

Yeah, there's a legal app for that!

Lawyers are embracing the convenience of legal apps on smartphones

By Anayat Durrani

Lawyers like their gadgets, especially the real shiny ones. And let's face it, there's an endless array of dazzling yet functional tech gadgets to catch a lawyer's eye. One that stands out is the Apple iPhone, a gadget that has revolutionized the smartphone market and, not surprisingly, become best friend to many a practicing attorney.

Mobile phones have come a long way since inventor Marty Cooper unveiled the first two and half- pound, 20-minute battery life version back in 1973. No longer merely devices to make voice calls, modern day mobile phones come with advanced capabilities. And for busy lawyers, smartphones have become a necessity.

The top three smartphones used by lawyers are the BlackBerry (66 percent), iPhone (20 percent), and Palm (9 percent), according to a survey of the legal profession, from January through May 2010, on the use of technology in the profession by the American Bar Association Legal Technology Resource Center (LTRC). Interestingly, the report showed iPhone use increased from last year while BlackBerry use fell slightly. However, BlackBerry remains the smartphone of choice for many law firms.

"The BlackBerry has been marketed as a business device and has been around the marketplace for a very long time," said Catherine Sanders Reach, Director of the ABA's LTRC. "Research In Motion aggressively targeted the legal and business markets, while the iPhone was initially marketed to consumers."

And while it is taking a little longer for law firms to make the switch to iPhones, many who use them argue that the iPhone is far superior, with its ability to run apps, allowing users to do virtually everything from their touchscreens. Today there are over 200,000 applications for users to choose from, beyond lightsabers and Deer Hunter 3D.

The top five

One lawyer loves his iPhone so much, he dedicated a blog to it, called "iPhone J.D." Jeff Richardson, an attorney in New Orleans, Louisiana, attended the ABA Techshow in March and co-presented "60 Apps in 60 Minutes," a collection of the best apps for attorneys using an iPhone (link: http://iphonejd.com/60apps). But he did share his top five.

"In no particular order, I'd say (1) Documents to Go, (2) Quickoffice, (3) LogMeIn Ignition, (4) MotionX GPS and (5) Twitterific," said Richardson.

Documents to Go ($9.99), for example, allows you to edit, create and view Word files and Excel spreadsheets; view PDF, PowerPoint, iWork and other files; and send and receive attachments in Gmail.

Sometimes it is the lawyers themselves who are the ones who create the apps. Dan Friedlander, a land use attorney and litigator, practicing in Westlake Village, Calif., created Court Days (99 cents). The app assists lawyers in quickly calculating the number of court days or calendar days before or after a given date. And for California attorneys, Court Days takes into consideration the monthly Wednesday "furlough days" in the state (under debate at presstime).

"I and thousands of other attorneys in the US use Court Days on a regular basis to calculate court deadlines and I have received a lot of positive feedback from attorneys," said Friedlander. "I use it principally for calculating motion filing deadlines in state and federal court."

Friedlander said, for him, it is no longer really about specific apps on any one device anymore, but more so about services that can be used universally on an iPhone, iPad, laptop, desktop or others. "Those services that offer applications that make it easy for you to efficiently switch between platforms, so that you can get your work done no matter where you are, are the services that will ultimately be the most useful to attorneys and the most successful," said Friedlander.


Ho

Kevin Ho, a lawyer who does both plaintiff and defense work in San Francisco, runs a blog called "Living with the iPhone" which he first began on CNET after Apple's release of the first iPhone in 2007. He was proudly among the firsts who stood in the long lines to own the device.

Ho said there are a lot of useful apps for lawyers. Among these apps are iDisk, which gives free virtual disk access to Apple Me; and also Yelp, which is a service that helps people find local businesses. In addition, Ho recommends Dragon Dictation, which is a free app that provides dictation/transcription service.

"This thing is great. I never understood why lawyers dictated their letters and notes in the past," said Ho. "But as I've gotten busier and as I find myself on the road more often without keyboard access, having the ability to transcribe – with about 90 percent accuracy – a hostile letter, a new brilliant trial strategy or a re-

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sponse e-mail to colleagues has been amazingly convenient, which has cut down on my 'scribbling everything on to a sticky note' approach."

Apart from the apps, Ho said the camera on the iPhone itself has been useful during library research for taking photos of pages, rather than spending money on photocopying or lugging around heavy books. Also great, Ho says, is SMS (short message service) texting, which is useful during depositions, and court hearings to communicate. He also likes Visual Voicemail.


Sparks

"Being able to pause and repeat voicemails is also quite important in case opposing counsel wants to get something past you without noticing in a voicemail."

David Sparks is an Orange County, California, trial attorney who runs MacSparky.com. If you haven't guessed by the name, he reviews all things Mac. Sparks thinks the iPhone has many great apps for lawyers.

"One of my favorites is iPassword ($6.99) that allows me to keep secure notes. It is all password encrypted and allows me to keep confidential information on the iPhone," said Sparks. "Another great app is the powerOne Financial Calculator ($5.99) which comes in very handy during settlement negotiations. Finally, I would recommend Air Sharing ($2.99) that allows you to keep copies of PDF files on your iPhone. This way you can put key exhibits literally in your pocket."

iPhone 4

The iPhone has its following among lawyers. And, now with the introduction of the new iPhone 4, Apple promises hundreds of new features. These include longer battery life, the same processor in the iPad, HD screen, and front facing cameras for video conferencing. All, welcome additions for iPhone lovers.

"Beside having all the resources I mentioned earlier, the fact that most law firms and court reporter offices have Wi-Fi turns into ubiquitous video-conferencing, which is 100 times better than a disconnected voice from somewhere unknown," said Ho.

Apple CEO Steve Jobs, in his June 7 presentation at the Worldwide Developers Conference, called the new iPhone 4 the "thinnest smartphone on the planet." Ho was excitedly watching. The shiny, even sleeker device beckons.

"Oh my goodness yes," said Ho. "I'll be the first in line."


Durrani

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