

## Why Internet Research Skills matter

The full story of Dominic's "Virtual failure" (and what Spencer had to do with it)

Partially told previously online in the VTS Internet for Law tutorial <http://www.vts.intute.ac.uk/tutorial/law>

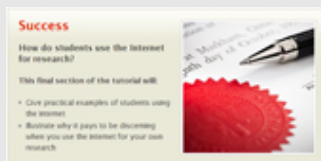
### Internet for Law

[Internet for Law](#) is a free online tutorial to help university students develop their Internet research skills.

The tutorial is part of the [Virtual Training Suite](#) - a set of Internet tutorials written and reviewed by qualified lecturers and librarians from across the UK



This fictional case study is extended from a scenario created for the Success section of Internet for Law online tutorial.



Dominic and Spencer © are made up by Steven Whittle but the perils and pitfalls of some web sources are not.

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### Dominic's "Virtual failure"

Dominic has just had his first assignment on the "Law of Virtual Worlds" back from his tutor – and is pretty gutted to see that his grade is a fail.

Seriously - he had thought he might have lost some marks for missing the submission deadline through his university course VLE but he hadn't reckoned on this. How could that possibly have happened? He had spent most of the day before submission working on it on the train with Spencer and had done loads of Internet research.

### What went wrong?

To be honest he can't just put it down to a run of bad luck – although he'd had that too, definitely. It all started when Spencer (a Chemical Engineer fresher) got invited to an interview in London with a TV production assistant from *Dragon's Den*. Spencer might have a chance to show the entrepreneurs the personal portable coffee percolator he'd designed (somehow involving an old Stella can, Zippo disposable lighter and a couple of Fairtrade coffee beans). Dominic had been up for the trip as Spencer's new best mate and as a first year law student he practically qualified as Spencer's patent advisor anyway.

They'd been so distracted to find a USB key marked OHMSS between the seats in first class (that and dodging the guard) that they'd left Spencer's bag and one and only prototype percolator behind when they'd changed trains at Temple Meads.

(Surprisingly the USB turned out to be just a bad pirate copy of the classic Bond film rather than State secrets.)

(Less surprisingly despite pressing 3 and holding to speak to an operator for some considerable time, their call to lost property hadn't been able to track down the distinctive tartan bag.)

Dominic had tried to remember the week 2 lecture on patent law to help Spencer decide whether it was still worth going to the meeting if he could explain his idea to the Dragons even without anything to show. Would he still be able to protect his original design?

Unfortunately Dominic guessed not. It was going to be a very long journey home. Dominic decided to make good use of the time working on his essay. It would also take Spencer's mind off losing the opportunity of a lifetime. That was it – one or two wrong decisions, and a narrow escape from a humiliating experience had wrecked the whole day (and his essay it seemed).

### What really went really wrong?

Dominic scans his tutor's feedback comments. It seems the tutor is not happy with the references Dominic used.

Apparently he had **missed out all the key sources** of information that he should have used. They ask why he didn't refer to the course reading list or any resources from the library. He thinks back – someone had mentioned he should try the library catalogue and e-resources on the website, but things had been so hectic – especially since meeting up with Spence in Freshers' Week, he hadn't got round to visiting the university library again after registration.

He had also mislaid his Course Handbook – which gave the

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Internet address of the online course materials – these things happen! (Quite often to Dominic and Spencer).

Even his web searches had managed to miss the **Virtual Law Bibliography on Terra Nova** <http://terranova.blogs.com/> altogether - which his tutor says is at least consistent with his use of the university's law library in reality ("sarky so and so" Spencer says – or something like that). Dominic's tutor advises him to borrow from the library: **Effective legal research / by Philip A. Thomas and John Knowles. London: Sweet & Maxwell, 2006** for essential information on how to use a law library.

The tutor says some of the **sources he had quoted are inappropriate** - they were looking for more academic sources such as journal articles, rather than anonymous websites on cyberlaw.

He remembers the quick **Google Web Search** <http://www.google.co.uk/> he did on the train – maybe taking a chance on Spencer's suggestion that the laws of virtual worlds ought to be analogous to Space law (although sounding like a unique angle at the time) had been too much of a long shot. Google had returned over 35 million hits on a search for "air and space" and his phone credit for web searches would only last for the first few pages.

The tutor is also unhappy with the **content** of the some of the sites he quotes – there was a lot of chat and one-sided argument. When he had cited information it tended to be out of date or totally inaccurate!

This is strange – using **Wikipedia** <http://www.wikipedia.org/> had always helped him make the word count in school homework. A Wikipedia entry about **Second Life** <http://secondlife.com/> gave a really good summary – well except he had been a bit worried about a lack of information on the rights of Avatars and was thinking of adding it himself.

The tutor suggests that it would be helpful to read the full text of the one article he'd found in abstract only with Google:

**The Laws of the Virtual Worlds by Greg Lastowka and Dan Hunter**

California law review and SSRN Social Science Research Network  
[http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=402860](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=402860)

Unfortunately on the London trip he'd left his library card that gives him login access outside the library to online full text journals on the library's subscription at home (well more like lost it actually as he couldn't recall seeing it recently) and he missed the download option completely. Not that viewing a full text PDF article was really an option on his mobile (even without the tunnels and a dodgy link). The tutor's comments also warn Dominic to watch out **where** the information he uses is coming from – all the sources he used were from the USA and he missed out European commentary in this area. There seemed to be some confusion over whether he was considering UK law or US law or international law applicable to virtual worlds or the virtual laws applicable within Life2.

But perhaps most embarrassing – apparently you're not allowed to "cut and paste" text from websites into your assignments – it's **plagiarism** - unless you use **proper citation** methods – so he got an outright fail. An expensive mistake!

His tutor suggests he goes along to one of the law library's brief introductory training sessions comparing the **Lexis Library** <http://www.lexisnexis.co.uk/> and **Westlaw UK** <http://www.westlaw.co.uk/> subscription databases – so they become as familiar and easy to use as Google.

His tutor also suggests that he brushes up on his Internet research skills - thinks about using the most appropriate search tools for each job and importantly then thinks more about the content and quality of the sources he finds.

Having considered his lecturer's comments, Dominic decides it could be better to re-check his references and start rewriting the essay rather than join Spencer in seeing Torres return from injury in the Chelsea match on Sky Sport in the SU bar. On reflection he resolves to use the library resources and choose web sources (and just maybe friends) a bit more carefully from now on – (Sorry Spence!).



**Eagle-i Internet Portal for Law** and **Internet for Law** VTS tutorial are edited by legal information specialists at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, School of Advanced Study, University of London <http://ials.sas.ac.uk>

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