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Blogging Tips for Small Firms and Solos

By Mister Thorne

Of all the small firms and solos that cater to the public, more and more are publishing blogs to promote their practices. Some of those blogs are very effective: they attract clients. Most do little good at all. And some do more harm than good.

The most effective attorney-authored blogs—the ones that really attract clients—are written for a particular audience. They're written for people charged with DUI in San Mateo County, or confronted with a personal injury lawsuit filed in Nassau County, getting a divorce in New York, starting a business in Ohio, or wrestling with the IRS. In short, they're written exclusively for people looking (or who know someone who's looking) for a particular type of lawyer.

Now, let's assume you're an attorney who caters to the public. You already have a blog, or you're thinking about starting one, and you want it to attract good clients. Then this article is for you. It offers a few things to consider when you write for a broad audience—an audience containing potential clients.

As an attorney, you spend your day dealing with legal matter—complaints, petitions, statutes, and rules, etc. You read and write material of, by, and for attorneys—very formal material containing long, convoluted sentences sprinkled

with obscure Latin phrases and hifalutin' technical terms.

You can't write that way when you write for your blog—not if you want to attract an audience chock full of potential clients. You have to write for that audience—for people who don't have law degrees and don't know obscure Latin phrases and aren't used to terms like *herewith*, *the aforesaid*, and *notwithstanding*. Write like an attorney writing legal matter, and your blog will be just a waste of your time.

So, if you shouldn't write like an attorney writing legal matter, how should you write for your blog?

Your blog is a journal, so you should write like a journalist. You want your blog to be read by many, so you need to write for a very broad audience. You have to make sure that people find what you write not only informative, but also easy to read. Fail to do that, and you won't attract the audience you want.

1. Write for Your Audience

Before you write anything, imagine someone in your audience—a potential client. Imagine a freelance artist in trouble with the IRS for years of unreported income, a software engineer dealing with a divorce, a contractor being sued by a disgruntled client, or a business executive charged with DUI. Imagine anyone who might come to you for help.

Then, imagine how would you explain something of the law to that person. That's how you want to write your blog. You want to use familiar language to provide potential clients with interesting information.

Put yourself in the place of your readers. It's easy to do: just think of something very involved and something you know nothing about, like the physics of a spinning top or a theorem about differential equations. And then suppose you need to learn about it.

How would you want a mathematician or a physicist to explain it to you? You wouldn't want the explanation to be composed of hifalutin' technical language, and you wouldn't want it to refer to concepts or rules you know nothing about, would you?

When you write, imagine you're the reader. The easier it is to find and fathom, the happier you'll be. Keep that in mind.

2. Structure Your Posts

A post that merely announces “the city council voted to allow (or prohibit) this (or that)” doesn't require much structure, but a post that explains what the council's vote means for small business owners in the city does.

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The longer a post is, and the more it covers, the more it must be well structured for people to read it. A long post (anything over 1,200 words) needs an introduction. If it's a very long post, the intro might inform the reader how the post is structured.

Long posts are divided into sections. To make it easy for readers to follow the discussion or find specific information, the sections have descriptive headings. (And to make it easy for people to use search engines to find posts of interest, the headings are likely to include certain key words.)

Whenever you write a post (or anything else for that matter), apply the basic elements of composition. Make sure each paragraph covers just one topic, and each sentence focuses on one idea.

Tip: Find your copy of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* and review Section II—"The Elementary Principles of Composition."

3. Write in a Concise, Easy-to-Read Style

Legal writing is one thing; writing for the public is much different. In legal writing, others might admire your ability to construct long, complicated sentences. When you're writing for the public, it's just the opposite.

In general, readers don't want to spend any more time, or do any more work, than they have to. The more intricate your writing, the less likely the people you're trying to attract will read it.

Compared to your legal writing, you want your blog posts to be composed of:

- Short paragraphs that progress logically from one topic to the next.
- Fairly short sentences composed of the most common words.
- The fewest words needed to express any idea.

To attract a broad audience containing potential clients, your posts need to be as clear, as concise, and as consistent as can be.

4. Use Plain English and Avoid Legalese

Prospective clients aren't familiar with terms like *Letters Testamentary*, *chain of custody*, or *disparate impact discrimination*, nor with cryptic references like C.C.P. 580d or IRC section 67(e). Don't confront readers with legal terminology unless you have to, and when you need to use an uncommon term, introduce it on its first use.

Don't use formidable phrases like "including, but not limited to," or archaic words like *herewith* and *notwithstanding*, or obscure Latin

phrases like *inter alia*.

You may be very comfortable with these terms and phrases, but your readers—assuming they're everyday people with everyday problems—are not. To them, legalese is burdensome. Don't use it.

Don't sound formal. As much as you can, use the language of everyday discourse. Look at some of the most popular blogs, and see how their posts are written. If you want your blog to be popular, follow suit.

5. Edit Each Post Before You Publish It

Paste the copy into a blank Word document. Make sure the following options are checked in the Spelling and Grammar preferences:

- Check grammar with spelling
- Show readability statistics

Then, use Word to check spelling and grammar throughout the document. When you're done, look at the readability statistics, and make a copy of them.

Word won't catch everything, so you'll have to read the copy to:

- Eliminate any remaining errors
- Improve the copy and shorten it

As you're looking for errors, look for any opportunity to cut words and replace longer phrases with shorter ones. And be on the lookout for anything that's not as clear as can be, or that smacks of legalese.

Improve on whatever you can make clearer or more concise. If Word identified passive sentences, make them active; that is, reword them so the subject is doing something, rather than having something done to it.

