

Legal Software Review Sources and Related Sites to Help Meet Law Practice Technology Needs

by Roger V. Skalbeck

Computers are necessarily ubiquitous in the practice of law, so you will certainly want to get the best tools to use them efficiently. Figuring out what software or services might best help your practice can be tricky, requiring a unique balance of sources and approaches.



Sources for Legal Software Reviews

A great starting place for finding legal software applications is the attractive and informative Lawyerware (www.lawyerware.com) site, subtitled “tech tools for legal professionals.” This site includes information on software in a broad range of legal areas, as well as general productivity and scheduling applications. Products are organized into groups such as case management, estate planning and intellectual property.

The magazine, *Law Office Computing*, has regularly featured product reviews in each issue and regularly features articles that cover technology topics. The related Web site for this publication has a searchable collection of software reviews, which used to be free to access. At present, it appears that access to all content is limited for use by subscribers.

One of my favorite sources for general news on new software products is *Law Technology News* (www.lawtechnews.com). The Web site features an online version of the print publication along with the semi-annual buyer’s guide, which includes advertiser-funded listings for software in about two dozen categories. Some of the article content from Law Technology News appears along with selected content from other American Lawyer Media publications within the “Automated Lawyer” section of Law.com (www.law.com/professionals/automated_lawyer/).

Some other places to find information on software vendors:

- FindLaw Tech Center: General Practice Software (tech.lp.findlaw.com/general_software/)—This arrangement is very similar to Yahoo! Categories, which include brief descriptions that appear to be provided by each respective company.
- Virginia Bar Association’s Law Practice Management Section (www.vba.org/section/lpm.htm) includes a collection of categorized links to legal software publisher sites.
- American Bar Association’s Law Practice Management Section (www.abanet.org/lpm) recently expanded its coverage of tech-

nology topics in the printed magazine and many articles are included on its site.

- Legal Software Vendors on the Internet (www.digital-lawyer.com/resource/software.html)—from the Digital Lawyer. This is another selection of legal software links.

One new approach to using technology to support the practice of law includes the use of outside companies to host data and applications, which are often available in secure locations over the Internet. These are often termed Application Service Providers (ASPs), and this model might likely be worth a look. Some companies and initiatives worth checking out include Serengeti (www.serengetius.com), Lexis-sponsored LawCommerce.com (www.lawcommerce.com), and any number of other single source or multiservice companies. ASP companies are covered more frequently now, and their services have already begun to include well-known software-based brands like *Elite* alongside new services such as client extranets.

Legal-Related Resources for Your PDA

For those who have a Palm Pilot, Visor, BlackBerry or similar Personal Digital Assistant (PDA) models for managing contacts, scheduling and a host of other applications, you might want to see what kinds of titles are available in the area of legal materials. In this area, a handful (or is that a “palmful”?) of places on the Internet have some depth of legal-related content and coverage relating to PDAs.

In the area of legal content, a Web site called MemoWare (www.memoware.com) offers a collection of over 150 downloadable documents in the category of *Law & Government*. This ranges from the Massachusetts State Constitution to *Roberts Rules of Order Revised* to *Federal Aviation Regulations for 2001*. The history section includes “Notes on the State of Virginia” from Thomas Jefferson as well as a collection of documents from Virginia Colony. The electronic book publisher PeanutPress (www.PeanutPress.com) has a handful of legal books available for purchase, but state-specific materials are limited to Texas and California.

For a very attractive site oriented directly towards the legal market, check out pdaJD.com (www.pdaJD.com). The site has device reviews, productivity tips, myriad articles and a collection of legal titles to download. The site was recently updated, and its

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concept is being utilized for other professions (such as pdaMD.com for doctors).

If you are on-the-go a lot, you might soon want to use wireless access to services and databases. Both Lexis and Westlaw are making their services available via wireless access, and this will be sure to increase. Lexis now owns the PalmLaw (www.palmlaw.com) site and domain name, which includes some articles on using a PDA, along with information on wireless access to Lexis content (also at: www.lexis.com/mvp/wireless/). If you can already get to the Internet with your PDA, you might point the browser to www.wireless.westlaw.com to get KeyCite® status for a case or to look for a lawyer. West Group's overall wireless program is described at www.westlaw.com/wireless/.

Hardware and Software in General

The best place to start answering a question about existing or considered technology is to find someone else who has already asked your question (and received an answer). It's common practice to find Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) posted on a provider's Web site. If this approach doesn't work, other areas to consider are newsgroups or discussion lists on your topic of choice. There might be newsgroup archives on a site such as Deja.com (www.deja.com), which was recently acquired by search engine Google, and is available at: (groups.google.com).

Another source might be one of many Yahoo! Groups (groups.yahoo.com), which now include eGroups. General Internet search engines can often turn up golden nuggets of information, but you might need good research skills as much as you would need good luck to find some answers quickly.

If I had to suggest one single site to consider for outside help in general hardware and software, I would have to select CNET.com (www.cnet.com). The site offers extensive categories of hardware and software news, reviews and resources. There are practical implementation tips, directories of companies to host your Web site, and hundreds and hundreds of downloadable software utilities and specialized applications to consider. Remember that in dealing with technology issues, it's important to stay focused on the goal, which is to make the tools work for you to accomplish a potentially complex job easily, not to adjust the easy job so that it works with potentially complex tools. ☺

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