LegalTransform

A Framework for making legal documents accessible to humans

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In this day and age, we are required to understand legal documents.
Credit card agreements, local, state, and federal laws, mortgage agreements, child custody contracts, divorce papers, tax documents, privacy agreements, software end-user license agreements, mattress tags, car leases, etc...
A diverse group...

But what makes them common is that there is one way to understand them – black and white.
For thousands of years, legal documents have essentially been viewed on scrolls. Even as legal documents are written, stored, exchanged, and verified on the digital medium, they continue to be viewed in a flat length of text. The digital medium does not change that. Legal documents must fulfill:

1. Legal documents must be complete. In order for legal documents to define rules and regulations, they must not contain loopholes or ambiguities.
2. Legal documents must be understandable. For legal documents to be enforced, they must be understood.

Frequently, the latter is sacrificed in favor of the former. We believe that providing multiple perspectives of legal documents can enhance understanding while maintaining completeness. These perspectives include:

- A visual navigation between different documents, enabling the user to see where she has been in a more natural way
- A translation between commonly used "legalese" phrases to common English phrases
- A view representing parts of a document that only apply to a certain party

We feel these perspectives can provide better understanding of legal documents for the average citizen. Moreover, companies can use these perspectives to enhance the presentation of their own documents to their clients. Our program will benefit both the average person and industry as a whole.
One other cultural artifact shares this phenomenon...

Bulk Cereal!
For thousands of years, legal documents have essentially been viewed on scrolls. Even as legal documents are written, stored, exchanged, and verified on the digital medium, they continue to be viewed as a flat length of text. The problem lies with two conflicting requirements that legal documents must fulfill:

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But bulk cereal isn't very popular...
But boxes of cereal are by far one of the most successful products in the supermarket.
But not because of the cereal...
because of the box.
That's because you can look at cereal in many different ways.
Ways to Understand Cereal:

- Nutrition
- Mascot
- Tagline
- Brand
The Point:

Cereal boxes allow you to make informed choices because they present multiple perspectives on an otherwise boring product.
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2. Legal documents must be understandable. For legal documents to be enforced, they must be understandable.

Frequently, the latter is sacrificed in favor of the former, as legal documents are often written in a complex, technical language that is difficult for the average citizen to understand. We believe that providing multiple perspectives of legal documents can enhance understanding while maintaining completeness. These perspectives include:

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The problem: Expensive.
What we need:

Human-readable legal documents, without the expense of going to a lawyer.
Computers are good at this...

The Internet... a wealth of information!
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Fantastic!

Many legal documents are online...

So let the increased understanding begin!
SEC. 210. SCOPE OF SUBPOENAS FOR RECORDS OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS.

Section 2703(c)(2) of title 18, United States Code, as redesignated by section 212, is amended--

(1) by striking `entity the name, address, local and long distance telephone toll billing records, telephone number or other subscriber number or identity, and length of service of a subscriber' and inserting the following: `entity the--

`(A) name;

`(B) address;

`(C) local and long distance telephone connection records, or records of session times and durations;
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Nordstrom Credit Card Initial Disclosure of Terms &amp; Conditions</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of Retail Credit Terms</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANNUAL FEE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ANNUAL PERCENTAGE RATE FOR PURCHASES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER APRS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GRACE PERIOD FOR REPAYMENT OF BALANCES FOR PURCHASES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>METHOD OF COMPUTING THE BALANCE FOR PURCHASES</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MINIMUM FINANCE CHARGE</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$5 if your Current Balance is $200 or less and the Due Date is not paid within 10 days after scheduled payment due date. $20 if your Current Balance is greater than $200.
Hmm...

Well that wasn't fruitful.

The problem doesn't seem to be access to documents...
They're still the same!
Even in this day and age, with our fancy computers, we still look at legal documents the same way...
Why?

They've been like that for thousands of years...

But mostly...
They fulfill their purpose...

Just the plain-text legal document is enough to specify proper conduct.
Fine, but we needn't live with the bare minimum.

We don't need to continue looking at legal documents as plain text.
The point:

Although legal documents have been viewed as plain text on scrolls for thousands of years, it doesn't mean we have to keep doing it.
So how are we going to understand legal documents better?

Like cereal! With Perspectives!
But unlike cereal, the providers (government, corporations) aren't going to package legal documents for us.

So we'll change the documents ourselves
So what kind of changes can we make?
Find what: henceforth

Replace with: from this point on

- Match case
- Find whole words only
SECTION 12 SPECIAL PRIVILEGES AND IMMUNITIES PROHIBITED.
No law shall be passed granting to any citizen, class of citizens, or corporation other than municipal, privileges or immunities which upon the same terms shall not equally belong to all citizens, or corporations.

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No law shall be passed granting to anyone privileges or immunities which shall not equally belong to everyone.

1citizen, class of citizens, or corporation other than municipal
2upon the same terms
3all citizens, or corporations
A law that makes illegal an act that was legal when committed, increases the penalties for an infraction after it has been committed, or changes the rules of evidence to make conviction easier. The Constitution prohibits the making of ex post facto law.
The point:

We can take the legal documents as they are given to us...

But we use home computers help us transform the documents to something more human readable...

Thereby helping us understand them more thoroughly.
That's what LegalTransform does...

... provides the tools to help regular people understand the law.
The audience is NOT:

Lawyers
Congresspersons
Judges
The audience IS:

People with home computer skills who don't usually read legal documents but want to understand their rights
(see program)
What LegalTransform does now:

- Includes 4 Tools
- Saves what you have done to pages automatically
- Saves browser history (where you've been) automatically
What LegalTransform will do within 4 months:

• Include more tools (eg...) 
• Be able to share *perspectives* with associates 
• Be more reliable!
What would be great if LegalTransform could do:

• Be smarter
• Integrate with corporate www
• A library of perspectives
Vision:

Millions of Instant Legal Experts
So:

Take a CD
Or download the newest version
Check out the webpage at

http://scidb.evergreen.edu/LegalTransform
The problem: Expensive.

Attribution 1.0

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work
- to make derivative works
- to make commercial use of the work

Under the following conditions:

Attribution. You must give the original author credit.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the author.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the Legal Code (the full license).

Disclaimer

The problem: Expensive.
Total Carbohydrate 26g
Dietary Fiber 8g
Sugars 0g
Other Carbohydrate 18g

"This cereal provides almost 1/3 of your total fiber requirement per day."
So what is going to be done...

...and who's going to do it?
It's already done.

Somewhat.