Pay Attention to Cyberlaw

by M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP
CTO, School of Graduate Studies
Norwich University, Northfield VT

How many times have you had to gabble, “I-am-not-a-lawyer-and-this-is-not-legal-advice.-For-legal-advice,-consult-an-attorney-with-expertise-in-this-area-of-the-law?” Regrettably often abbreviated “IANAL,” which raises entirely different questions about the writer, this phrase is often used when non-lawyers are discussing legal issues. The hideously-formatted Word DOC file<http://www.wsba.org/Lawyers/groups/practiceoflaw/uplcomplaintinfotrifold403.doc> from the Washington State Practice of Law Board that I found thanks to an article in the Wikipedia<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/IANAL> (NO, students, you may NOT use Wikipedia as a primary reference – this is a reference to one of the citations that I downloaded personally and read for myself) makes it clear that the unauthorized practice of law is illegal in Washington State – as it is elsewhere in the United States. Don’t give people legal advice if you are not their lawyer and definitely not if you are not a lawyer.

Incidentally, for any readers who actually do discuss legal affairs on their Web sites and blogs, there’s an excellent review of legal constraints on such services from Margaret Hensler Nicholls in the Summer 2005 issue of the Georgetown Journal of Legal Ethics.<http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3975/is_200507/ai_n14684366>

However, not being a lawyer does not absolve us from knowing about basics of the law in the jurisdictions where we work. At a minimum, IA professionals need to be familiar with elements of criminal law such as definitions of cybercrimes, proper procedures for collaborating effectively with law enforcement officials, methods of collecting and preserving data as evidence that can successfully be used in criminal trials, and intellectual property law. I have recently updated my narrated overview lectures on these topics (with a US perspective) and hope that readers will find them useful:

- Introduction to cyberlaw and jurisdiction (125 MB)
  PPT in ZIP<http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/msia/msia_s1_w07_cyberlaw_ppt.zip>
  PPSX in ZIP<http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/msia/msia_s1_w07_cyberlaw_ppsx.zip>

- Introduction to intellectual property law (109 MB)
  PPT in ZIP<http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/msia/msia_s1_w08_ip_law_ppt.zip>
  PPSX in ZIP<http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/msia/msia_s1_w08_ip_law_ppsx.zip>

In addition, there are many useful materials including US Department of Justice guidelines on handling electronic crime scenes freely available for anyone to download in my undergraduate CJ341 lecture pages.<http://www.mekabay.com/courses/academic/norwich/cj341/lectures/lectures.htm>

Readers may find the following texts helpful in studying cyberlaw:


In my next column, I’ll point readers to the single most valuable research tool in following developments in law that affect IA (or any aspect of law): the Cornell Law School Legal Information Institute (LII). <http://www4.law.cornell.edu>

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M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP <mailto:mekabay@gmail.com> specializes in security and operations management consulting services. CV online. <http://www.mekabay.com/cv/>

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