

LawyeristLAB.com

(l-a-b) n. The lawyering advisory board.

Report #007366

Top Tech
Upgrades

013

006

Top Tech Upgrades

Lawyerist is well-known for its tech tips and recommendations. But with technology seemingly changing every fifteen minutes, determining where to invest in technology can overwhelm a busy lawyer. This LAB Report is our technology product guide. It's packed with recommended technology tools, from desktop computers to practice management software, and from free to pricey.

Where we can, we supply pricing and a link to the product for more information (or to purchase). We've also gathered Lawyerist posts on specific tech subjects and link to them for more information. If you are looking to upgrade your law firm's technology, keep reading!

Desktop Computer

Dell Inspiron 560 with Windows 7 Pro

When it comes to a Windows-based desktop PC, you don't need to worry too much about what you buy. Get something cheap, but one step above the cheapest, and make sure it has Windows 7 Professional (stay away from the Home version of Windows). You don't need to pay more than \$500 to get a great PC.



That said, Dell makes great computers for great prices, and it's hard to go wrong with the Inspiron. Right now, the 560 looks like [a great deal at about \\$400 with Windows 7 Professional](#).

Apple iMac 21.5"

The Apple iMacs are all-in-one desktops. So much so that you have one cord to plug in to make it work: the power cord. While you may prefer the 27" model because of its large screen, the [21.5 inch Apple iMac](#) is plenty big and likely all you need. As with all Apple products, expect to pay a premium for its great functionality and the beauty of its design. A



decently decked out 21.5 inch iMac will run you about \$2,000, which includes AppleCare (recommended) and some basic office software. [Read more about Apple products on Lawyerist.](#)

Laptop

You'll notice we are big fans of compact laptops. If you are going to be carrying your computer around, get something that won't add much weight to your load. If you aren't, get a desktop.

Lenovo ThinkPad X220 or X1

Lenovo ThinkPads are probably the most durable laptops on the planet, and if you ever do have a problem with the hardware, the customer service is second to none.



The [X220 is a compact laptop](#) with a battery slice that makes all-day (and into the evening) computing possible. Lenovo claims 9+ hours, and independent reviews back that up. Plus, it is small and light, so you can take it anywhere.

The X1 is a brand-new cake-slicer of a laptop. If the battery life isn't quite as good as the X220, it makes up for it with a bigger screen (13.3") and a super-thin chassis. Your Macbook Air-toting friends might even be a little jealous.

MacBook Air 13.3"

This is a sweet laptop, extremely thin and light and exceptionally powerful for its size. As with nearly any Apple computer, by the time you are done with all the configuration options



(including adding AppleCare and some basic software), expect to pay about \$2,000. Or check out Amazon for occasional deals or for refurbished/used Apple laptops. We found a lower end new version of the [MacBook Air 13.3 Inch](#) on Amazon, starting at \$1,287. [Read more about Apple on Lawyerist.](#)

External Hard Drive

While just about any external hard drive will be fine, Western Digital makes a no-frills line of drives called WD Elements. You can [get 2 TB for under \\$100](#), and that should be all most firms ever need.

Phones

iPhone 4

The Apple ecosystem may not be for you, but the iPhone 4 is. No other phone combines speed, durability, and quality components quite like the iPhone. It's camera will rival your point-and-shoot, and it has all the apps you will ever need.



Get an Android phone if have a specific reason. Otherwise, [go with the iPhone](#).

File Sync

Dropbox

You cannot beat [Dropbox](#) in price and simplicity. Installs effortlessly on your desktop or laptop (or mobile device), giving you up to 2GB in storage and file synchronization, for free. Then just drag and drop files into your Dropbox folder and the files are available wherever you have an internet connection. Cost: Free (for 2GB storage); \$9.99/month (for 50GB storage). [Read more about Dropbox on Lawyerist](#).



On the Horizon

We're also looking at Cor², a secure file storage and document management service for solo and small firm lawyers. It is not yet in beta. We're also keeping an eye on [iCloud](#), the new file sync and push service Apple recently announced but is not available until the fall. [Read more about cloud computing on Lawyerist](#).

Online Backup

Carbonite or Mozy

Carbonite and Mozy are very similar online backup services. Both have similar feature sets and both offer about the same pricing model, though [Carbonite is slightly cheaper](#) and offers unlimited backup space, while [Mozy allows for monthly pricing](#) and charges for 50GB (\$5.99/month) and 100GB (\$9.99/month) worth of space. Entry level accounts on both services are limited to one computer, so you'll need to upgrade from the "basic" or "home" account if you need to backup more than one computer.

