

Law via the Internet Conference 2009

Using Free Access Legal Materials in Legal Information Services – GilesFiles

Graham Giles

Slide 1

My sincere thanks to the conference organisers for allowing me to speak. I am particularly grateful to SAFLII for making all this possible.

Time is limited and I do not propose to read the paper I prepared for the conference. I understand it will be made available to delegates.

In that paper I have described the history and development over the last 30 years of what ultimately became known as **GilesFiles**.

This afternoon I will provide a brief overview, describe how I aggregate the information in a database and make it available through a portal and an **Index of Work Law**, being the primary content on the **GilesFiles** web site.

After discussing the benefits of the **Index of Work Law** I will open it and demonstrate how to find relevant information within minutes.

Slide 2 - Overview

Background

Thirty years ago South Africa brought about dramatic statutory changes concerning Employment or Labour Law and Industrial Relations, which I define as the “**World of Work**”. The concept of an “unfair labour practice” was introduced, to a large extent discrimination was scrapped in the workplace and for the first time an “industrial court” was created to determine “fairness”.

Legal practice & teaching

In 1981 I fortuitously ceased practising as an advocate (barrister) and resumed practising as an attorney (solicitor) and notary public. Almost immediately I developed a thriving practice in the new legal field concerning the World of Work. From about 1984 until a few years ago I conducted seminars for the legal profession in this new field of law at the request of the Association of Law Societies of SA. From 1991 I was appointed a part-time law professor at the University of Johannesburg where I still lecture part-time and also lectured full-time at the University of Stellenbosch for nearly 5 years until reaching their “compulsory” retirement age of 60.

Database development

In about 1981 I also started collecting and recording information in various databases. Fortunately I ensured that I kept up to date with the latest developments in technology.

Website creation

During 2007 I was lecturing part-time at various universities and digitally recorded the lectures. At the suggestion of John, our youngest child and a prominent technology lawyer based here in the Cape, I created a web site, **GilesFiles**. This enabled me to provide free access to the students to the recordings together with other relevant information, mainly with links to cases kindly provided by **SAFLII**.

Communication

Students and other interested persons provided me with e-mail addresses and I now have over 1,000 contacts and communicate with them on a regular basis.

Business plan

When the **GilesFiles** web site was created in 2007 I decided against relying on any advertising and funded it myself. I provide as much as possible without any charge. Registered users who become subscribers to GilesFiles, pay a nominal monthly amount to access the premium content, being the **Index of Work Law**.

The Index will be described in more detail shortly.

Sabinet Online

Towards the end of last year Sabinet offered to acquire the database and the related services. I am very pleased to report that Sabinet Online duly acquired those assets with effect from the start of this month. I will be assisting Sabinet for the next 2 years to ensure that the database and services are maintained until Sabinet announces what its intentions are with regard to those products.

Slide 3 – GilesFiles website

Allow me to describe how it all works.

Primary Internet Sources

I am not a content provider nor do I wish to compete with the publishers. I provide an online legal service with guidance on the law concerning the **World of Work** by aggregating the available information with full references to the primary sources. Thanks to SAFLII links are also provided to most of the cases.

The South African primary sources are provided by LexisNexis, Jutas, Contemporary Labour Law, Labour Law Sibergrammes and last, but by no means least, SAFLII.

Database

The database has tables and numerous fields containing detailed information collected during the last 30 years. The tables themselves contain over 11,000 cases; over 10,000 journal articles; nearly 1,300 judges and arbitrators; nearly 3,000 authors; over 600 trade unions & employer organisations and over 300 statutes.

Website – www.GilesFiles.co.za

As already mentioned the GilesFiles web site contains

General content

and provision is made for

Registration

Users

are able to freely access some of the categories and the site links.

Registered users

have free access to additional unlocked categories but this will have to change at the end of the year.

Judgments

For ease of reference judgments added to the Index each month are posted in a separate document.

Journal Articles

Again for ease of reference journal articles are stored in documents that are updated regularly.

Unlocked content

As already mentioned the unlocked content is available to registered users.

Index of Work Law

The cumulative Index is updated monthly and contains all relevant information concerning the **World of Work**. I will say more about the **Index** and show you how it is used in a short while.

Premium content

The **Index** is only available to subscribers.

Subscribers

There is a monthly subscription with the right to cancel without notice.

Communication via internet

Registered users and subscribers receive e-mails on a regular basis alerting them to developments and updates on the GilesFiles web site and the Index.

Payment via internet

To simply accounting subscribers pay via the internet, mainly by debit order.

Slide 4 – Index of Work Law

The Index has many benefits and advantages, including the following.

PDF & searchable

Being in an Adobe Acrobat format there are bookmarks and searches can be conducted.

Single document

The Index is cumulative with all the information contained in one document. Additions are marked in **red** and updates in **pink**. However, given that the Index contains information from 2003 to date it has been necessary to divide it into a current and archive section.

Current – Just in Time

Users are able to determine the current state of the law very quickly and access the actual reports where hyperlinks are available, thanks again to SAFLII.

Topics

The Index has a number of topics and keywords and references to the section of the statutes.

Annotated

Cases that have been taken to a higher court are cross referenced to enable users to track the latest decision.

Hyperlinks – external & internal

As already mentioned there are external hyperlinks to SAFLII and a number of internal links to avoid repetition.

Result & digest

Full details of each case, including references to various reports, are included as well as the outcome of the case with a brief description. Each case has a unique number to enable it to be linked to any relevant journal article.

End of slide presentation.

Should take about 10 minutes

Index of Work Law

I will now open the current issue of the **Index of Work Law** and demonstrate how it works.

It is not possible to predict how this will work as I intend to open the document and conduct a few searches and describe what is found.