

Internet law made simple

August 28 2008

(PhysOrg.com) -- Internet law is a new frontier where SMEs fear to tread. Now European researchers have created a new internet law wiki designed to encourage more SMEs to go online. The internet has enabled a brave, new world of online commerce, pushing new ventures and large corporations to launch confidently into cyberspace.

But SMEs have lagged far behind, held back in large part because they lack reliable information about their online legal obligations. Without the enormous resources of a legal department, many SMEs fear the potential repercussions.

Now European researchers have developed what is probably the first internet law wiki written for non-experts. A wiki is an online information source contributed by the users, like Wikipedia.

“Fear of legal problems is one of the main reasons why SMEs are slow to launch internet-based services, from e-commerce to online marketing,” explains Margaretha Mazura, initiator of the LEKTOR project.

SMEs have good reason to be fearful. Internet law across Europe represents a patchwork of varying standards. Even where European directives exist, the national regulations implementing the directive vary from country to country.

I am Spam

For example, the regulations regarding business-to-consumer spam are

well established, and consumers must opt-in every time. But in the business-to-business space, spam rules vary from opt-out, in Italy for example, to opt-in in Germany.

There are other considerations as well. Consumers can legally return goods, no questions asked, from 7 to 15 days after they have received it, depending on their place of residence. The length of time, again, varies from country to country.

But mailing time is not counted, so some SMEs will face a ‘cooling-off’ period that can effectively last a whole month between the time it takes to mail a product and the consumer’s statutory rights.

“It is vital for SMEs to know what regulations apply to which country, to respect them, and then to adjust their cash flow to reflect their obligations,” notes Mazura.

The issues become even more complicated across the world, where the variety of regulations in force proliferates. Finally, the law as it applies to the internet is changing all the time, as legislators create new laws and the courts establish new precedents.

SMEs take the Lexelerator to cyberspace

Enter the Lexelerator, LEKTOR’s free Web 2.0 information platform for internet law. “Web 2.0 refers to the sharing, collaboration and interactivity typical in many of the most successful online services that have launched in recent years,” Mazura explains.

Lexelerator is an online information source for legal information, aimed at SMEs who want to start e-commerce or internet services. Even companies with established internet-based services can use the platform to ensure they are compliant with all relevant regulations. And while the

service is aimed at SMEs, there is plenty of information that is also useful for consumers, too.

It provides non-technical information, supplied by experts in the field, relating to internet law. The EU-funded LEKTOR project created the platform using an open source content management system, called Drupal. Drupal enables a wiki, blogs, and forums.

“We didn’t use the Wikipedia software, which is also open source, because any users can post information,” says Mazura.

LEKTOR used Drupal because it allows levels of access for different users. Ordinary surfers, from consumers to SMEs to anybody else, can read all of the information. However, registered users have more input. They can apply tags, contribute to forums and add comments to the blogs.

Registration is simple enough, and only requires a real email address. But the top level of access is reserved for contributors. “We check contributors manually, using our panel of experts around Europe, to establish that the contributor has a sufficient level of expertise to write an article on internet law,” stresses Mazura.

This makes Lexelerator better than a wiki, because users can be confident that there is a proven level of expertise in the content.

“Most of the contributors come from universities, or law firms who want to raise their profile,” Mazura notes. “And they are not remunerated.”

Sustainable service

“The choice of contributors was deliberate, because we’re hoping to keep the service as low cost as possible, so it will remain sustainable,” says

Mazura, who is secretary general of the European Multimedia Forum, the group currently hosting Lexelerator.

So far, the wiki is in English, but there are a number of blogs in a variety of languages that provide similar information, and all information is searchable. Moreover, registered users are able to add tags, so if there is a discussion about advertising in the wiki, French-language users can tag it ‘publicité’, for example, considerably enhancing the search function.

Finally, the forums offer registered users an opportunity to discuss the issues relevant to their circumstances.

LEKTOR is keen to promote the service which has already been presented at the eJustice conference held under the aegis of the Slovenia presidency. It will also be presented at a conference of the World Intellectual Property Organisation in Geneva later in 2008. There have been dozens of other workshops run by LEKTOR.

The research programme also had a global appeal, with partners in the UK, Italy, Chile, India and the USA.

“We are building a critical mass of users and contributors around the world, and we hope the service will continue to track the rapid change in online law,” says Mazura.

Provided by [ICT Result](#)

Citation: Internet law made simple (2008, August 28) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2008-08-internet-law-simple.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private

study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.