

# Luminaries of the Canadian blawgosphere

*Canadian Lawyer's* technology columnist's top 10 law-related blogs range widely in style and content.

BY GERRY BLACKWELL

A few years ago, blawging — blogging by lawyers — was almost unheard of. Now dozens are doing it in Canada; scores, possibly hundreds, are doing it in the U.S.

Whether you should be doing it too is a discussion for another column. Here I tackle the question: which Canadian blawgs should I be reading?

The answer will depend of course on your legal interests. Not all areas are covered, but many are. Start with the Canadian Law Blogs List ([www.lawblogs.ca](http://www.lawblogs.ca)), a web directory maintained by former law librarian Steve Matthews, founder and principal of Stem Legal, a web consulting firm.

I've picked my top 10. They range widely in style and content, though technology and internet law inevitably dominate. Tech-savvy practitioners are more likely to blog.

How did I choose? What makes a good blog? The blogger has to be consistent, posting at least weekly. (Some at [lawblogs.ca](http://lawblogs.ca) haven't posted since 2005, but a few post more than once a day.) The writing has to be lively and the site well designed — admittedly subjective measures. Posts should not be dissertations — a common failing among some Canadian blawgers — and the blog should be focused. If it's about family law, don't tell us about your vacation.

Finally, most blogs should engage readers and foster discussion. It must be

easy to post and read comments. A few Canadian blawgers inexplicably don't accept comments.

When dipping into a new blawg, I count comments. The more there are, I figure, the more people are reading — a sure sign of a blawg worth reading — and the greater the chances of lively exchanges. That being said, absence of comments, as we'll see, doesn't necessarily mean a dull or worthless blog.

So, my top 10, in no particular order:

## MICHAEL GEIST

([www.michaelgeist.ca](http://www.michaelgeist.ca))

Geist is a University of Ottawa law professor specializing in privacy, copyright, and internet law. His blog is a must-read for lawyers interested or involved in these fields. Geist has been blawging longer than almost anyone in Canada — in one form or another since 1998 — and he's prolific. He doesn't necessarily post every day, but he does most days, sometimes more than once. The site is professionally organized and copiously linked, and it's a rare post that doesn't garner multiple comments. His seminal post, "My Fair Copyright for Canada Principles" (posted Jan. 17), elicited almost 40 responses within five days.

## LAW21

([www.law21.ca](http://www.law21.ca))

Subtitled "Dispatches from a legal profession on the brink," this is a relatively

new blog (launched Jan. 7) by Jordan Furlong. He's the editor-in-chief of the *National* magazine but his blog is unrelated to the publication. It covers trends in the business and culture of lawyering. A sampling of posts in one five-day period: new lawyers graduating into recession; *Avocats Sans Frontières*; new approaches to compensating associates; a young, debt-laden law school grad who now tries to talk others out of joining the paper chase. Posts are consistently well written, and, despite being so new, the blog is already pulling comments.

## LAW FIRM WEB STRATEGY

([www.stemlegal.com/strategyblog](http://www.stemlegal.com/strategyblog))

The blog site of Stem Legal, Steve Matthews' firm. Most of the time, it covers exactly what its name suggests: law firm marketing using the internet. Matthews blogs about once a week. When he sticks to the knitting, he provides lively reading and interesting discussion points — as with posts on guerilla marketing for law firms, use of RSS feeds, and sponsoring web sites. But he also sometimes posts filler, such as the egregious "'Twas the Night Before Christmas" parody, which he didn't even write himself. Gong!

## eLEGAL

([www.canton.elegal.ca](http://www.canton.elegal.ca))

Long-time blawger David Canton, of Harrison Pensa LLP in London, Ont.,

specializes in privacy, copyright, and technology law in general. Canton co-authored *Legal Landmines in E-Commerce* and writes a weekly column on business law for the local daily, *The London Free Press*. The blog, like his column, is aimed primarily at the lay public and clients, which is probably the reason it doesn't generate the kind of reader exchange the best of the more professionally focused blogs do. Canton posts at least once a week, including republication of his *Free Press* columns. I like his clear style of writing and open-handed treatment of issues.

