

## Should You Switch to Macs in Your Law Firm?

By Ben Stevens

April 28, 2009

**Y**ou've seen the commercials. The Mac is hip while the lovable loser PC bounces from one crisis to another. Do these commercials reflect reality in the legal world? Should you take the leap and make the switch? Family lawyer Ben Stevens, founder of *The Mac Lawyer* blog, answers these and other questions in this look at the state of Macs in the law firm. Thanks to his lawyerly ways, Ben remains grounded in reality throughout the article without an accompanying distortion field. This article contains 1,983 words.

### INTRODUCTION

Lawyers can be creatures of habit — and skeptical of marketing claims. But when it comes to the Mac v. PC debate, the ads with the bungling PC and the cool Mac have some basis in reality. For example, many specialized programs for Macs are as capable or more capable than PC programs. Those who suggest that Macs don't deliver for law firms are simply not working with updated information.

### THE MAC'S HIDDEN ADVANTAGES AND HARDWARE OPTIONS ...

Macs and Mac software are designed for consumers, not technowizards. The operating system is intuitive, no matter which Mac you choose, and the menu structure on Mac software is similar no matter which program you're using. You'll spend less time learning to use a particular program.

Macs are also more secure than PCs. Since many attorneys count on

billing as many hours as possible in a given workday, not worrying about updating antivirus software on a PC (or spending money on such protection) is a bonus. There are reportedly over 100,000 viruses for PCs, and there are exactly zero for Macs.

There's no need to reinvent the wheel (or even pay for each new spoke) because Macs work with existing hardware. You might want a sleek new monitor, mouse, or any number of the Apple peripherals, but you don't have to buy them. That counts for most printers, scanners, and multi-function machines too. Your Mac will recognize most of your peripherals when you connect them, and there's usually not even a reason to reboot. Macs even work well with non-Mac networks. All new Macs can even run Windows and Windows software.

More good news: For the most part, you just have two simple choices: (1) do you want a desktop or a laptop and (2) do you want a "regular" model or a high-end model? Answer those questions, and you'll have narrowed your machine options to just a couple choices. If you prefer laptops as most lawyers do, you'll choose between the MacBook, the MacBook Pro, or the ultra-light MacBook Air. Desktop options for staff include the iMac or the Mac mini. A Mac Pro is available for those who need ultra-high power.

But beyond these choices, there are plenty of software options tailored to help you and your practice manage on Macs.

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### CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Marketcircle Inc.'s [Daylite](#) is a full-featured customer/client and project/case manager for the Mac.

It's fully customizable and manages your contacts, calendars, tasks notes, etc. DayLite excels at connecting various types of documents (such as .doc, .pdf, Web links, etc.) to specific client files and enables you to organize and even open those files within Day-Lite. You can schedule appointments, print email, and send email within the program. It's also fully networkable, so you can organize over the Internet, locally, or through your office network.

Powersoft Innovations Corp. makes [LawStream Pro](#), which handles scheduling, communication, document control, contact management, detailed reporting capabilities, and much more.

[Rocket Matter](#) by Rocket Matter LLC, though, is my firm's case management program of choice.

It's a Web-based practice management and time and billing solution designed exclusively for the legal industry. It manages calendars,

to-do's, contacts, and documents for multiple users and it's simple to learn. Its reporting capabilities enable you to see an overview of your firm's activity so that you can increase productivity and profits. Because it's Web-based, it's accessible from any computer, BlackBerry, or iPhone, which makes it easier to bill time and keep track of activities. Rocket Matter works with Macs and PCs, which makes it a good option for mixed-use firms that use both operating systems.

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#### ORGANIZATION SOFTWARE

If you're looking to test the creative possibilities of Macs, look no further than Circus Ponies' [Notebook](#).

Notebooks can contain outline pages, free-form pages, or any combination of both. Pages can contain text, graphics, audio, video, imported data — virtually anything you can imagine. Copy and paste information into the pages, type information directly in, or use "clipping services," which enable you to insert data into a specified page, even if you're not using Notebook then.

Notebook also features automatic indexing of information into multiple indexes for easy location and retrieval, which makes the program useful for organizing information at the office or in a trial. All of a file's documents can be attached to a specific page, such as correspondence, pleadings, orders, etc. Notebook makes it easy to con-

centrate on what you need to present, rather than how you should present it.

[Evernote](#) enables you to store, organize, and process a large amount of information.

Send information to Evernote from a variety of sources — a drag-and-drop, email, clipping from the Internet or other documents, or even from a camera on your iPhone or Windows Mobile device. Evernote then makes the text within these items searchable. Everything put into Evernote is always synchronized and backed up, so you can access any or all client files wherever you go.

For small firms or solo practitioners, Apple's [OS X Leopard](#) operating system includes basic organizational tools.

Address Book keeps track of contact information and comments. Apple Mail now includes the ability to easily create to-dos and notes, which can include links, attachments, and data from email. Schedule appointments in iCal and/or set alarms, all within iCal. iChat provides free video conferences.

#### TIME AND BILLING SOFTWARE

In addition to its case management abilities, LawStream Pro has timekeeping, billing, accounting and productivity control features. Marketcircle offers [Billings](#), which handles basic time and billing functions, but it's not multi-user or networkable at this point, so it's not ideal for anyone other than solo practitioners.

[EasyTime](#) currently being developed by Bright Light Software, is networkable and easy to use.

