

LEGAL RESEARCH THAT THINKS THE WAY LEGAL PROFESSIONALS DO.



As a Vice President of New Product Development at Thomson Reuters, Mike Dahn has played a leading role in design and product development for Westlaw, the flagship online legal information product. Prior to that, Mike held a variety of key positions, including head of libraries and intranet development for a major law firm, as well as legal positions in academia, and the private sector.

For legal professionals, doing research often means navigating through mountains of information in order to identify the right cases, statutes, and other relevant authority for their client's issue. It's both complex and time consuming. Beyond that, there's always a concern that something important may have been overlooked. Westlaw is reimagining search capabilities to think and work the way legal professionals do. So attorneys will now be able to identify the relevant, accurate information they need faster than ever – and serve their clients with the confidence that every source and scenario has been explored. Mike Dahn shares his insights on these innovative research tools.

How does customer input figure in Westlaw product development?

It's absolutely critical to our product development efforts. We've worked with literally thousands of practicing attorneys and librarians to better understand how customers approach legal research. Beyond focus groups and surveys, we do in-office workflow observation and full-day codesign sessions with our customers to get really nuanced feedback. We also use eye-tracking equipment to get a sense of which parts of a page attract the most attention, and we make sure that the most important information is in those places. We've also built long-standing relationships with lawyers and librarians to get frequent feedback on our design thinking – we consider them an extension of our product development team.

What's the most important insight you've learned from studying how legal professionals do legal research?

If there is one thing that is common to the customers with whom we work, it's this: nearly all share a nagging anxiety that an important document might be missed. When your reputation and credibility are on the line, it's inevitable that doubts such as: "Have I found everything?", "Is there something else that might pertain to this?", or "Is there a case I've missed?" can start to eat at you. The last thing an attorney wants is to be surprised by a piece of information from their supervisor – or worse yet, from the other side, in front of a judge.

What do today's attorneys and legal researchers want in legal search?

Today's attorneys want to focus on the part of their jobs they love the most – developing work product and advice to help meet their clients' legal needs. That's why we spend so much time summarizing the law, organizing it, and linking documents that attorneys need to know about. The less time an attorney spends on legal research, the more time he or she can focus on crafting work product and counseling clients – all with the confidence that they're delivering their best work, because we've delivered ours.

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