And be on the lookout for series of items that you could replace with a numbered or bulleted list. If you create such a list, give it an introduction, and make sure each item in it is presented in like fashion.

After you edit the post, use Word to check grammar and spelling once again. Compare the new readability statistics to the earlier ones.

You've done a good job of editing if:

- The post contains fewer words.

- There are fewer words per sentence.
- There are few, if any, passive sentences.
- The Flesch reading ease score increased and the grade level decreased.

Tip: You can check a single sentence or paragraph to see how your edits affect readability.

If you ever write a post that begins like this:

One of the most important protections provided to taxpayers by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is a taxpayer's right to obtain a hearing known as a collection due process, or CDP hearing, with the IRS Appeals Division before an IRS collection officer can issue a tax levy as provided by Internal Revenue Code Section (IRC) Section 6330.

You should edit it so it's more like this:

As a taxpayer, you have a right to a hearing before the IRS can issue a levy against you.

If your posts aren't clear and concise, or seem as if they were written of, by, and for attorneys, your blog won't help you attract potential clients. They won't even bother to read it.

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How to improve your firm's presence in cyberspace.

Marketing Your Law Firm via the Internet

By Cheney Winslow

With the economy in the dumpster what are law firms to do? The smart attorneys will get tough and market stronger than ever. The good news is that the Internet is helping users win the marketing wars. The year 2008 saw a 10 percent increase in people who research online.

Focus on your website and internet marketing strategies in 2009. Does your website feature stale news and static content? How can you better serve your existing, as well as potential, clientele via this avenue? Your options are many.

1. Add Fresh Content to Your Website on a Regular Basis

This is achieved via multiple options.

1. *Start a Blog.* A blog is an online journal of regular commentary on your particular practice area. The information that you write about can be short or lengthy. The text can reference a breaking news story or promote one of your firm's recent successes.

Blog posts syndicate through RSS feeds, which differ from the content on your websites.

The content from the blog syndicates automatically. People can also subscribe to your feed in order to receive updates regularly. In



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nontechnical language, the RSS feed sends out the content you write via the syndication network used by major online publications such as USAToday.com, MSNBC.com, and CNN.com. When someone is searching on a topic that you commented on recently, or gathering information for a story on a recently discussed topic, your post is apt to be noted via the syndication of the text.

An alternative to blogs is the text on your website, which is written in html. People read this text when they go to your site. The search engines send crawlers to your website to check for new and viable content in order to give them credence and list them on the directory. The text on your website requires a visit to your website in order to be read. Text on a blog is sent out via the network.

The regularly posted information not only serves your target audience with timely and viable news, but it also pushes your website to the top of the natural/organic listings on Google, Yahoo!, and the other major search engines. The catch is that it must be updated constantly. Enter new posts at least two times per week. Starting the project and then slacking relegates you to the end of the Internet marketing gravy train.

Blogs are interactive. People can respond to your comments, which starts a string. This additional content is also valuable to search engine placement. Be careful and use a viable blog company in order to maintain control of your blog content. Attorneys Online, Inc., requires comments to be approved by the law firm moderator prior to being posted on the site. This prevents spam and bogus comments, which helps to protect law firms. A negative response is not always a bad thing. Conflict can be compelling, so do not be afraid to post something that can draw more traffic to your website and assist you in highlighting your knowledge and authority.

The domain name of your blog can be unique, or the blog can be a section of your main website. Research is divided as to which is more effective. Multiple domains that have viable websites on them that link to your main website help increase the popularity of the main site, which is a factor in search engine placement. With the launch of the Google Blog search engine and the viability of blog.com domain names, I believe setting up a separate domain will have more value in the end.

2. *Add more content to your website.* Add more practice area information, new categories, local legal news, firm news, and newsletter content to your website regularly.
 - You can subscribe to a legal newsletter service through companies such as Next Client or Findlaw. Attorneys Online, Inc., has an newsletter strategy that features article titles and teasers on client homepages. These give readers a

reason to drill down further into the site if a topic interests them. They also give the law firm brownie points with Google, because people spend more time on the websites. This added feature also rotates titles and descriptions on the law firm's homepage, as well as the eNewsletter page. Next Client also provides eNewsletters, which rotate weekly.

- The eNewsletter feeds should brand to the law firm's website, content provided on shared feeds, and exclusive content written for the law firm. Be careful about sharing any content with other websites since this can count against you with Google rankings.
- Practice area content should be multiple pages. These pages contain main practice area information, including overviews that break down into several niche practice topics within the main categories. All should appear on the navigation bar for ease of use. Using multiple drop-down menus gives the site a high-tech appearance and makes information easy to find.
- Keep your website current with breaking firm news, verdicts, staff additions, and headline news. You must keep your site from looking stale. If dates shown are old, then potential clients view the firm as dated, and Google will give your placement less credence, because it is not timely and up to date.

2. Create Niche Practice Websites

The creation of multiple niche practice specific websites is an invaluable marketing tool. These sites show your strength in one particular practice area. If you practice in the area of family law, you might have a website devoted to adoption issues or surrogacy.

- Multiple websites help with the optimization game because the sites link to your main website and to one another. This helps show the site is popular in the eyes of Google search rankings. This can take time since the inbound links to your website from your niche practice sites first need to establish with the search engine gods that they are credible sites that offer viable and fresh information.
- Niche practice websites are great sources for keyword rich domain names. A family law main practice site may have a name such as SmithLaw.com and the niche sites would be orlandchildcustody.com or floridasurrogacy.com. The keywords in the domain name also help with the optimization process. The registration of a domain is inexpensive and can have value in the future.

