



Citizen Media Law Project Completes Launch of Online Guide to Media Law

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Cambridge, MA – July 29, 2008 – The Citizen Media Law Project (CMLP) announced today that it has completed the launch of its Citizen Media Legal Guide, located at <http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide>. The free guide, which is intended for use by bloggers, website operators, and other citizen media creators, focuses on the legal issues that non-traditional and traditional journalists are likely to encounter as they gather information and publish their work online.

“We’ve created the legal guide to address the myriad legal issues faced by online publishers, whether they are bloggers, citizen journalists, or established journalism organizations. Because many online publishers don’t have a background in media law, we have tried to make the guide as approachable as possible and included dozens of practical tips for avoiding legal liability,” said David Ardia, director and co-founder of the CMLP, an initiative to provide legal assistance, education, and resources for citizen media and to study the impact of law on online journalism.

The legal guide, which runs more than 575 pages, is funded by the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation. It covers the 15 most populous U.S. states and the District of Columbia and is broken into six major sections:

- [Forming a Business and Getting Online](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/forming-business-and-getting-online) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/forming-business-and-getting-online>), which covers the practical issues online publishers should consider in deciding how to carry on their publishing activities, including forming a for-profit and nonprofit business entity, choosing an online platform, and dealing with critical legal issues relating to the mechanics of online publishing;
- [Dealing with Online Legal Risks](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/dealing-online-legal-risks) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/dealing-online-legal-risks>), which covers managing a website and reducing legal risks through compliance with the Digital Millennium Copyright Act and other laws, finding insurance, finding legal help, and responding to legal threats;
- [Newsgathering and Privacy](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/newsgathering-and-privacy) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/newsgathering-and-privacy>), which addresses the legal and practical issues citizen media creators may encounter as they gather documents, take photographs or video, and collect other information, including information on state shield laws and using confidential sources;

- [Access to Government Information](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/access-government-information) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/access-government-information>), which provides information for citizens to proactively use the law in an affirmative manner to enhance their reporting and highlights the extensive amount of information available through government sources and explains how both traditional and non-traditional journalists can use various public access laws, including the Freedom of Information Act, state open records and open meetings laws to gather and make effective use of government information;
- [Intellectual Property](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/intellectual-property) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/intellectual-property>), which explains various intellectual property concepts, including copyright, trademark, and trade secrets, and provides practical advice to online publishers about how to use the intellectual property of others and protect their own property from exploitation; and
- [Risks Associated with Publication](http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/risks-associated-publication) (<http://www.citmedialaw.org/legal-guide/risks-associated-publication>), which covers defamation law, privacy law, rights of publicity, and other legal risks that can arise from public distribution of content. This section also explains the legal risks associated with the publication of reader comments and other user-submitted material.

The legal guide follows the successful launch in November 2007 of the CMLP's [Legal Threats Database](#), an interactive compendium of legal threats directed at online speech. The database contains more than 350 lawsuits, subpoenas, and other types of legal threats from 40 states and 12 countries. These threats range from copyright infringement lawsuits filed against bloggers to cease-and-desist letters claiming defamation sent to MySpace users. Visitors to the CMLP's website can input new threat entries, comment on existing threats, and search the database in a number of ways, including by location, legal claim, publication medium, and content type.

“As more journalists, whether professional or non-professional, begin to practice their craft online we hope that they can turn to the CMLP's legal guide and legal threats database to help them understand the legal environment they are operating in,” David Ardia commented.

About the Citizen Media Law Project

The Citizen Media Law Project, which is jointly affiliated with the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School and the Center for Citizen Media, has five primary objectives: legal education and training; collection and analysis of legal threats; litigation referral, consultation, and representation; community building; and advocacy on behalf of citizen media. It was the recipient of a 2007 John S. and James L. Knight Foundation News Challenge grant. For more information, visit <http://www.citmedialaw.org>.

About the Berkman Center for Internet & Society

The Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University is proud to celebrate its tenth year as a research program founded to explore cyberspace, share in its study, and help pioneer its development. Founded in 1997, through a generous gift from Jack N. and Lillian R. Berkman, the Center is home to an ever-growing community of faculty, fellows, staff, and affiliates working on projects that span the broad range of intersections between cyberspace, technology, and society. More information can be found at <http://cyber.law.harvard.edu>.

About the Center for Citizen Media

The Center for Citizen Media, which is co-sponsored by Arizona State University's Walter Cronkite School of Journalism & Mass Communication and the Berkman Center, aims to understand, enhance, and expand grassroots journalism and its reach. Since its 2005 launch, the CCM has initiated a number of projects including a survey of how traditional media organizations are bringing their audiences into the journalism process and a directory of citizen media projects and tools. More information can be found at <http://www.citmedia.org>.

About the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation

The John S. and James L. Knight Foundation promotes journalism excellence worldwide and invests in the vitality of the U.S. communities where the Knight brothers owned newspapers. Since 1950 the foundation has granted more than \$300 million to advance journalism quality and freedom of expression. The Knight Foundation supports ideas and projects that create transformational change. For more information, visit <http://www.knightfdn.org>.

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