

A labour of love leads to a legal portal for all

Drawing on 30 years experience of legal practice, Andrew Rogers has created a free internet portal with links to practical legal information for lawyers and general public alike.

ANDREW ROGERS originally developed his legal information portal, Foolkit, when he was the principal of a small commercial firm in Adelaide and found that secretaries and other support staff were struggling to search on the internet. He created an intranet which linked together frequently used online forms and legislation.

In 2005 this information wellspring became a website. Rogers sold his practice in 2009 and now works solely on Foolkit: www.Foolkit.com.

As he told a well-attended Young Lawyers CLE seminar in Sydney recently, "it's not rocket science, and I know you can look it up anyway, but if I can save you one or two clicks, the time you save mounts up".

"Foolkit solves the problem of staff finding things," Rogers told *LSJ*. He estimates "it saves lawyers between a half-hour and one hour, and support staff around half an hour, a week."

At first just focused on federal and South Australian law, Foolkit's scope has vastly broadened, with information tailored for each of the state jurisdictions, plus separate information about the law for the general public.

Now in its seventh iteration, Foolkit's legal portal has sidebars titled 'quick reference library' and 'the fast lawyers toolkit', plus drop-down menus at the top. Clicking on 'quick reference library' in the NSW version shows a menu of NSW and federal legislation, federal institutions, state governments, courts, tribu-

nals, cases, international law, and libraries, law schools, legal organisations and legal reform. Each link leads to live online resources.

The 'fast lawyers toolkit' lets you search the section of a commonly used Act you want to know about right now, and also has court lists, rules and quick reference links for ASIC information, a currency converter, postcodes, and so on. "It's the stuff commonly known," says Rogers, "but I've sped it up - it's like the internet with turbo."

Altogether, there are 12,000 links over 350 pages. "Some people say this looks awfully busy," Rogers quipped, "they don't know the half of it." He admitted that he personally checks more than 5,000 links every day to make sure they are up to date.

As well, there is specialist advice on careers, management and general wellbeing, which Rogers has garnered from sources such as the Canadian Bar Association and others in the English-speaking world.

"I've always known I should build a good website and it should be national, and for the public who are looking for answers to legal problems," he told *LSJ*.

Rogers has a strong view that "access to justice should be for everybody", but regrets this is not, in fact, the case. Citing the "Access To Justice" report, the Federal Attorney-General's review of the law and its accessibility, Rogers noted that of those who have a legal issue, approximately half will seek advice, and of the other half, 16 per cent will do nothing



"With intranets and the law libraries, my point is that there will be occasions when they haven't got everything," says Andrew Rogers, who has tailored his website Foolkit to provide up-to-date information for all Australian jurisdictions. PHOTO: STUART MILLIGAN

and be worse off, whereas 32 per cent will tackle the problem by themselves. Of the 50 per cent who do seek assistance, only 12 per cent will see a lawyer. "So only six per cent of people with a legal problem will see a lawyer," Rogers told the Young Lawyers seminar. "Law is really failing in selling itself to the community."

This leaves a gap for "objectionable" non-legal providers. "One in Australia says that they will do probate documents for you for \$600, supposedly thousands less than that charged by lawyers," Rogers noted, "but that's not true, many would charge less than \$600."

Given these gaps in legal awareness and in access to justice, Rogers aspires to fill them with the public side of his site. Although there is advice for those seeking to do DIY law, Rogers also stresses the risks, and includes practical information to help people to choose a lawyer. Rogers said readers are encouraged to contact a lawyer, since "maybe lawyers don't cost as much as you think. Go and have a first interview and see if you really need a lawyer."

Traffic to Foolkit is growing all the time, but is yet to be matched by advertising rev-

enue. Some lawyers who use Twitter will have become aware of Foolkit through tweets from @foolkitlegal. These originate from Nick Ramage, who was headhunted from his job of editor of the South Australian Law Society's *Bulletin* to become digital content editor for Foolkit when it was still under the umbrella of Andrew Rogers Lawyers. Now working as a social media consultant, Ramage still distributes information of interest to lawyers on Twitter on Foolkit's behalf, solely in an honorary capacity. "I really believe in what Andrew is doing," he told *LSJ*.

And where did the name come from? When starting out, Rogers found 'toolkit' was already taken. He was inspired to alter it slightly, thinking of a jester. "Daily practice struck me as like juggling so many balls. You've got so many up in the air when you start the day, and then they start throwing more at you." The audience at Rogers' Young Lawyers session seemed to be in furious agreement with that description, and their feedback forms show they rated Rogers and his initiative highly. □

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