3. Create Information Portals

A website that focuses on information instead of the law firm is the foundation of this concept. Use the concept of WebMD and build from there. General practice area information, questions and answers, breaking news, and searchable articles are pieces of this type of marketing.

- These legal information portals are constantly updated and can become a source for news for the major search engines. This is a

more expensive strategy to set up and maintain due to the constant updating, but can be invaluable in the end. Remember that Google gives better rankings to sites that are established and offer updated, viable, and timely content.

- The law firm can sponsor the website. No firm information will be provided concerning attorney bios or firm history. These sites are strictly for informational purposes.

4. Pay-Per-Click Marketing Is Necessary in Order to Maintain First-Page Placement on Google, Yahoo! and the Rest

This avenue guarantees your law firm will be on the first search page for an unlimited number of pertinent keywords to your practice and geographic location. You cannot beat this placement with any other avenue.

- The downside is the expense of paying per hit. The upside is that the campaign is controllable, budgets are capped as well as manageable, and you are only charged a fee when someone clicks on your sponsored listing. This avenue wins over other types of advertising because it is changeable. If titles and descriptions do not get results, we can change them at any time and continue to tweak campaigns in order to achieve optimal results.
- Be careful about setting up and managing a campaign such as this yourself. I have seen law firms spend thousands of dollars by adding a feature that seemed simple but ran up a large tab with Google. Hire a professional. We promise not to file our own lawsuits.
- A pay-per-click campaign is great for taking advantage of breaking news. Your law firm could appear on the first search page almost instantly when a newsworthy event occurs, such as a natural disaster or a recall of a defective drug.
- Many fail-safes have been instigated by the major search engines in order to prevent click fraud, such as blocking an IP address if it clicks on your ad more than once. Google sets a daily budget that cannot be exceeded automatically in order to help insure the controllability of the account.
- Pay-per-click campaigns are geographic specific. If you want people in Philadelphia to see your ads, then the campaigns are targeted to IP addresses that log onto the Internet from that location only. These campaigns are very controllable.

5. Link Exchanges

Link exchanges occur when you place an outbound link to another website on your site in exchange for a link back to your site. The theory behind this marketing is that Google ranks your website's popularity by how many viable websites link to yours.

1. Link exchanges can hurt your credibility and placement. For starters, you are promoting another website or law firm. If you choose to pursue this avenue, make sure you are dealing with a credible firm that you wish to endorse.

2. Too many outbound links, or links to other sites from your website, can hurt your rankings.
3. Be leery of link farms, or companies that promise to get your law firm sites on many websites. You might just wind up on a porno site.

We will discuss social networks such as Facebook and Twitter when next we speak. The bottom line is that you must keep marketing your practice in order to stay in the game. The Internet is controllable, as opposed to print options. The Internet is the only way that your law firm can be found worldwide. The Internet is the future. Stick with it. The longer you use it to your benefit, the more it will benefit you.

Cheney Winslow is the CEO of [Attorneys Online, Inc.](#) and [Askthelawyers.Com.](#)

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MacNotes

Post-Steve Jobs offerings at Macworld

By Jeffrey Allen

The last several months have proved quite interesting in the Apple world. Apple refreshed its laptop and iPod line and announced new versions of iWork and iLife. Apple also announced plans not to participate after 2009 in MacWorld, the iconic all-Mac computer show in San Francisco. Steve Jobs' (Apple's answer to Sun Tzu, P.T. Barnum, and Houdini) health has become more suspect. Rumor has it that he will play a reduced role on the Apple campus, at least for the near term. In a move reflective of a reduced role for Jobs, Philip Schiller, a senior VP at Apple, gave the keynote at MacWorld instead of Steve Jobs.

Apple released most of its upgrades prior to MacWorld to take advantage of the

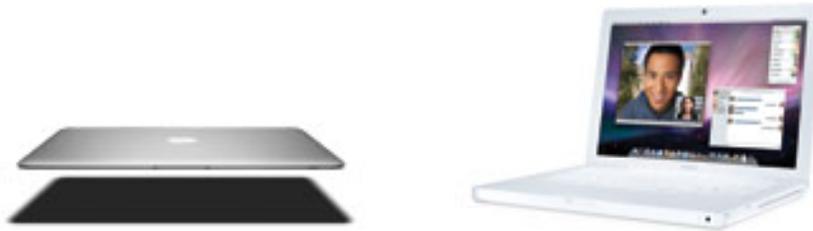
holiday shopping season. It saved only iLife'09, iWork '09, and the rebuilding of the 17 MacBook Pro for MacWorld.

Cosmetically, the MacBook Air benefited the least from the refreshing of the line. In fact, it served as the model for the appearance of the new MacBook and MacBook Pro laptops (each of which looks pretty much like chubby MacBook Air). Don't take that comment wrong, I really like the way the new line looks. Cosmetically, the MacBook benefited the most from the upgrading as it shed its black plastic case (you can still get a white plastic case) for the same silver-gray aluminum housing as the MacBook Air and Mac Book Pro.

The MacBook and MacBook Pro each got a slick new glass multitouch trackpad. It takes a little getting used to, but it does make control of the computer easier. The trackpad has no buttons to push: you can click anywhere on the pad.

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MacBook Air and MacBook 13
Courtesy of Apple Computer, Inc.

The MacBook and MacBook Pro both got speed upgrades, graphics processing improvements, and display improvements (the new displays really look good). Disappointingly, the MacBook no longer has any FireWire ports, and the MacBook Pro lost its FireWire 400 port, but kept a single FireWire 800 port.

