# Beyond Google: Quality Research for Policy Decisions

Pepper Sturm
Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau

## Between Now and Session

- \* Help to fill in the details for BDRs already submitted
- \* Statistics to support your issue
- \* Historical context-what has been tried in the past
- \* Policy questions that may arise
  - \* This helps to frame your issue so you can better explain the potential solutions to the problem

# During the Legislative Session

- \* Assistance with bill introduction remarks
- Policy options
- \* Ideas (concepts) for amendments
- \* Technical data

Our purpose is to provide you with objective, unbiased information – both (or all) sides of an issue; lobbyists and advocates tend to have a point of view



# Time is not on Your Side

Policy Informed by Substance



#### \* Reliance on Other Sources

# "Red-faced People's Daily editor speaks out after falling for 'Sexiest Man' Onion spoof"

An editor on China's Communist Party online newspaper, which fell for a report in the satirical website The Onion, naming Kim Jong-un, the North Korean dictator as the 'Sexiest Man Alive', has said he hoped the incident would not draw too much attention. [Excerpt from London Telegraph]

# Avoiding a Train Wreck

- Quick and dirty web Searches are often dated or inaccurate;
- Most open sites do not target significant policy matters; and
- Authority and objectivity may be unknown at best or suspect at worst.



What's Important?



### LIMITATIONS OF GOOGLE

- \* Scope Issues Surface Web versus Deep Web
  - Google only searches the Surface Web or Open Web.
  - Deep (or invisible) Web is <u>500 times</u> larger than the surface web.
  - Deep Web cannot be searched by Google or other common search engines.
  - Most of the Deep Web is located in library databases, publisher sites, password protected sites, fee-based sites, etc.

## Limitations of Google (continued)

#### \* Technical Considerations

- Paid sites listed first; and
- Word order matters.

#### \* Search Terms

- Use of the right search terms to obtain the desired results.
- Controlled vocabulary versus free text.

# Example

#### Lemon laws for cars

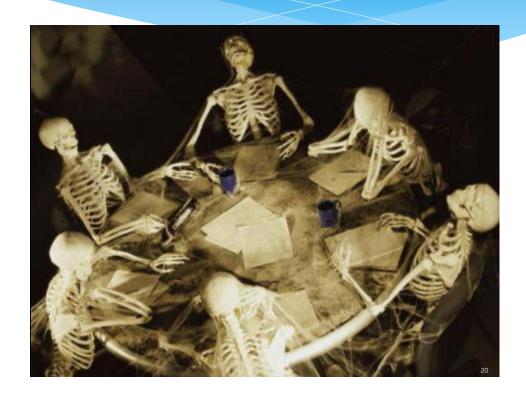
- \* Google produces 23.3 million results for "lemon laws."
- \* State lemon law web site—network of attorneys, conveniently leave out certain statutes; referral to attorneys taking such cases.
- \* The BBB has a site-but Nevada summary is dated 2004 & significant changes were made in 2005.
- \* Adding "cars" to the search narrowed that to 4.9 million hits;
- \* Or wild horses;
- \* Or motorcycle helmet laws.

- We can provide information directly related to policy decisions made by legislators
- \* Take the motorcycle helmet law—NCSL's Transportation Review: Motorcycle Safety report (January 2012), describes recent State actions for helmet laws; safety education; licensing; child passenger laws; and the latest state requirements and NTSB data.

# **Evaluating Sources**

- \* Our Library and policy analysts over time have evaluated sources for:
- \* **C**urrency
- \* Reliability
- \* Authority
- \* Purpose/Point of View

Time is <u>not</u> on Your Side



There is a faster approach

# Ask an Analyst

#### Subject experts know who to talk to, we talk to-

- \* NCSL, Education Commission of the States;
- \* Experts in the field;
- \* Heritage and Brookings Institute;
- \* Agency heads and staff;
- \* We can find the last time this topic came up; and
- \* Inquiries are confidential.

#### Help is Available

Don't hesitate to ask for help Our job is to make you look good

If there is something you need to know, we will tell you



