

WATCHING THE DIGITAL RADAR WITH GOOGLE NEWS ALERTS

By Sharon D. Nelson, Esq. and John W. Simek
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What is the world saying about you? About your law firm? About your partners? About your clients? One of our favorite legal technology tips involves the savvy use of Google News Alerts.

Here is Sharon's story of how she became a "true believer." Several years ago, my good friend, computer forensics technologist Craig Ball, sent me an e-mail of congratulations for an article that quoted me and had been published online. It was a well known publication, so I didn't think too much about it. A short time later, he sent me another e-mail, this time congratulating me on being quoted in a small time rural newspaper. At that point, I realized that my buddy Craig was "watching me" through the use of Google News Alerts. Since Craig is truly one of the original "whiz kids" and often reads the future in his tea leaves, I decided to check out Google News Alerts for myself – and I've never looked back – this is one of the smartest moves I ever made.

These days, we both routinely use these news alerts, checking on them first thing every morning. So, why is this a jewel of a tip for lawyers?

Just consider the power of Google, which goes around hoovering up enormous quantities of data each day – and analyzing them so **you don't have to**. Many, many thousands of sites are trolled while you sleep, with relevant information provided to you as often as you desire. Through these news alerts, which can also be set (and should be set) to cover blogs, you can do all of the following:

- 1) First and foremost, enter your own name as a keyword – you certainly want to know what the world is saying about you!
- 2) Keep a weather eye on what competing law firm are doing.
- 3) Enter the names of the firm partners – there is very likely things they are doing you should know about – and perhaps things being said about them they would want to know about.
- 4) Do you have highly proprietary data of significant clients? Enter keywords – you'd be surprised how often proprietary data shows up in blogs – just ask Steve Jobs at Apple, whose R&D beans were spilled left and right not long ago.
- 5) If your have a well known product they're selling, you'll want to watch what is being said about it – and perhaps watch for knock-offs.
- 6) Trying to follow legislation in a particular area? Enter keywords designed to return those stories.
- 7) Keep up with development in any area of law especially relevant to your firm by entering the appropriate terms. As an example, we watch (among many others) "computer forensics," "electronic evidence" and "Sedona Conference" (an e-evidence think tank).

- 8) See what your return on investment is for your marketing – if you send out a press release, enter identifying terms for it and see how often it appears in blogs and on the Net generally.
- 9) If your firm is involved in a lawsuit, identifying words that would elicit those materials can be invaluable.
- 10) Are there experts in your area of law who are always, always worth reading? Plug in their names too.
- 11) We all know what mischief ex-employees can create. It's a good idea to track them for a while, especially if they are disgruntled ex-employees.
- 12) Sometimes, it's not people you want to watch, but places. If you have an office in Peru, news from there may be instructive.

Use the above suggestions as a springboard to think about other things that you might want to keep an eye on. You'll be happily surprised to find that you have at your fingertips the most important currency of all – information – in your Inbox each morning. We spend the first 10-15 minutes of each day looking at the Google results, deleting all but the nuggets of gold we intend to use.

On the personal side, you can monitor your favorite celebrities, sport teams, or anything else that catches your fancy. Alas, all work and no play make this Jack and Jill dull children – our terms are strictly business – but go wherever your imagination takes you!

These alerts can be a tad erratic at times – you won't necessarily get everything you should and someone else with the same alerts will sometimes get different results. We've given up trying to figure out why since there seems to be no rhyme or reason to the differences. However, it is still the best gadget going for tracking specific news.

Here's the big payoff – you are going to look brilliant. You are going to have a rich resource of information that you can pass along to your partners, in-house counsel that you routinely work with, colleagues etc. You immediately become the “in-the-know” person that folks rely on for current information. And Google does the heavy lifting for you. What a deal!

While it is child's play to a technologist to get started with Google News Alerts, we know that many of you reading this are not technologists. So here is the ABC version of how to get started – you'll be off and running in no time.

How to Set Up a Google News Alert

Thanks to our legal assistant, Nicole Kolinski, who put together the screen shots below.

1) Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts> - don't fear the word “Beta” – these alerts have been around since 2003! We guess that they are still perfecting the model.

[FAQ](#) | [Sign in](#)

Google Alerts (BETA)

Welcome to Google Alerts

Google Alerts are email updates of the latest relevant Google results (web, news, etc.) based on your choice of query or topic.