MacBookPro 15



MacBookPro 17

The 17" MacBookPro is bigger, heavier, faster, and more costly than the 15" MacBookPro, but as 17" laptops go, this one looks and feels pretty svelte. It has three USB ports, but otherwise, the same port configuration as the 15" MacBook Pro. Apple claims a charge will last for 8 hours of work on the 17" MacBook Pro.

The MacBook Air looks pretty much the same as before, but now comes with a far more usable 128GB flash drive or 120GB SATA hard drive. The Air remains the lightest, slightest member of the family, but it has not become a cheap date. The least expensive MacBook Air costs \$1,799. Apple has reduced the price differential between the MacBook Air versions. You can now get a MacBook Air with 2GB of memory (not upgradable), a 1.86 GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor, and a 128 GB solid-state (flash) drive for \$2,499. Apple claims a 4.5-hour use per charge for the Air, which continues to preclude a battery swap on a long trip. The Air continues to have no built in optical drive and only a single USB Port.

The Air weighs in at 3 pounds, the MacBook at 4.5, the 15" MacBook Pro at 5.5 pounds, and the 17" MacBook Pro at 6.6 pounds.

All of the new Mac laptops use the Mini Display Port, so if you upgrade to a new model, you will need new adaptors for larger monitors or use with projectors.

As for recommendations, the 17" MacBook Pro makes a good desktop substitute. The 15" MacBook Pro makes an excellent workhorse computer for business use. The 13" MacBook works brilliantly for a home laptop, for travel, or as a second computer. The MacBook Air continues to as a showpiece, but, in truth, unless you are just dying to have people see you with one, you don't have any need or desire to travel with an optical drive and the weight differential makes a difference to you, the MacBook makes a better choice and gives you better value for your dollars.

In its iPod line, Apple has improved the line's performance and tried to continue to offer something for everyone.

Apple has redone the iPod Touch, giving it more features, a thinner profile, and less weight. The Touch now has a built-in speaker, a 3.5" display with 480 x 320 pixel resolution, measures 4.3" x 2.4" x .33" and weights a hair over 4 ounces. It comes in 8, 16, and 32GB versions costing \$229, \$299, and \$399, respectively. Apple claims longer battery life—up to 36 hours of audio or 6 hours of video play.



The new iPod Classic comes in black or white and with a 120GB memory for \$249. It does not have the large touch-screen display of the iPod Touch or the ability to run applications from the App store. It will play music and video quite nicely and can also serve as a USB storage drive. It has a 2.5" display with 320 x 240 pixel resolution. It measures 4.1" x 2.4" x .41" and weighs in at 4.9 ounces.

The Nano has a 2" display with a 320 x 240 resolution and measures 3.6" x 1.5" x .24". You can get it in your choice of nine colors with either a 8GB or 16GB memory for \$149 and \$199, respectively. I particularly like the Nano's design.

The Shuffle comes in a 1 and 2 GB version. You can choose from among five colors. The Shuttle measures 1.07" x 1.62" x .41". It has no display.

In the software department, Apple has announced substantial upgrades to iWork and iLife '09. Apple released iWork right after the product announcement, and you can order it from the Apple Store for immediate delivery. Apple announced the release of iLife '09 and will take orders for it in the store. By the time you read this, Apple should be delivering iLife '09. It has not been available as of the preparation of this column.

Apple continues its policy of not having an upgrade price, but offering the software for a total price of less than what most developers charge for a major upgrade. Apple sells single copies of each suite for \$79. It also makes a family license available (5 single users) for \$99. If you still need to upgrade to Leopard, Apple has announced its "Box Set" of Leopard, iWork '09, and iLife '09 for \$169 for a single user and \$229 for family pack licenses.

iWork continues to include three programs in its suite: Pages (word processing), Numbers (spreadsheet), and Keynote (presentation). All of the programs are Microsoft Office friendly, in that they can open Office files and save as Office files, so that Office users can open them on both Mac and Windows platforms.

Apple's website lists the following new features of iWork:

Pages '09:

40 new Apple-designed templates (more than 180 total).

- Full-screen view
- Dynamic outlines
- Mail merge with Numbers
- Insert equations with MathType 6 (sold separately)
- Create bibliographies with EndNote X2 (sold separately)
- Open, save, and email Microsoft Word files from within Pages

Numbers '09:

- Easily create formulas, using visual placeholders with plain language text
- Perform calculations using more than 250 functions
- Organize your data instantly using Table Categories
- Check your calculations at a glance with Formula List view
- Create two-axis charts and combine line, column, and area series in a

- single mixed chart
- Choose from twelve new Apple-designed templates (30 total)
- Open, save, and email Microsoft Excel files from within Numbers

Keynote '09:

- Create sophisticated animations with Magic Move
- Add dramatic object and text transitions using new visual effects
- Visualize your data with new styles and animations for 3D charts
- Dramatically reduce file size without compromising quality
- Create dynamic flowcharts and diagrams using connection lines
- Choose from eight new Apple-designed themes (44 total)
- Open, save, and email Microsoft PowerPoint files from within Keynote

Apple's website lists the following new features in iLife '09

iPhoto '09

- Use Faces to find photos of people
- Use Places to explore your photo library
- Create slideshows using animated titles and multiphoto layouts
- Publish photos directly to Facebook and Flickr
- Create travel-themed photo books with custom maps

iMovie '09

- Fine-tune movies with the Precision Editor
- Use enhanced drag-and-drop to edit projects
- Use automatic video stabilization to smooth clips
- Apply themes to a project
- Add animated maps to travel videos
- Animated titles, new transitions, and cinema-quality video effects

