An Improved Forensic Science Information Search

J. Teitelbaum
Forensic Science Library Services
Forensic Laboratory Services Bureau
Washington State Patrol
Seattle, Washington
United States of America

TABLE OF CONTENTS

* Corresponding author: Jeff Teitelbaum, Forensic Science Library Services, Forensic Laboratory Services Bureau, 2203 Airport Way South, Seattle, WA 98134; 206 262 6027 (voice); Jeff.Teitelbaum@wsp.wa.gov.

1042-7201/27-1/Jan. 2015/41–52/$18.00 •

An Improved Forensic Science Information Search

REFERENCE: Teitelbaum J: An improved forensic science information search; *Forensic Sci Rev* 27:41; 2015.

ABSTRACT: Although thousands of search engines and databases are available online, finding answers to specific forensic science questions can be a challenge even to experienced Internet users. Because there is no central repository for forensic science information, and because of the sheer number of disciplines under the forensic science umbrella, forensic scientists are often unable to locate material that is relevant to their needs. The author contends that using six publicly accessible search engines and databases can produce high-quality search results. The six resources are Google, PubMed, Google Scholar, Google Books, WorldCat, and the National Criminal Justice Reference Service. Carefully selected keywords and keyword combinations, designating a keyword phrase so that the search engine will search on the phrase and not individual keywords, and prompting search engines to retrieve PDF files are among the techniques discussed.

KEYWORDS: Databases, forensic science information, Google, Google Books, Google Scholar, Internet, National Criminal Justice Reference Service, online searching, PubMed, PubMed Central, search engines, Web of Science, WorldCat.

INTRODUCTION

Forensic science information does not lend itself to simple online location and retrieval. In any given week, it might be necessary for a forensic library to access 30 or 40 different databases to find the information required for casework requests, due to the fact that there is no central repository for forensic science information. The multiplicity of disciplines (toxicology, DNA, chemistry, trace analysis, firearms, latent prints), plus innumerable subdisciplines (crime scene photography, bloodstain pattern analysis, proper evidence collection, crime scene reconstruction, arson and explosives analysis, textile identification, tire tread matching, serial number restoration, forensic entomology, shoeprint identification, postmortem analysis, questioned document examination, etc.), can necessitate the use of an enormously wide spectrum of resources. There are thousands of online databases and search engines available today, many of them free to use and many of them costing tens of thousands of dollars per year. If your organization is not affiliated with a university or medical library system, however, it is unlikely that you will have access to any of the commercial subscription databases. The result is that the majority of forensic scientists in crime labs often do not have access to information, particularly in the form of journal articles or book content, which could be critical to their daily work.

If, for instance, you are interested in finding an article published in the *Drinking Driving Law Letter*, it will become evident that it is not an easy task to search this publication unless you either subscribe to the publication itself, have access to extremely high-priced commercial full-text databases, or are cognizant of the Rutgers Alcohol Studies Database, which indexes the publication. A basic Google search will not necessarily be fruitful.

If you want to search the *Journal of Forensic Sciences (JFS)*, one of the premier forensic journals in the field and the official journal of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS), it would seem it should be a simple matter, but it is not. A logical start would be the journal's commercial website, and a quick search leads to its publisher, the Wiley Online Library. A search on a specific topic would generate very few, if any, results, because Wiley has only been publishing the *JFS* since 2006, a fact that is not evident on the journal's home page. And, because the *JFS* was launched in 1956, 50 years' worth of material is unavailable through Wiley. A partial solution, if you happened to be aware of it, would be to go to the website of the AAFS, which has a searchable index for the *JFS*. Clicking on that index link takes you to yet another website, ASTM International, an organization that currently provides industrial accreditation standards. ASTM was the previous publisher of *JFS* and here the journal can be searched from 1972 through 2005. Combining ASTM with Wiley, the years 1972–present are covered, but 1956–1971 are still missing. PubMed, a database from the National Library of Medicine and a resource that is discussed more extensively later in this review, provides indexing to the *JFS* from 1961 to the present; however, on closer inspection, much of the early 1960s material is missing, not to mention the absence of 1956–1960.

The *JFS* example illustrates that what seems like it should be a routine search is often quite difficult. It also demonstrates that searching for forensic science information has a lot to do with knowing where to search and knowing what is available. As important a resource as PubMed is, for example, it doesn't index conference

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

J. Teitelbaum

Jeff Teitelbaum received his master's degree in library and information sciences from the University of Washington's Information School (Seattle, WA). He currently runs the forensic library and research services for the state of Washington's Forensic Laboratory Services Bureau, the seven-lab crime lab system of the Washington State Patrol, where he supports the information needs of over 200 forensic scientists.

He is a faculty member at the Borkenstein Drug Course (Indiana University: Bloomington, IN), where he instructs on searching techniques for locating forensic science information using online databases and search engines. He has presented similar workshops for a variety of organizations, including the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and the Society of Forensic Toxicologists.

He is an executive board member of the National Safety Council's Division on Alcohol and Other Drugs. He is the principal research associate for Dr. Randall Baselt's *Disposition of Toxic Drugs and Chemicals in Man*. He is also on the editorial boards of the *Journal of Analytical Toxicology* and *Forensic Science Review*.