Another option is [SugarSync](#), which [we've written about before on Lawyerist](#). SugarSync has a [great comparative chart](#) showing the differences between it and the other major online backup services. [SugarSync is a bit more expensive](#), with a basic plan offering 60GB of storage for \$9.99 month or \$99.99 per year.



Pogoplug

The [Pogoplug is like having a file server](#) without the need for an IT person to to installation and maintenance. It's the only product or service I have tried that makes me question my love affair with [Dropbox](#). However, I think it words best as a remote backup server.



Installation is a snap; you just plug it into your router and plug an external hard drive into the Pogoplug. You could even use a little [USB flash drive](#), if you want to keep it as compact as possible. Set up your Pogoplug at your home—or better, at the home of a relative in another state.

Set up your computer to use it as a backup drive, and you'll have the security of remote backup without the concern that some third-party company has your client's data on its servers.

Billing/Invoicing

Freshbooks

While there are plenty of alternatives to [Freshbooks](#), we always come back to it as the number one recommended cloud-based billing and invoicing system. It is drop-dead simple and integrates with numerous other online applications, plus allows clients to pay online or, if you are old school, can send out invoices by snail mail for a small charge. Cost: Free (3 clients) to \$39.95/month (for unlimited clients and an additional staff user). If you are just starting out, [try the "Seedling" account](#) at \$19.95 month for up to 25 clients. [Read more about Freshbooks on Lawyerist.](#)



Contact Relationship Manager (CRM)

Highrise

You can't beat Highrise for an easy-to-use CRM. Like [Basecamp](#), it is fast, simple, and intuitive software-as-a-service. You can share your contacts with someone else, and attach notes and tasks to contacts. You can also work on *cases* and *deals*—just other ways to organize your people-based projects.



If you are trying to automate and streamline your intake process, your client retention system, or anything else that requires people-centric management, [give Highrise a try.](#)

Office Productivity Suites

LibreOffice

If you want powerful, open-source, and free, there's no other alternative than LibreOffice, formerly known as OpenOffice.org. [Read more about LibreOffice on Lawyerist.](#)

Microsoft Office Home and Business 2010

Whether you loath it or like it, MS Office is the standard bearer for most business office suites. If you are still using Office 2003 (a lot of attorneys

still are), it's time to make the switch. At around \$250, it's well worth the upgrade to MS Office 2010. Unless you need Access (most lawyers don't), buy the [Microsoft Office Home and Business](#) edition. Cost: \$210. [Read about law office productivity on Lawyerist.](#)

PDF Creation/Formatting

Adobe Acrobat X Pro

If you are a civil litigator or if you are trying to operate a paperless office, invest in [Adobe Acrobat X Professional](#). It's well worth the \$400 cost, especially if you need to do any redaction, metadata cleaning, or Bates numbering, which Acrobat makes easy peasy. If you can find Acrobat Professional 8 or 9, buy them. They will also do the job and may be a bit cheaper (but beware of getting out of date quickly, as Adobe has an annoying habit of upgrading so frequently that you barely have time to learn the newest update before another one comes out).



Practice Management Software

Clio or Rocket Matter

[Clio](#) and [Rocket Matter](#) revolutionized practice management software. They make pretty much any other practice management software look like a slow, clumsy dinosaur.



The choice between the two is down to personal preference. Both offer similar feature sets at similar prices. This is one time it is okay to choose on looks, because the biggest difference between Clio and Rocket Matter is how you get around in the interface. Take both for a test drive, and go with the one you like best.

Project Management

Basecamp

Need an application that will help track your to-dos and milestones and manage cases and projects with a team or clients, all securely and in the cloud? Basecamp is one of the best. It is easy to use, intuitive, and provides a secure client portal on cases and projects if you need one. No need for a user manual; you just need 30 seconds to get started. Cost: Free (1 Project) to \$149/mo (unlimited projects). At Lawyerist, we currently use the Basic plan, at \$24 month for 15 projects (older projects can be archived). [Read more about Basecamp on Lawyerist.](#)



TeamworkPM

[TeamworkPM](#) is a great alternative to Basecamp (and even comes with a built-in function to import existing data from Basecamp). Plus, it comes with 256 bit encryption, even on the basic free account. Add Teamwork's client portal and you have the potential for a virtual law office for less money than the major VLO providers. Cost: Free (2 projects) to \$149/mo (unlimited projects). [Try TeamworkPM now.](#)

