the legal prospective.

"If you go for this option, you then have to take the one-year postgraduate Common Professional Examination (CPE) before you can get into law work. I haven't decided yet what option is right for me. I do know, though, that law is competitive so I am going to choose the course that gives me the best competitive edge for getting into internet law."

For those interested in cyberlaw and looking to take a law degree it makes sense to choose a law course that offers modules in the internet. There are a fair number of these about including courses offered by the University of Liverpool, Aston and Leeds.

Department of Cybernetics

The other option is to take a first degree whose main focus is the internet itself and then move on to take the qualifying CPE. One such course that provides an interdisciplinary approach to the internet is the Internet, Law and Society (ILS) degree course taught by the University of Bradford's Department of Cybernetics, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities and the Bradford College Law School.

Almost a third of this course is taught by the Department of Cybernetics with the intent of giving students "a theoretical understanding and practical mastery of the internet, network communications, computer programming, software design, cyberpsychology, e-commerce and virtual worlds" which compliments the legal part of the course.

Deciding which course option is best for entry into a career in cyberlaw is hard to determine at the moment. However, the one thing that is certain is that the type of law careers related to online activity is sure to grow in an area moving forwards as quickly and diversely as the internet itself.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Selection of courses

- A – Interdisciplinary internet courses: Internet, Law and Society (three and four year study options available)
University of Bradford
Tel: 01274 234112 Web: www.bradford.ac.uk

- B – LLB courses with internet law modules:
University of Liverpool: Tel: 0151 794 5928 Web: liv.ac.uk
University of Leeds: Tel: 0113 233 2332 Web: www.leeds.ac.uk
Aston University: Tel: 0121 359 6313 Web: www.aston.ac.uk

- C- LLB with internet commerce:
Staffordshire University
Tel: 01782 292753 Web: www.staffs.ac.uk

Organisations:

- The Law Society of England and Wales
113 Chancery Lane, London WC2A 1PL

Tel: 020 7242 1222
Web: www.lawsociety.org.uk

- Law Society of Scotland
26 Drumsheugh Gardens, Edinburgh EH3 7YR
Tel: 0131 226 7411
Web www.lawscot.org.uk

- The Law Society of Northern Ireland
98 Victoria St, Belfast BT1 3JZ
Tel: 028 9023 1614
Web www.lawsoc-ni.org

- The Bar Council
289-293 High Holborn, London WC1V 7HZ
Tel: 020 7242 0082
Web www.barcouncil.org.uk/

- The Institute of Legal Executives (ILEX)
Kempston Manor, Kempston, Bedford MK42 7AB
Tel: 01234 841 000
Web www.ilex.org.uk

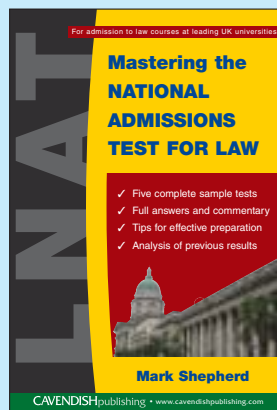
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