GarageBand '09

- Learn to play piano or guitar with interactive lessons
- Learn how artists play their songs and practice them
- Play and record with new guitar amps and stompbox effects
- Jam with virtual instruments in a full-screen view that allows mixing, playing along, and recording

iWeb '09

- Add YouTube videos, RSS feeds, iSight videos to your web pages
- Manage multiple websites
- Built-in FTP publishing
- Link your web site to your Facebook account

iDVD '09

- Apple-designed themes with animated menus
- Author-customizable DVDs
- Combine videos and photos

Jeffrey Allen is the principal in the law firm of Graves & Allen with a general practice that, since 1973, has emphasized negotiation, structuring, and documentation of real estate acquisitions, loans and other business transactions, receiverships, related litigation, and bankruptcy. Graves & Allen is a small firm in Oakland, California. Mr. Allen also works extensively as an arbitrator and a mediator. He serves as the editor of the *Technology eReport* and the Technology & Practice Guide issues of *GPSOLO Magazine*. He regularly presents at substantive law and technology-oriented programs for lawyers and writes for several legal trade magazines. In addition to being licensed as an attorney in California, Jeffrey has been admitted as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales. He holds faculty positions at California State University of the East Bay and the University of Phoenix. You can contact Jeffrey via email at jallenlawtek@aol.com. Mr. Allen blogs on technology and the law at www.jallenlawtekblog.com.

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SurvivingEmail

The Drama Queen's Guide to Infamy on Mailing Lists

By jennifer j. rose

It can take months for many list subscribers to work their way up to persona non grata status, but a determined lawyer can go from being completely unknown to batting less than zero in only a few days. With little concerted effort, a list newbie can make a lasting impression upon a thousand or more lawyers who participate in a law-related mailing list to share information, seek answers, network, and socialize. The online behavior of some of these lawyers can make bystanders hope that a poseur has stolen the identity of some poor, misbegotten lawyer.

Let's explore some of the ways a new subscriber can convince other lawyers on a

mailing list that he or she is a complete idiot:

- Don't waste your precious time lurking and learning the list culture before posting. Simply hop aboard and interrogate the community before learning its standards and styles.
- Ignore the list's rules, declaring that your familiarity with online communities trumps the rules. Flout all rules and conventions.
- Before introducing yourself, and within only a few days of joining the list, point out to the list all of its failings, from the threads under discussion to the participants' style and even the mechanics of a list's operation. Your time is simply too valuable to be spent lurking and discovering a list's culture.
- Demand that the list migrate from its time-honored, tried-and-true delivery vehicle to a webboard.
- Don't spend any time trying to find answers on your own. Your time is too precious to waste using a search engine to ferret out questions like the capital of North Carolina or who wrote Prosser on Torts. The list exists to serve your every whim and need, just like your personal reference librarian.
- Don't lower yourself to exploring and reading the list's archived messages. The same question may have been asked and answered only yesterday, but you deserve a fresh answer.
- Draw particular attention to your posts by using ALL CAPS, poor grammar, and inorthography.
- Distribute every joke that reaches your inbox to the entire listserve. Lawyers lead dull, humorless lives, and they need as many laughs as they can get.
- Personally attack, insult, and deride one or more of the list's Most Valued Players.
- Rebuff all attempts at reason, lobbing taunts of unprofessionalism. Be sure to call your detractors insecure, unsuccessful, and obviously lacking in intelligence.
- Consider your responses to list posts an opportunity to practice your cross-examination skills. Jump right on to every post, peppering others with challenges and requests for clarification just to keep them on their toes. Consider your participation in a law-related mailing list the cyberequivalent of the Socratic Method.
- Fire away as many posts as you can, because doing so costs you absolutely nothing.
- Respond to every post, either on list or off, and then complain that the list's taking up too much of your valuable time.
- Deliberately foment discord to draw attention in your direction, and prove that your unwillingness to rise above the fray makes you somehow better than everyone else on the list.
- Scream "invasion of privacy" if anyone mentions Googled references about you.
- Threaten legal action against the listowner, the list's sponsor, list subscribers, and anyone within earshot.

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Even those who've gone and made complete and total fools of themselves can be rehabilitated. All it takes is an humble apology, forbearance, and a good measure of time.

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SitesForSoreEyes

By Jim Calloway and Courtney Kennaday

Time Capsules

The beginning of a new year has us thinking: Where does the time go, and how can I get a better handle on it? As lawyers and human beings, we struggle a good bit with arranging the minutes in a day to suit the amount of work we have to do.

Naturally, we queried [Yahoo](#) and [Google](#), hoping for an answer to the riddle of time. Oh, we got a lot of answers, including explanations of the space time continuum (which will make our science fiction TV viewing more interesting), but not the ones we were looking for. We did, however, find some websites that

just might come in handy for lawyers.

First, if you want an accurate “official” time for the United States, with a map showing the time zones, go to The [Official U.S. Time](#) page. To be honest, sometimes the animation on this page prevents it from loading properly, no matter which browser you use, so we use the nonanimated version (click on “Disable Java Animation,” then choose your time zone). But it is a handy site to make sure your computer, or watch, is displaying the correct time.

Is your college buddy from Thailand irritated when you call him at home in Bangkok at 2:00 in the morning? Next time, go to The World Clock www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/ before you call. Likewise, if you have overseas clients or want to set up a conference call between people in several time zones, use The World Clock Meeting Planner www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html to set up your conference call at a time convenient for everyone. Just pick the date and the cities of the attendees. When Jim needs to teleconference with his copresenter in Addis Ababa, the Meeting Planner lets him see a range of days and times he and his copresenter can chat. (Hint: if you must communicate with someone in Addis Ababa, use email.)

