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FCC Unveils E-Filing Upgrades

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As part of the overhaul of its electronic systems, the Commission has launched an enhanced Electronic Comment Filing System – dubbed ECFS 2.0 – providing significantly improved access to docketed materials in the Commission’s files. It’s a long way from the blue and red binders, RIPS and ECFS 1.0.

Preparation for this new and greatly improved system included imaging and indexing full text comments back to 1992. As a result, the on-line public now has the ability to perform full text searches of Commission dockets using a Google search appliance and Boolean search parameters. Finding documents in ECFS has never been easier. Viewing search results is also much more user-friendly, with quick view options and the capability to download search results with links to the documents. (An extra feature: search results can be displayed with all FCC-issued documents listed separately. This speeds up searches for orders and the like that might have been released by the Commission during the course of a multi-year proceeding that attracted hundreds or thousands of public comments and pleadings.)

The comment filing function has also been improved. Batch filing of comments in multiple dockets and/or with multiple attachments is now available. That means that, if you have prepared a single set of comments for inclusion in multiple different proceedings, you can do so in one fell swoop (rather than having to upload the same item over and over again in each of the separate dockets).

If you want to test-drive the system yourself, the Commission encourages you to do so. It has even created dummy dockets (00-2000 and 00-2001) for use in trying out the new system.

The FCC’s electronic overhaul will ultimately reach well beyond the enhanced ECFS system. Already, for example, you may have noticed improvements in other systems (for example, CDBS now allows deletion of individual attachments). And the FCC is now communicating directly with the public on Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and Digg, through RSS feeds, and on topical sites (broadband.gov, internet.gov, FCC.gov/live). RSS Feeds can also be used to follow dockets in ECFS.

As with all things Internet, some caveats are still in order here. If you are planning to file any confidential materials, DON'T use ECFS. Rather, plan to file those the old-fashioned way, on paper, complying with the FCC's filing rules governing such submissions. Also, be aware that the new ECFS system will reject password-protected documents. Paper-filed documents will encounter a slight scan delay, but most documents filed before 4:30 p.m. will be accessible by the end of the day and documents filed after that should be available by 10:00 a.m. the next day.