

COMPUTERS AND THE LAW
By: Bradley S. Dornish, Esquire
Dornish & Scolieri, P.C

Part 1 - Bankruptcy and Federal Courts

The PACER service is designed to provide people with easy access to Federal District Court and Bankruptcy Court information. PACER stands for "Public Access to Court Electronic Records."

The system allows the use of a computer and modem to dial into the court, connect to a special public information computer, and request information about a case. The system can provide lists of cases, searched by name, as well as an electronic summary record of any case. The information that you retrieve may be saved or printed.

The system can do the following:

- Track updates to a case of interest -- you can check if anything has happened to one or perhaps several cases you are tracking.
- Obtain a printed summary of a case -- you can retrieve the public summary record of a particular case.
- Research case involvements by name -- for example, you can search for all of the cases where "KJM Manufacturing" is a litigant.
- Obtain slip opinions of court decisions as soon as they are available to the public.

You will need a computer that allows you save download data onto a disk for later review, printing, or even editing. Your computer must also run some type of communication software. You will also need a modem. Use the fastest possible to save time.

The cost of this service is \$.60 per minute of access time, so organize your request and have the correct spellings of all names. PACER billing begins upon a successful login and fees accrue

until the session is terminated by you or there is an abnormal exit. Billing statements are sent out quarterly. The statement is broken down by court and individual login with a client code, time in, time out, and total time for each transaction. PACER accepts Visa, MasterCard and check.

To obtain this service or for further questions, please contact PACER at 1-800-676-6856. PACER will then set up an account for you and send you a login and password to access the service.

Landlords can use the system if your tenant says they've filed bankruptcy to log into the system and see if the bankruptcy is really filed or not. I have done this while the tenant is on the phone, and it can be effective at catching a lie. You can also search the names of prospective tenants to see if they have filed bankruptcy in Western Pa. Make sure you have a social security number especially for common names.

Investors can monitor bankruptcies where investment property may be liquidated to see when the court is scheduling a sale without leaving the comfort of your home or office. If you are planning on buying a property at a foreclosure sale, you can even check at midnight before the sale to see if there was a bankruptcy filed to postpone the sale.