Other free worldwide meeting planners are available online, such as [ScheduleOnce.com](#), or [World Time Server](#) (which has a mobile version).

Of course, if you just want to know the time in a particular city or town right now, type the word “time” and the city’s name into Google. Try that one right now and see the results.

This year, we resolve to capture more billable time. Oh wait, we don’t do that anymore. OK, we resolve to help *you* capture your time. The best way to do that is with your practice management software or billing software. But there are some nice free tools on the Internet that will help you do that as well. One is [Online Stopwatch.com](#) and another is [TimeMe.com](#). Both will let you set a timer or stopwatch for meetings, presentations, phone calls, and so on. You use the timer directly from their web page, which relies on your PC’s internal clock for accuracy. Online Stopwatch has a version you can download—the “Stay on Top App”—which stays open on top of the other applications you may be running on your computer.

If you only have a short amount of time to give a presentation, setting the timer to count down the minutes on your laptop PC will either be a tremendous help or a nerve-wracking experience. Try it, and let us know which it is.

If you want to track the time it takes you to do a task and then see a very basic report, try [Time Tracker](#). With a simple registration you can add “Tasks” which consists of a category and a subcategory for what you are timing. Once that is set, start the timer. When you are finished, stop the timer and view a report. The

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report is just the category name with the date and time started, the date and time finished, plus the total duration.

OnlineConversion.com has a list of date and time related conversion charts and calculators. We can both convert to and from military time in our heads; but if you cannot, here is the place to go. That is just one of many free tools there, including one that tells you what a person's birthday must be in order to be a certain age today.

If you have trouble hitting the snooze on your alarm clock too many times in the morning, there are a number of Internet-based services that will let you schedule wake-up calls or our telephonic reminders at the cost of a few cents per call. Some of these are www.wake123.com, www.MySnoozeSter.com and <http://telepixie.com/>. We haven't actually used any of these, so we can't vouch for them. We assume that they verify it is really your phone number first somehow. Otherwise some lawyer might decide to give opposing counsel a wake up call at 4:00 a.m. before every deposition, just as professional courtesy, of course.

If you have young children, you might want to see this reviewer's links to five websites that help teach kids about telling time: www.surfnetkids.com/telling_time.htm.

The National Institute of Standards and Technology has a service that will synchronize your computer's clock to the correct time at <http://tf.nist.gov/service/its.htm>. But after looking at the instructions, we've decided we'll just go to one of the sites that we first mentioned and reset our computer clock manually if we have the need, as we don't have time to figure that all out. NIST also has a history feature called a Walk Through Time, <http://physics.nist.gov/GenInt/Time/time.html>, which is interesting and might be really valuable if you had to write a term paper on the history of measuring time.

We would love to hang around and share some more great sites with you, but unfortunately, we're out of time! We hope you find the time to explore these sites.

Jim Calloway is the director of the Oklahoma Bar Association Management Assistance Program. He served as chair of the ABA TECHSHOWT 2005. Calloway publishes the weblog, Jim Calloway's Law Practice Tips, at <http://jimcalloway.typepad.com>, and was coauthor of the book, *Winning Alternatives to the Billable Hour*. He serves on the **GP|Solo Division Technology Board**. Courtney Kennaday is the director of the Practice Management Assistance Program of the South Carolina Bar. She advises bar members on practice management and law office technology.

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Lenovo Ideapad S10

Reviewed by jennifer j. rose

Jeff Allen really is Cupid.

I looked at the ASUS Eee PC, and I checked out the Acer AspireOne, but when it really was decision time, I went directly to my most trusted source—Jeff Allen.

“The Lenovo IdeaPad S10” he said, without hesitation. “And Lenovo’s got a deal going on.”

Having known Jeff a couple of decades, I knew that his counsel, at least when it came to matters technological, was nonpareil. It was like listening to E. F. Hutton.

And so the only matter left to debate would be the color. Now, picking a reasonably good color is never a difficult matter for me, because there is no finer color than red. I’m one of those with a finely honed set of internal rules: GM for motor vehicles, HP for printers, Lancome for my face, Ferragamo for my feet, and Neiman Marcus for clothes.

But the Lenovo red gave me pause—and then there was the pink.

“Every thirteen-year-old girl will have a pink computer” insisted Robin. “And besides, a red netbook would go nicely with your new red Malibu.” As if my netbook was supposed to color-coordinate with my car.

“Pink is just so lame and girly,” chimed in Larry.

But I knew that I had enough power and confidence to carry the pink. And besides, the fingerprints wouldn’t show. Red may be the new blue, but pink will always be the domain of the privileged.

Within minutes of its arrival, the Lenovo was up and running, retrieving the past day’s email while I caught up with Drudge. I was smitten, which isn’t a bad emotion to have on Valentine’s Day.

I carried it to an evening gathering of friends, just in case I had the urge to compute when I should’ve been networking, schmoozing, and socializing. The iridescent cover could pass for an evening accessory, a poor geek chick’s Judith Leiber. No one batted an eyelash. More than a fair number at the gathering wanted to touch and try out my new netbook. This was almost as good as bringing a good book to a party. Weighing in at about the same heft as a Whitman’s Sampler, slightly larger than a trade paperback, and only a finger’s width, the Lenovo S10 meant that I no longer had to schlep along like a bag lady with my wheeled Swiss Army arsenal.