Some handy uses of Google Alerts include:

- monitoring a developing news story
- keeping current on a competitor or industry
- getting the latest on a celebrity or event
- keeping tabs on your favorite sports teams

Create an alert with the form on the right.

You can also [sign in to manage your alerts](#)

Create a Google Alert

Enter the topic you wish to monitor.

Search terms:

Type:

How often:

Your email:

Google will not sell or share your email address.

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2) Fill in information

Google Alert

Enter the topic you wish to monitor.

Search terms:

Type:

How often:

Your email:

Google will not sell or share your email address.

in the box on the right – what terms should be searched, what type of search, how often the search should be done (we prefer daily searches over weekly or “as it happens” searches), and a valid e-mail address. You can ask for just “News”, as Nicole did, but our preference is to ask for both News and Blogs (called ‘comprehensive’) by using the pull-down arrow.

3) Once all the boxes are filled out, click the “Create Alert” button at the bottom. The following confirmation page will come up.

[FAQ](#) | [Sign in](#)

Google Alerts (BETA)

Google Alert Created

Your Google Alert request [North Carolina Tar Heel Basketball] has been created and a verification email has been sent to nkolin1@gmail.com.

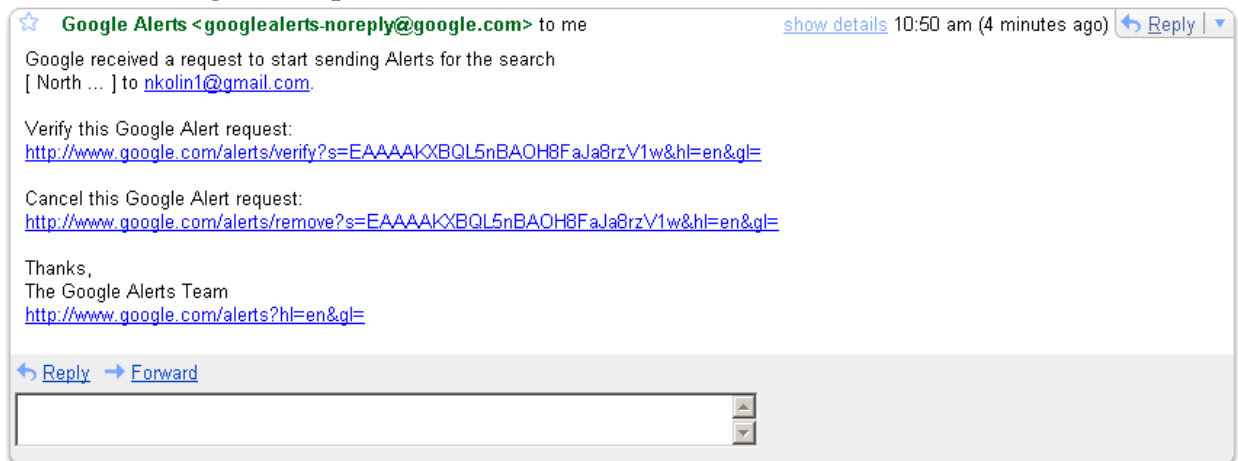
You will not receive Google Alerts on this topic until you click the link in the verification email and confirm your request.

Return to the [Google Alerts](#) home page to create more alerts.

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4) An e-mail like this one will appear in your inbox.

Click to confirm your Google Alert [Inbox](#)



5) Once you click on the confirm link, it will take you to the following page.



6) Your new Google Alert should be all set and ready to go!

A few helpful links which provide further information:

All the information from Google itself:

<http://www.googleguide.com/alerts.html>

An informative news article about how to limit your searches:

<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=32&aid=43832>

Wikipedia article on Google Alerts:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Alerts

Managing your alerts is a piece of cake – you go into “Manage Your Alerts”, see all the alerts you have on a single screen, and delete, add or edit at will. Truly a thing of beauty – even a true technophobe will have no problem. If you want to get really fancy, you can limit your searches by source, or country – you can also search for exact phrases or exclude words that might make your search too broad. Play around a bit and you’ll tailor this nifty tool to your own needs.

Another good hint – create a rule in your e-mail software that will automatically move these alerts to a separate folder in your Inbox. Being very ingenious, we cleverly dubbed ours “Alerts.” This will help to keep your Inbox clear and, consequently, will keep your smartphone from buzzing or making noises at you as well.

Ready . . . set . . . go! With a few minutes of work, you'll have everything you need to monitor on your digital radar. Go knock their socks off you brainiac!

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