

JUSTNET

NIJ's Gateway to Criminal Justice Technology Information

It all began in Charleston, S.C., at a June 1995 meeting of the Charleston Corrections Technology Subcommittee. Practitioners from across the country, from all different facets of corrections, came together and realized that they shared the same wish: They wanted a real-time information network that would enable them to trade information with fellow correctional practitioners across the country.

And so, the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) set out to give practitioners what they wanted. That afternoon, after the meeting had ended, members of NIJ's Office of Science and Technology and the staff of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology centers came together to sketch the blueprints of what would become the Justice Technology Information Network (JUSTNET). The project built on an earlier effort to establish a network for sharing technology information, which staff had begun planning the previous year.

Just four months later, JUSTNET was online. It began providing state, local and federal law enforcement and correctional agencies with technology information via the Internet and the World Wide Web. Since its inception, JUSTNET has developed into a valuable technology information tool for the criminal justice community. More than 10,000 users per month access information on new technologies, technology equipment and other products and services available to the law enforcement, corrections and criminal justice communities. Under the direction of NIJ, JUSTNET is maintained by the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center (NLECTC) system.

Recently, the JUSTNET site was redesigned to provide easier, more direct connections to specific aspects of criminal justice, such as "corrections" and "courts." In the future, video capability and graphics will be enhanced.

What is JUSTNET?

JUSTNET was designed as a "one-stop shop" for law enforcement and corrections technology information. It provides easy, online access to technology information, and enables users to receive information on initiatives sponsored by NIJ's Office of Science and Technology, make connections to NLECTC regional centers and offices, link to other criminal justice Web sites, and examine the home pages of manufacturers of law enforcement and corrections products.

Chat Line. Users can carry on interactive, online dialog through JUSTNET's chat line option by posting comments or questions for other users who can see and respond to them instantly.

Topic Board. JUSTNET also enables users to post electronic "sticky noses" under a variety of specific topics. Other users can then post their replies, allowing the development of information "threads" over an extended period.

For those in law enforcement or corrections, practitioners, JUSTNET provides topic boards with password protection. These users can find instructions on obtaining a password to restricted areas at the end of JUSTNET's registration page.

Data and Publications Services. Interested parties can access a database of commercially available law enforcement and corrections products and technologies. On-screen instructions and a keyword search guide users to the product and manufacturer information they need.

For registered law enforcement and corrections users, search results automatically link them to information provided by agencies that have used those products, product tests or evaluations on file with NLECTC and recall information.

Also, recent NIJ and NLECTC publications, as well as standards and testing information, can be accessed through JUSTNET. Publications with hypertext links may be viewed online as text or downloaded to a computer.

Accessing JUSTNET

JUSTNET is available as an Internet/World Wide Web site, so users need to establish an Internet/Web connection before accessing it. Most users who access JUSTNET are law enforcement practitioners themselves, and much of the information they obtain deals with technology equipment product information.

Because of the popularity of personal computers these days, many corrections professionals opt to access the Internet at home. Accessing the Internet through a local university or college may be another option. Many educational institutions have direct Internet links and may allow criminal justice professionals access through their facilities.

City and state governments are increasingly putting computer networks in place to serve their public safety agencies. Although access may be limited at some facilities, checking a facility's computer support department can let potential users know if their correctional agency has access to the Internet.

Users can connect to JUSTNET via modem, through commercial services such as America Online, CompuServe, Microsoft Network and Prodigy. Available in most areas of the country, these commercial services provide access to the World Wide Web.

Web Browser Requirements. A browser is the way a computer looks for information and presents it to the user from the Web. Commercially available Web browsers, such as Mosaic and Netscape, often are included with the Internet connection service at no charge, or at an additional charge offering a number of extra features. Almost any browser will work with JUSTNET.

System Requirements. In addition to offering access to an unending source of information from throughout the world, the popularity of the Web is due to its user-friendly design and its ability to provide color graphics, photographs and even sound and video. However, such graphic operations require newer computers with sufficient speed and memory. Slower, older equipment can work on the Web, but it cannot download graphics files. Graphics downloading is normally an optional selection of the Web browser.

Navigating JUSTNET

Once the user makes an Internet connection and has a browser, JUSTNET is only a few keystrokes or mouse clicks away. Most browsers allow the user to type in a "URL" (Uniform Resource Locator). The URL is the address where a home page resides. JUSTNET's address is: <http://www.nlectc.org>. By typing

in this address and pressing enter, correctional practitioners quickly can be connected to JUSTNET. Once JUSTNET has been accessed, corrections professionals may want to add it to a "Hot List." The Hot List is a listing of Web sites a person wants to visit most often. It provides a shortcut to finding JUSTNET in the future without having to remember the URL address.

On JUSTNET's home page, some text is presented in a color other than black. This color highlighting indicates hypertext links. By clicking on the hypertext, a user can jump to another JUSTNET information area or to another Web home page, but still maintain the link back to the starting point.

Users must register with JUSTNET when entering the Interactive Services area for the first time. A short, simple procedure, this registration allows NLECTC to track usage and provide assistance to users. Anyone may register and use the interactive services area. However, a separate section for criminal justice practitioners only is maintained to support the needs of that community. During registration, a notice advises criminal justice professionals how to register their status and obtain an access password. Despite having password protection, this section should not be considered fully protected. Users are asked not to post or exchange operational information which may be sensitive in nature.

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Kevin Jackson is the NIJ Centers program manager. If you have questions about JUSTNET or need assistance, call the NLECTC Hotline at 1-800-248-2742.

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