## SLAW

([www.slaw.ca](http://www.slaw.ca))

Most blogs are very personal, which is part of their appeal. *Slaw*, a co-op effort, proves that sometimes many heads are better than one. Covering legal research, information, and technology, it offers the best of two worlds: the many voices of a commercial periodical, and the immediacy and personality of a blog. The stellar cast of regulars includes Heenan Blaikie LLP partner and veteran legal-tech champion Simon Chester; Ted Tjaden, the director of knowledge management at McMillan Binch Mendelsohn LLP; and Osgoode Hall professor emeritus Simon Fodden. A few moonlight as solo blawgers — Steve Matthews, Jordan Furlong, Connie Crosby. One big advantage of many heads: somebody posts at *Slaw* every day, usually more than one. And most draw comments and discussion.

## THE BIZOP NEWS

([www.bizop.ca/blog2](http://www.bizop.ca/blog2))

Talk about a tight focus. Michael J. Webster, a young sole practitioner in Toronto, does commercial litigation focusing primarily on franchise and distributorship law — and writes about it. If this obscure corner of the law concerns you, *BizOp News* is the place to come. Webster posts almost daily, commenting on material from American colleagues' sites and other sources, and throwing in his own advice and ideas. The blog doesn't garner much reader response yet, but it

is very new — launched last November — and very specialized.

## TORONTO ESTATE LAW BLOG

([estatelaw.hullandhull.com](http://estatelaw.hullandhull.com))

A model for how to use a blog to promote your practice. From Hull & Hull LLP, a Toronto boutique firm specializing in estate law, the blog is part of a larger web-savvy marketing program that includes regular podcasts. It looks to be aimed at clients first — other lawyers second — by offering a mix of generic legal advice, commentary on case law and other developments, and promotion of the podcasts. The lawyers take turns, and there's generally at least one post a day. Quality of writing varies but it's always literate, if not scintillating. I don't see many comments but that may be a function of the client focus.

## LAW IS COOL

([www.lawiscool.com](http://www.lawiscool.com))

Launched last year by a group of Canadian law students, this is another impressive example of the many heads approach. *Law is Cool's* primary audience is other students, both current and aspiring (see *Law21* post referenced above). The authors hope it will also help young lawyers preparing for bar exams, as well as the general public. The almost-daily posts, of varying but generally quite decent quality, range from the humorous ("Chimps Decry Discrimination") to the brief and informational (new QuickCITE feature in LexisNexis) to serious legal commentary and analysis (use of CCTV cameras, striking down of the Safe Third Country Agreement).

## LIBRARY BOY

([micheladrien.blogspot.com](http://micheladrien.blogspot.com))

*Library Boy* is Michel Adrien, a former journalist and researcher and now reference librarian at the Supreme Court of Canada. He covers "law library news" and generally stays focused. Adrien posts prolifically — sometimes more than once a day — with more information than analysis. Notices (many of which

include commentary) of new reports, articles, and books available at the SCC library — and elsewhere — are a mainstay. The writing is clear and the site is cleanly designed and well set up, using a Google Blogger template. It doesn't draw a lot of reader response but looks to be an invaluable resource for other librarians and lawyers.

## RULE OF LAW

([rulelaw.blogspot.com](http://rulelaw.blogspot.com))

Kelowna, B.C., sole practitioner Stan Rule has been blawging since 2005, covering "British Columbia wills, trusts and estates law, elder law, and estate litigation." The intended audience appears to be both clients and colleagues. Rule analyzes and comments on recent cases, usually with a B.C. or western focus; talks about the local/regional judicial scene (personalities, etc.); and offers advice on estate planning and other things. He posts every few days. The writing is a little too earnest and workmanlike to draw a huge readership — comments are sparse — but the content appears solid, and the site, created in Google's Blogger, is attractive. 