A Site For Your Sore Eyes

LITIGATION SECTION

[https://ncbarblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Efird-Martha-152-1.jpg]

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On June 19, 2018, the North Carolina Judicial Branch rolled out the new public website for our courts (https://www.nccourts.gov [https://www.nccourts.gov]). The site is the culmination of the work of the Discovery Phase of the web redesign project and recommendations in the final report of the North Carolina Commission on the Administration of Law and Justice (NCCALJ). During the process, NCCALJ invited comments and suggestions from state bar members, other agencies, and community users of the state court website, as they innovatively worked to bring the judiciary, the bar, and the citizens of North Carolina an effective, user-friendly website.

My practice requires me to use the judicial branch website multiple times a day; therefore, I offered comments to NCCALJ when solicited and I was eager for the new site. Now that the site is live, I was also eager to have impressions about the site from those who use it differently than I use it. Jules Carter, a 2L summer associate from Duke University, along with my sister-in-law, who represents our state's citizenry, explored the site and shared their impressions with me.

If the speed in which Ms. Carter offered her impressions represents the ease of using the site, then the state earns high marks. Ms. Carter and my sister-in-law noted:

Aesthetics and Approachability

- The new NC Courts site is modern and aesthetically appealing. The clean, minimalist presentation makes it attractive and approachable. The sans-serif typeface and monochromatic design add to the appeal. The headings, links, and body text are appropriately proportioned and easy to read.

- The aesthetics and approachability are as close to a 10 as you could get using a 1-10 scale. For a governmental site, the clean, uncluttered pages present a less intimidating site compared to so many. Initial pages are

concise and don't try to present too much 'frenetic' information, while still making it easy to find the links to subsequent pages.

- The extra white space makes it easy to read, less condensed, and easy to click on the links. (This would be particularly helpful for individuals with disabilities, eye sight limitations, or other challenges.)

Utility

- The site is helpfully divided into subdivisions for the general public, the judicial community, the legal community, and the media.
- The site appears to include features intended to economize actual judicial processes. The "Judicial Forms" search function and the electronic filing portals are easy to find and include user instructions. Having easy access to *Forms* at the top is very helpful.
- The organization of the topics and links is easy to follow and the few pictures are simple and relevant.

Online Services

- The citation searching function is now featured with more prominence. This is an extremely positive development because most of the public will only encounter the site for the purpose of finding personal court date information and settling citations and court fees.
- The inclusion of the criminal background check feature for only $25 is a welcome feature. If the information existed on the prior site, it was not easy to locate.

Accessibility

- The link to the Spanish-language version of the site is prominently featured on the home page. Compare with the United States Department of Justice website, where the Spanish-language version is virtually hidden at the bottom of the page ([https://www.justice.gov/ [https://www.justice.gov/]](https://www.justice.gov/)).
- The "Help"/FAQ section appears to be helpful.
  Again, on a scale of 1-10 it seems to be a solid 10. Even a web novice could likely figure out where to get their information.

I echo the above comments and add only a few other practical notes. Many of us are working in multiple counties and navigating different calendars and local rules. Therefore, we quickly want to open a particular judicial district's calendars, local rules, and local contact information. Being a creature of habit, I immediately sought-out the "drop down" menu of counties. While it is not located on the home page, you eventually find it after going into *Court Dates* and then *Civil Calendars*. However, that still didn't take me to those important local master calendars and motion calendars used and offered in most of our larger counties. The trick to locating those calendars is to search the key term "Local Administrative Schedules." Alternatively, just enter a county name in the search bar and the county site will populate and include the Local Administrative Schedule.

While there are many features that I will continue to discover in using the site, I applaud the inclusion of the full directory of judicial branch employees— currently totaling 6,810. With the entry of a name and a click of a button, you

can find the court personnel you need. From all aspects, I find the site to be effective, relevant, and a great step forward for our state. The full press release is available at https://www.nccourts.gov/news/tag/press-release/judicial-branch-launches-new-public-website-nccourtsgov [https://www.nccourts.gov/news/tag/press-release/judicial-branch-launches-new-public-website-nccourtsgov] .

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