My firm uses Rocket Matter, not only for organizing, but also for time and billing needs. It's a Web 2.0 application, so no installation is necessary, and we especially enjoy the batch billing features, which means our monthly bills always go out on time. Other Web-based time and billing options include [Clio](#) and [Bill4Time](#).

#### WORD PROCESSING AND SPREADSHEETS

I've said it before. If you're familiar with the Windows version of Microsoft Office, then you are familiar with the [Mac versions](#). These programs work the same in both operating systems and files are interchangeable between the two.

Apple's [iWork](#) software includes Pages for word processing, Numbers for spreadsheets (which many users find easier to use than Excel), and Keynote for presentations. As with all Apple software, iWork is easy to learn and fun to use.

If you want to go a different route, there are other alternatives. [NeoOffice](#) is a free set of office applications including Writer for word processing, Calc for spreadsheets, and Impress for presentations. [Nisus Writer Pro](#) has a lot of fans because of its simple interface and powerful text management features.

#### PRESENTATIONS

Although PowerPoint is included with Microsoft Office, I believe PowerPoint is eclipsed by Apple's Keynote. Keynote enables you to animate elements within slides, remove background elements, save presentations in cross-platform QuickTime movies, export them to Apple's iDVD — all while preserving chapter breaks between slides and even exporting your Keynote presentation to PowerPoint format.

**TrialSmart** by Clarity Legal Software is a trial presentation package that enables transcript-to-video synchronizing, exhibit presentation, and video clip editing.

The Exhibit Presenter component enables you to redact or call out information, insert notations, use arrows/lines, zoom or magnify, rotate, and highlight. DepoSmart is also made by Clarity, and it enables you to analyze, annotate, and print transcripts. It also affords the ability to import real-time transcripts from a court reporter during a deposition or trial.

iMovie, part of Apple's **iLife** suite, can be used to conduct video depositions. Imagine being able to show video clips at trial to impeach a witness instead of simply reading from a transcribed deposition. Which do you think would capture a jury's attention best?

Preview is an application included with Apple's OS X that acts as a jack-of-all-trades viewer. It will open and view most file formats, and it enables you to zoom in and out, rotate images, and save changes.

### **PRACTICE-SPECIFIC SOFTWARE AND VIRTUALIZATION PROGRAMS**

Family law attorneys use child support calculators, real estate attorneys use different packages to assist with closings, and bankruptcy attorneys have programs to assist with filings, so can Mac software really compete with current programs out there — especially when they're overwhelmingly "Windows-only" programs?

Virtualization programs are the key to running any Windows program when necessary. **Parallels Desktop** for Mac is one of the most popular virtualization programs.

It's easy to install and easy to use. Any version of Windows can be installed and run inside a window on your Mac, side by side with OS X programs. You can even run more than one virtual machine at a time and copy/paste and drag/drop files between Windows and OS X. Parallels offers a coherence mode, in which the Windows programs appear to run within OS X without having to see Windows at all. Using SmartSelect, you can set file associations to open a specified file type with specific Mac or PC software, or you can open Windows files with Mac apps and Mac files with Windows applications.

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**VMware Fusion** is similar to Parallels Desktop, and it enables you to run different varieties of Windows as well.

Using its Unity mode, the Windows desktop disappears. You can use the same peripherals and share files between different operating systems. VMware seems to be the preferred virtualization choice for many Mac users.

**VirtualBox** is an open-source option that's in beta testing. Its main advantage is that it's free (for now, at least), but it lacks automated setup, no support for USB devices, and only limited networking options. But those features are supposed to be available once the program is fully released.

If you're still using a Mac with a Power PC processor, **Virtual PC** is the way to go. It's considerably slower than other options, but it works adequately with many Windows programs.

CodeWeavers' **CrossOver Mac** is unique among virtualization programs in that it enables you to run certain Windows programs without requiring you to own Windows. CrossOver uses an open-source protocol called Wine to provide Windows-native libraries. Once installed, you can run certain Windows programs directly from your Mac's Finder. Its Web site has a comprehensive list of over 2,500 Windows programs, with a rating for how well each program runs with CrossOver.

Apple's **Boot Camp** is unlike other programs in that you can't run Windows programs alongside your OS X applications. Instead, it gives you the option to run your Mac as a full-blown Windows machine. Once Boot Camp is installed, simply hold down the Option key (that's the "alt" key for you longtime Windows users) at startup to choose between Mac OS X and Windows. After starting up, your Mac runs Windows completely natively. Restart to return to Mac.

### **CONCLUSION**

So can you do it? Can you make the switch from PC to Mac? It's absolutely possible. Plus with some of the virtualization programs available, you can run two fully operational computers for the price of one.

Read about several other conversion experiences from practicing lawyers at the [Switching to Macs section of The Mac Lawyer blog](#).

The common thread in their testimonies seems to be that they only regret not having made the switch sooner.

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*firm switched to Macs in 2005. Ben began publishing [The Mac Lawyer blog](#) in 2006; it has become one of the leading legal technology blogs. Ben and his blog have been featured in several national publications, including [MacLife](#), [ABA Journal](#), and [Lawyers USA](#). He serves on the editorial board for the ABA's [Law Practice Today Webzine](#) and is a*

*member of the ABA's Practice Technology Core Group. Ben frequently speaks at seminars on both substantive legal topics and legal technology. He also publishes the [S.C. Family Law Blog](#) and in his spare time coaches little league baseball.*

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