

VENDOR VOICE

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

Chatting with Casebriefs

Casebriefs' content has more than quadrupled since its introduction in 1995. The product's core services—initially focused around samples of case briefs—have grown to include tools for note taking, collaborating, exam prep, and more, that serve both law and pre-law students, recent graduates studying for the bar, and other legal industry members.

Twenty-one years ago, first-year law student David Gray wanted to find a technology tool to help him organize and augment summaries he wrote for the cases that were covered in class. Gray, who was enrolled at the Chicago-Kent College of Law, went to six law school bookstores asking if they sold study aid software for law students. The resounding answer he received was 'no;' the clerks didn't think such a product even existed.

So Gray took it upon himself to create one. He built the tool's structure to echo the IRAC—Issue, Rule, Application, Conclusion—case briefing method many law schools use. He approached top students in his class and offered to buy briefs they had written for six first-year courses—Torts, Property, Contracts, Civil Procedure, Criminal Law, and Constitutional Law. They agreed, and their work became Casebriefs' original content. In 1995, roughly three years after finishing law school, Gray released Casebriefs.

Much like the legal industry, Gray's digital study tool has gone through a number of changes in the past two decades. Bar review company Harcourt Brace Publishers purchased it in 1996. After reacquiring Casebriefs in the mid-2000s, Gray relaunched the product—originally sold in law bookstores as boxed 3.5-inch diskettes—as a free online offering, supported by advertising and sponsorships in 2008.

Today, users can access content for 27 law school courses, written by law professors and attorneys who have practiced in specific academic disciplines. Bloomberg Law links throughout the text direct students to additional resources.

We asked Gray, Casebriefs' founder and chief executive officer, how the tech tool has adapted to serve the legal education industry, what he feels the future of online and in-person learning will look like, and how law librarians stand to influence the way information is shared.

How has the industry reacted since Casebriefs' introduction?

Casebriefs was developed to help law students organize and write briefs for cases reviewed in their law classes. Casebriefs has evolved to a more interactive study platform offering private dashboards where students can keep track of their notes and bookmark cases they are studying in class, which are then organized chronologically from the first case studied to the last. They can also share class notes with fellow study group members using a shared legal pad that was developed for interactivity.

Resources can be imported from many sources—for instance, we are seeing students using the legal pad to bring in resources from their school's law library. Let's assume a class is studying negligence. A student is able to search for and find resources in the library, then copy and paste the link location directly into the legal pad that corresponds to negligence cases. As you can imagine, the reaction has been overwhelmingly positive. Casebriefs.com is the most widely used site for U.S. legal education, with

CASEBRIEFS BASICS

Founded
1995

Registered Users
140,000+ law students; 17,000+ pre-law students

Content
from 27 law school courses

Monthly Page Views
5,520,000

Cost
Free

almost every law student accessing Casebriefs multiple times per week, if not daily.

Does the product have a certain audience?

Casebriefs is primarily a student-used site. However, it's also used by students who recently graduated and are studying for the bar, new attorneys who may need a refresher on a legal premise, undergraduate students taking business law classes, and foreign attorneys who are seeking an LLM degree through a U.S. law school.

A few years ago, we decided to offer pre-law students assistance with the LSAT exam. Today, Casebriefs offers the only free LSAT course. It encompasses a complete overview of every area of the exam and provides comprehensive answers to every question asked on numerous practice exams. Prospective law students have access to all of the study productivity tools that law students have. They can bookmark video lectures and keep them in their library; make notes about the lectures in their digital legal pad; and use the law dictionary to search for legal term definitions. Additionally, the site offers a free first-year orientation course that provides a complete overview about what class is like and how to study as a law student.

How do you feel education-based research has changed in the legal information industry over the past five to ten years?

I believe the day has passed when legal information staff assist in reviewing books for information; they now help information seekers navigate in a vast world of digital content. The law library is the center for legal information, and more and more, we are seeing it as that epicenter for information gathering via technological means. The new law libraries we are seeing being built today, especially in new law schools, are very tech-savvy spaces. Legal information professionals are becoming the most tech-savvy individuals when it comes to being able to research and pinpoint content, more than almost anyone else in a law school or law firm.

How can industry professionals stay current on the latest topics being discussed in law schools and other educational outlets?

The first thing to do is to attend industry conferences. In the legal industry, the two conferences one should absolutely attend are the American Association of Law Schools (AALS) Annual Meeting and the American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) Annual Meeting. Each hosts numerous discussions and workshops on education, and from there, individuals can dive deep into topics that interest them.

What low-cost educational resources could you recommend for legal information professionals?

Today, there are more avenues than ever before in which to obtain additional legal education. With the proliferation of online courses allowing students to take classes anywhere and at any time, students can further their education with ease and flexibility. Additionally, more and more law schools are offering Masters in Jurisprudence programs or courses allowing virtually anyone, whether they have a law degree or not, to advance their legal knowledge for

career growth. Both paths are being delivered and taught by a variety of approved institutions. Students can research to find the course that best fits with their budget.

Has social media changed the way educational information is shared in the industry?

I think about this all of the time. Today, when people use social media, it is exactly that—social, and not serious. What we at Casebriefs have found is that when it comes to serious topics or serious aspects of a person's life, people tend not to use social media, opting for a more serious type of sharing solution, such as email.

However, we have found that the use of a planned Twitter chat, for instance, has resonated well with students. We may host, with other well-known organizations, a Twitter chat on how to best prepare for final exams, or a chat on resume tips for getting a job. Social media can work in a serious environment as long as it is well planned, meaningful, and discussion topics are of high interest to the target audience.

With so much online education available, do you feel there is still a market for in-person education?

When it comes to core discipline courses, there is no substitute for in-person instruction. More and more, we are seeing graduate education, and especially legal education, focus on the practical nature of law, rather than a complete focus on the theoretical and academic nature of legal education. By far, I believe there is no substitute to having an experienced practitioner teach a course and inspire class participation. It is a more engaging and meaningful experience both for the student and the professor.

That being said, there certainly are times when online education fulfills a certain need. We are seeing more law schools advertise their online courses via the Casebriefs site. We are seeing more and more classes from various law schools being offered online, primarily elective courses that students at

accredited law schools can take through another law school and still obtain the same amount of school credit. This allows students to take courses in which they are truly interested, helping them make better decisions based on where their interests lie with regard to practice after graduation.

What does the future of education in the legal information industry look like?

By attending all AALS, AALL, and other educational conferences, as well as watching the habits of higher education students today, I can safely say that legal education is going through a wonderful transformation. Ironically, one of the first industries to evolve into a digital work environment was the legal industry. Today, it is much more typical for law firms to perform research online than to use printed books.

What is missing is the focal point source of law students' education; the casebook. However, some of the major casebook publishers have recently started offering their books in a digital format. Once the professors can wrap their arms around the digital textbook, legal education will become more in tune with today's legal industry. Thankfully, publishers have been offering digital textbooks to law professors, and some, especially the younger professors, are adopting the digital book.

Once the bulk of teaching content is available digitally, students from all over the world will be able to take advantage of online courses without any deficiency, compared to the course being taught on campus in a physical classroom. The 'new' classroom will be completely digital. ■



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