Matters of style and Jeff Allen’s recommendation aside, there were other features of the IdeaPad S10 that drew me to it. Under the hood, all good netbooks are pretty much like Lake Woebagon’s children—strong, good-looking, and above average. But the IdeaPad S10 had two factors far more important to me than even the operating system: a 10.2" matte antiglare screen and a solid-feeling, adequately sized keyboard. I just don’t like feeling like I’ve got to use a

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magnifying glass just to see either. It's fine to shrink everything else down, but my hands and eyes demand size, and this netbook met those requirements. Display and touch count for a lot.

Now, on to what's under the hood:

Windows XP® Home Edition

Processor: 1.6GHz Atom N270

Display: 10.2 WSVGA AntiGlare TFT with integrated camera, 1024 x 600

Total Memory: 1 GB PC2-5300 DDR2 SDRAM 667MHz

Hard drive: 160GB 5400

Communication: Broadcom 11b/g Wi-Fi wireless

Features: 2 USB ports, ExpressCard slot, built-in Bluetooth, 4-in-1 memory card slot, Ethernet connector, OneKey™ Rescue System, headphone/mic jacks

Battery: 3 Cell Lithium-Ion

Weight 2.64 lbs.

Cost: \$349–399 in black or white. Add \$10 for red, blue, or pink.

Goldilocks wasn't entirely perfect, and neither is the IdeaPad S10. The biggest drawback is its 3-cell battery, but it's not hard to buy a 6-cell battery aftermarket. On the other hand, do you really need more than three hours' time away from a recharge? After all, you're buying a netbook, not a portable iron lung or defibrillator.

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Clio

Reviewed by Jeffrey Allen

Most attorneys in private practice need to keep track of their billable time and get invoices out to clients in a timely manner in order to stay in business. For that reason, billing programs always interest lawyers and those who help lawyers and law firms with technology. Although a wealth of billing systems exist on the Windows side, a serious weakness of the Mac platform for attorneys has been the shortage of usable billing systems that work on the platform.

Practice consultants have told attorneys that they need to have practice management software to keep their firm running smoothly and efficiently and help lawyers stay out of trouble with their clients and their state bar disciplinary committees.

probably not find that as significant an issue as a firm with many clients. I understand that batch billing is on the board for future inclusion in an update to the program.

In working with the program, I found it satisfactory to perform the things it sets out to provide and relatively easy to work with. I think that most solos and small firms will find that it meets their needs for billing, calendaring, and contact management. The document management piece really sets itself up as a document storage structure, and it works just fine for that purpose. It does not try to provide the features required for management of documents in a litigation context.

The program appears well integrated and allows you to review all entries relating to a particular matter, sorted by matter, without regard to which portion of the program holds the entry.

You can easily keep copies of documents stored in the program on your own computer. You can also keep calendaring and contact information on your computer. While you can keep copies of your invoices on your computer, you cannot keep copies of your unbilled billing data there. Even if you had a backup of that database, you could not access it, so it would not do you any good. Keep that in mind if you decide to drop the service for any reason, and be sure to do it immediately after you have generated bills for all clients to ensure that you do not leave unbilled time in the system.

In the interest of integrity, I want to disclose that Clio is a sponsor of the GPSolo Division. That said, their status, as a sponsor did not influence the opinions expressed in this review. The review reflects my review of the program. I have had several conferences and meetings with high-level personnel in the company and found that they are very interested in learning what features they need to add to make the program work better for attorneys and in adding them as quickly as possible. I expect this program to get even better in the near future. New features on the immediate horizon include direct access programs for current Blackberry devices as well as the iPhone.

Clio offers a 30-day free trial of the program. Go to their website and give it a try.

Filemaker Pro 10 Advanced

Reviewed by Jeffrey Allen

I have used FileMaker since it first came out. I have watched it evolve from a good database program for the Mac to a great program for both Mac and Windows. FileMaker, which comes in a Pro and a Pro Advanced version, now moves to FileMaker 10. It plays nicely with Mac OS 10 as well as both Windows

XP and Vista. I include it on the short list of programs that I believe every law office should have.

Although FileMaker introduces a number of new features in version 10, its true strength remains in its simplicity of operation, its short learning curve, and its ease of use. FileMaker's continuing success emanates from its impressive ability to continue to increase the power of its software without sacrificing its flexibility and its ease of use. Many developers use FileMaker as a platform to create programs. Despite the flexibility to function in that environment, it remains a ready tool for the novice to set up a database.

Interestingly, I have had people tell me that they really don't need a database program. In truth, most of you already use limited databases in your practice and your daily life. Do you have a calendar program? Do you have a contact management program? They are both forms of database programs. While you may already have such structures in use, once you start using a program like FileMaker, you will find many other things that it will help you with. A few examples for you to consider:

1. File management. Have you ever lost track of a file? A database will allow you to keep track of all your files and their location.
2. Do you still have a physical law library? How about a database to keep track of where you have stored each book?
3. If you don't have a formal document management program, you can create a database with FileMaker and use it to keep track of your documents.
4. You could build a database to keep track of your personal form file.
5. You could build a database to keep an inventory of your business equipment or, for that matter, your personal holdings. As FileMaker can include photographic records, you could build a database that would facilitate an insurance claim in the event of a loss.
6. What about a database of your CD collection or your DVD collection or your personal library? If you have a lot of CDs or DVDs, you may have found it difficult to remember whether you have a particular DVD or CD. If you build a database to keep track of them, print a report to PDF and store it on your PDF or smart phone, you will have a far more manageable situation.

To make your life as a FileMaker user easier, the new version of FileMaker (Version 10) comes with 30 updated starter database solutions for you, as well as a number of themes to make the data records look nice. The built-in reporting features make it easy to organize information as you need or want to have it organized.

