

FCC.gov

AT A GLANCE

The FCC has created one of the federal government's most extensive Web sites, and it has many uses. It is the primary vehicle for broadcasters to file various documents with the commission.

It also can be used to:

- View and read the Daily Digest news briefing;
- Obtain copies of documents the commission releases;
- Get copies of applications and pleadings submitted by others and filed electronically with the commission;
- Access various FCC databases;
- Gather information and obtain authorizations;
- Acquire forms;
- Check the status of applications through the ever-increasing number of hyperlinks available on the site.



THE FIRST OF
A TWO-PART
SERIES ON HOW
TO UNEARTH
VALUABLE
INFORMATION
AND RESOURCES
MAINTAINED
AT THE FCC'S
WEB SITE.

MINING THE ONLINE MOTHER LODE

By ERWIN G. KRASNOW & COLIN B. ANDREWS

THE FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION IS ADEPT AT producing prodigious amounts of paper, and for decades it has been a worthy customer of the Government Printing Office. But due to the rise, complexity and increasing utility of the Internet, much of the commission's commerce has moved online.

If you have business to conduct with the commission, unfamiliarity with the electronic transactional environment in which the FCC operates can severely hamper your efficiency, or worse, place you at a serious disadvantage. But you can solve that problem by learning what kind of information can be found at FCC.gov and the most efficient ways to access it.

The following is a primer on how to mine all the nuggets of news and resources on the site. We're following up with a tutorial on navigating the FCC's application filing systems and electronic databases in the January/February 2015 issue of *TFM*.

Almost anything a broadcaster needs to know about the commission's rules and regulations is available on the FCC's site. In fact, there's so much there that a senior FCC official has suggested that before calling a member of the commission's staff for information, one would be well advised to visit the site first. The answers to many questions are readily available. That advice also holds true for

communications lawyers that represent broadcasters.

Even for individuals who do not consider themselves "Internet fluent," the FCC site is relatively easy to use. After devoting a few minutes to reviewing the site's organization – and reading this article – chances are you will be able to find the information that you seek. However, bear in mind that the site is a "work in

progress” that is continually being updated, maintained and otherwise improved.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Type the FCC’s address, <http://www.fcc.gov>, into your Web browsing software, for example, Google Chrome or Internet Explorer. When your computer loads the commission’s homepage you will see several links to various FCC bureaus and offices, the most recent headlines involving the commission, a list of upcoming events and a list on the right side of the page called “Quick Links” that allows you to easily access the most useful portions of the site.

If you are unfamiliar with the site, explore the layout of the homepage. Start in the upper left hand corner and scan your cursor left to right, top to bottom. It works like conventional Web sites; anywhere that you move your cursor and get a hand symbol you can get information. When you find what you’re looking for, click the link, and your browser will take you there. If you follow a link and it takes you somewhere you didn’t want to go, click the back button on your browser and it will take you to the previous page. If that does not work, and in some cases it will not, look for and click on the FCC Home hyperlink.

Among the more useful tools is an updated staff directory. For example, if you wanted to locate contact information for Peter Doyle, chief of the Media Bureau’s audio division, you would start with the heading on the horizontal navigation bar at the top of the homepage that says “The FCC,” and then click “Find People.”

That takes you the “Finding People at the FCC” page. If you type “Peter” in the “Name To Search For” box (with or without quotation marks) and click the submit button, the search engine will find every occurrence of the name Peter in the FCC’s phone book, even if it is embedded in another word. You can also search by last name, so if you type “Doyle” in the “Name To Search For” box your search will be streamlined.

ABOUT THE FCC

You might also want to get general information on how the FCC functions. On the homepage you’ll find a dropdown menu at the top called “Our Work.” Click on the link labeled “What We Do.” That takes you to a page giving a broad overview of the FCC’s activities and how it is organized. If you are interested in learning

about the commission’s management structure, look at the FCC’s Organizational Chart, which is available on this page.

At the top of the left margin, you will find a box labeled “search.” It will enable you to find information using words, call signs and types of documents (for example “Open Proceedings”) or other keywords that might be located within a document.

The search engine will bring up information from the public areas of the site that meets your criteria and, considering a number of factors, ranks it on the basis of the probability that it is what you’re looking for.

An especially useful function of the search bar is to find FCC documents that mention a station’s call letters. Simply type the call letters of your station, or your competitor’s, into the search function; click the magnify-

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ing glass symbol at the end of the search bar, and the page will load all the FCC documents that mention it.

You might be interested in finding out what’s holding up the processing of one of your station’s applications. If so, look at Broadcast Radio AM and FM Application Statuses. This information can be found by scrolling over the heading that says “Our Work” and clicking “FCC Encyclopedia.”

The Encyclopedia is filled with useful guides arranged in alphabetical order. To look for the “Broadcast Radio AM and FM Application Status Lists,” scroll through the “B” section of the encyclopedia until you find that link. Click on it, and you’ll access a page containing various broadcast status lists. Click the blocked and/or unblocked status report links and scroll down until you find what you’re looking for.

Make sure to bookmark this page as well as any other that you’ll be returning to on a periodic basis. It will create a direct link to that information, so you won’t have to search for it again – at least until the FCC replaces it with one that’s new and improved.

In addition to pages for the commission

bureaus and offices, the FCC commissioners have their own homepages within the FCC site. Although they differ, they generally contain the commissioner’s statements, speeches, biographies, initiatives, identification of staff members and other useful information.

DAILY DIGEST

Each day the FCC publishes a summary of its business activities in the Daily Digest news summary. It is an important feature of the site, and can be found listed in the “Quick Links” section of the FCC homepage. The Daily Digest contains a list of documents and public notices released by the FCC as well as information on how to receive the Daily Digest by e-mail.

There is a link to the full text of the document under each caption of the FCC release listed in the online Daily Digest. If you are looking for a document and know the date it was released, you can browse for it by clicking the link “Previous Issues Daily Digests.” Additionally, you can use the “Search EDOCS” link (which refers to the Electronic Document Management System) to search a database of Daily Digest entries for FCC documents placed on the site since 1996.

From the Daily Digest page, you can also access a “Recent Releases” page. It is constantly updated and contains a list of FCC action summaries posted in chronological order. Each summary has a link to the full document. This can be a useful tool for finding any of the following materials: FCC headlines, Congressional hearings of interest to the FCC, periodic lists of filings in docketed proceedings and ex parte notices, the FCC calendar and the FCC Open Meeting agenda, statements by FCC commissioners and commission rulings on various broadcast matters.

Stay tuned for “Part 2” of this series in the next issue of *TFM*. We will provide step-by-step guidance on the FCC’s online filing systems and aspects of doing research on matters relating to radio and TV stations.

This article originally appeared in RBR/TVBR and is reprinted in revised form with permission.

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