Remote Access

LogMeIn

While cloud-based file sync services are making remote access to office computers less important, you may still want to access applications on your office computer that you don't have anywhere else. [LogMeIn](#) will let you log in to your office computer and run it as if you were sitting at your desk, and the LogMeIn Ignition application will allow you to control any computer from your iPad. Works with all major browsers, but we've found it to work best on Firefox. Cost: \$69.95 per year (LogMeIn Pro2 for 1 computer). [Read more about remote access on Lawyerist.](#)



Scanner

Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500 or S1500M

In our mind, the only choice for a scanner is whether to get the [Fujitsu ScanSnap S1500](#) in black or white. We've been



recommending it for years and have no reason today to suggest any other brand. Cost: \$410 ([S1500 for PC](#))/\$419 ([S1500M for Mac](#)). [Read more about the Fujitsu scanner on Lawyerist.](#)

Second Monitor

Dell UltraSharp 24"

No matter what platform you use, Dell probably has the best deal on monitors around. The UltraSharp line is every bit as good as the competition (see below) at far more reasonable prices. The [Dell UltraSharp 24" monitor](#) is plenty large to fit two full-size pages on the screen at once – although you certainly won't regret going bigger.



Apple 27" LED Cinema Display

It's not cheap, at a buck under \$1,000 at Apple stores (or [slightly less here on Amazon](#)), but it sure is beautiful. And big. With a MacBook Air, it makes an awesome second screen (or a primary screen with the MacMini). Comes with built-in iSight and microphone for video and for using Apple's developing FaceTime application. [Read more about Apple on Lawyerist.](#)



Tablet

Apple iPad 2

There are no compelling reasons to get a tablet other than the [Apple iPad 2](#). For most lawyers, the Wifi version will suffice, especially if you already have Wifi at the office and at home. Get at least 16GB, 32GB if you want to keep all the family photos handy. Cost: \$599 (Wifi only/32GB). [Read more about the iPad on Lawyerist.](#)



Stylus

Boxwave Stylus

Adding a stylus to your tablet makes it double as a legal pad. The [Boxwave](#) uses a rubber “nib” instead of a fuzzy ones found on some others. That makes it precise, with a good feel when writing on the screen. Cost: \$15.00, in four available colors.



Task Management

Remember the Milk

[Remember the Milk](#) is deceptively simple. You can easily just bang out a quick to-do list, but if you want more options, there are a ton lurking under the simple interface, including the ability to share tasks or lists with others in your firm (or family—or anyone else, for that matter), set repeating tasks. Remember the Milk also has a powerful search function that lets you save searches as lists for easy access. Cost: Free (no mobile apps) or \$25 year with access to RTM via mobile applications.



Teux Deux

[TeuxDeux](#) (pronounced “to do.”) is a bare bones but well-designed task management application that runs in your browser. A paid iPhone App (\$2.99) allows you to keep tasks synchronized to your mobile Apple device. If you want super simple task management, Teux Deux does it. Read More about TeuxDeux on Lawyerist.

Online Forms

Wufoo

SurveyMonkey just acquired [Wufoo](#), and it’s not surprising that one of the big online players picked up this great online form builder application. If you want a robust and powerful online form, Wufoo can do it, plus integrate with dozens of different online products, including



MailChimp, Highrise, Salesforce, and Campfire. And integrate with PayPal, Authorize.net, or Google Checkout. Downside: if you absolutely need SSL encrypted data transmission, you'll need the monthly \$29.95 package, which we admit is steep for an online forms portal.

Too expensive? If you have a WordPress site, consider [Gravity Forms](#) (starts at \$49 for one site) or the free plug-in [Contact Form 7](#). Both work extremely well, with Gravity having a much more powerful (and thus paid) feature set.

Browsers

Google Chrome

Stop using Internet Explorer. Google's Chrome browser is speedy, easy to use, and uncluttered. But we'll forgive you if you retain Firefox. Cost: Free. [Download Google Chrome](#) .



Tech Books/Guides

Digging Into WordPress

[Digging Into WordPress](#) is the Bible of WordPress books, with entire chapters on seemingly mundane (but important) topics as RSS Feeds and keeping your site secure. If you want to learn how to design a WordPress site, run your current site more efficiently, or modify your site to make it do exactly what you want, this is the book to buy. Cost: \$75 (Print and Digital) or \$27 (Digital Only). [Read more about WordPress on Lawyerist](#).