If you have used FileMaker before, the new interface will come as a bit of a surprise, but I think you will find the surprise pleasant. Once you acclimate to it, you will also find it easy to use. If you have not used FileMaker before, you will find the interface simple and straightforward to learn.

FileMaker sells the program as FileMaker 10 Pro and FileMaker 10 Pro Advanced. The advanced version of the software gives you additional features that allow you to create more sophisticated database structures, as well as customized database forms and reporting structures. Which version should you get? If you do not have experience with building databases, FileMaker 10 Pro should work just fine for you. If you plan on really getting into it, FileMaker 10 Pro Advanced may prove a better choice. FileMaker 10 Pro Advanced has all the features of FileMaker 10 Pro and then some, so you lose nothing by getting the more powerful version.

FileMaker (www.filemaker.com) sells FileMaker 10 Pro for \$299. If you have an earlier version, the upgrade will cost \$179. FileMaker Pro 10 Advanced costs \$499 for a full copy and \$299 to upgrade from an earlier version. If you plan to network your database, you will want to look into FileMaker's server editions. You can buy it and download it immediately from the website or order a CD for an extra \$20. If you want to try it before you buy it, they have a restricted trial version you can download as well.



Making the Case

Reviewed by Jeffrey Allen

Every good gadget and most tools deserve a good case. Some time ago I got into the habit of wrapping my laptops in protective sleeves and then putting them inside a carrying case. That gives me the option of using a case that lacks an internal protective pocket for the computer.

The MacBook Air works both as a tool and as a gadget. Many of you may remember Steve Jobs's introduction of the MacBook Air at MacWorld. For those of you that do not, he walked out onto the stage carrying a manila envelope. He opened the envelope and extracted the MacBook Air to the "oohs" and "aaahs" of the gathered Mac faithful. From that day to this, the MacBook Air has held the title of the coolest member (albeit also the least powerful) of the MacBook laptop family. One thing about the MacBook Air, coolness aside: Its thin construction and lightweight make it an excellent travelling partner.

If you have already acquired or have plans to acquire a MacBook Air, an additional \$49 will get you a manila-envelope made of leather by the folks at Civilian Labs (www.civilianlabs.com).



The padded case provides a reasonable amount of protection for your MacBook Air. The flap snaps down onto two metal snaps, and you can use the red string (see picture) to secure it, just like you would a traditional manila envelope. Civilian uses good quality leather for its Air Manila Sleeve. It comes in black, giving it a somewhat formal and professional appearance that does not, in any way, detract from its panache. I put one on my MacBook Air and took it to a meeting. As soon as I pulled it out, people started asking questions about it. One of my friends wanted to know where I got it, as he wanted to get one as a present for his partner. If you get one, be careful about how you wind the string up to ensure that it stays secure. If it comes loose, the snaps are strong enough to keep the envelope closed and the computer safely inside.

By the way, you may have heard that the TSA people now let you leave laptops in certain types of cases meeting specific design requirements. Although this sleeve does not strictly comply due to the metal snaps, TSA has allowed my laptop to go in with the sleeve many times. The first few times, I asked and they said send it through. As nobody has taken a contrary position, I don't even ask anymore.

A Few More Cases

The folks at OtterBox (www.otterbox.com) have built heavy-duty cases designed to take abuse for some time. If I was going off to serve in the military or to work at a construction job, I would not want any other case on my PDA or cell phone. The current line includes the Defender Cases and the Impact cases. The Impact cases slip over the device, giving you a protective housing that will guard against bumps and scratches. The Impact line sells for \$19.95, and the Defender line for \$49.95. Otterbox has recently released both Defender and Impact cases for the iPhone 3G and the Blackberry Bold, and a Defender case for the Blackberry Storm. Check out the website for other devices and cases.



Bold Defender



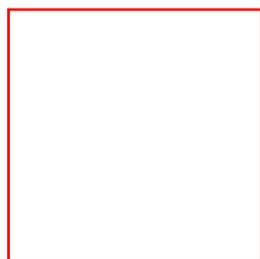
Bold Impact



iPhone Impact



iPhone Defender



Storm Defender

Jeffrey Allen is the principal in the law firm of Graves & Allen with a general practice that, since 1973, has emphasized negotiation, structuring, and documentation of real estate acquisitions, loans and other business transactions, receiverships, related litigation, and bankruptcy. Graves & Allen is a small firm in Oakland, California. Mr. Allen also works extensively as an arbitrator and a mediator. He serves as the editor of the [Technology eReport](#) and the Technology & Practice Guide issues of *GPSOLO Magazine*. He regularly presents at substantive law and technology-oriented programs for lawyers and writes for several legal trade magazines. In addition to being licensed as an attorney in California, Jeffrey has been admitted as a Solicitor of the Supreme Court of England and Wales. He holds faculty positions at California State University of the East Bay and the University of Phoenix. You can contact Jeffrey via email at jallenlawtek@aol.com. Mr. Allen blogs on technology and the law at www.jallenlawtekblog.com.

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Upcoming Events

- **GP|Solo Spring Meeting** »
May 7 - 10, 2009
Los Cabos, Mexico

Upcoming CLE

- Teleconference
Actions that Affect Applications for U.S. Citizenship »
March 25, 2009 • 12:00 p.m. CST

Confirm your hotel room by April 6, 2009, to receive the discounted room rate of \$250 single/double room based on availability. The spring meeting

early bird registration deadline is April 24, 2009. If you register before this date, you will save \$50 on your registration fee. Do not delay and go to [Register Now](#)

For more information, please go to [GP|Solo 2009 Spring Meeting, Cabo San Lucas Mexico](#).

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Applications are available until March 31, 2009

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