

## MAC USER: Are Macs Really Cheaper over the Long Haul?

American Bar Association > Publications > GP Solo > 2013 > January/February 2013: Practicing in a Down Economy

### MAC USER: Are Macs Really Cheaper over the Long Haul?

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Victoria L. Herring ([vlh@herringlaw.com](mailto:vlh@herringlaw.com)) practices in Des Moines, Iowa, in an office that has used only Apple/Macs since the early 1980s.

Because this issue is about the effects of the economic downturn on the practice of law, I thought I'd check into the present state of the old dispute over whether running a law office with Macs or Windows machines was more cost efficient. I am not trying to suggest that for some the use of Windows (or another) hardware or software might not be better, but from my point of view as a solo, it is frequently easier and less expensive to run a Mac-centric law office.

Before tackling cost, it must be noted that there are occasions when a particular software program may not be available for the Mac. But that is increasingly rare. And even if the need arises,

running Windows on a partition of a Mac or running the program through Windows "virtualization" software allows the seamless use of the program in question. So don't let such concerns stand in your way.

### Purchase Price vs. Ownership Cost

Although less so than in the past, the purchase price of a Mac system still tends to be higher than a Windows system. That computation doesn't really speak to the savings available to the Mac user, however. I checked with some other solos and small firm lawyers who use



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Macs, and they agreed with my own sense that the larger costs for Windows computers lay in the need for IT or technical personnel, virus software and protections, and other steps that need to be taken to get the office computers all up and running. As one of these lawyers pointed out about the Mac, “you turn it on, it works.”

Like others I surveyed, I find that my various Mac and Apple devices—not only computers but now iPads and iPhones—all are easy to use and set up, and they all work well together. Also, there are numerous magazines, blogs, websites, and other resources available to answer your questions. You can learn how to use or fix your various machines using AppleCare, the Genius Bar at the Apple Store, or the discussion groups at the [Apple.com](http://Apple.com) website. And a little Googling will find an answer for your questions soon enough.

### Real-World Experiences

One of the best sources of information on the subject is MacLaw ([groups.yahoo.com/group/MacLaw](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MacLaw)), a community of thousands of Mac-using lawyers who ask and answer questions about law and also operating their Macs/iPads/iPhones. Recently I surveyed the users on MacLaw about the relative costs of Windows and Mac systems, and I received a particularly informative response from Nate Silverman. Nate began practicing in 1961 and retired at age 70 in 2006. Between those dates, he learned about computers and ended up with a Mac-based practice. Here are his thoughts:

I had never used computers in my practice or elsewhere, but I became interested in 1982, in part because of the “paper war” the largest firms were engaging in to drown smaller litigating law firms in repetitive work. . . .

The lawyers in my office had played around with renting IBM magcard machines and I began to see the potential, but it seemed to me as if making use of these machines remained a secret between the secretaries and the tech people who came out to train them. I began buying and reading all the monthly computer magazines that filled the shelves at the local newsstand, but felt I was drowning in puff and in technical details in which I lacked comprehension.

Then in 1983 I saw a full-page ad in Fortune for the Apple Lisa and was knocked over by the idea of a graphical user interface, but disappointed to learn the price per machine. Then I saw the Super Bowl TV ad

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from Apple introducing the Macintosh in 1984. . . . [We] started out with three original Macs and three ImageWriters and MacWrite for work and MacPaint for play.

When I talked to fellow lawyers about computers, they seemed to think of them as nothing more than an expensive new-fangled tool for the secretary—sort of a typewriter with a TV screen attached so they could look at the words before they were printed! I found that very amusing, since I envisioned my goal quite differently: It was to find a way to use computers to build an assembly engine customized to the nature of my practice, which would construct editable transactional and litigation documents, and time-keeping entries and itemized bills, from hidden banks of alternate words, phrases, and paragraphs used in my practice, based on my or my secretary's responses to a set of questions I wrote. But I dismissed the notion of trying to become a lawyer trained by a computer. Instead, I was in search of a computer which would somehow be trainable by a lawyer, a lawyer like me! It would have to work the way I told it to work, not the other way around.

As time passed and more significant software came out, I knew I wanted database management software to run the whole show, not just word processing, and I gradually became self-taught. I joined [a couple of Mac groups] and read their monthly newsletters, etc., for fun. It was effortless. And I participated with others . . . in the creation of MacLaw and immersed myself in the camaraderie and exchange of ideas between members. I learned about networking, set up my own network, first stringing ordinary telephone wire[, . . . then] running Ethernet through the ceiling of our offices, and finally going to wireless.

As I gradually built my Mac system into its ultimate form, with correspondence, transactional and litigation documents, calendaring and time-keeping and billing being automated through FileMaker Pro, virtually all repetitive typing [ended, and] each of us was able to have one well-paid and smart personal secretary who did the work formerly done by two or three secretaries

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with typewriters, etc. Other lawyer friends with volume similar to mine, using DOS and later Windows machines and expensive law office specific software, never seemed to be able to reduce their staff.

And I never felt that I was doing work that should more properly be done by a tech specialist. Never. In fact, it was time-saving fun, not work. As the saying goes, "Do the Math."

Nate's experience is similar to mine. I started out in the mid-1980s with an Apple computer and have continued to use them over the years, upgrading when needed or desired. I do use the services of a couple "tech gurus" intermittently for FileMaker Pro scripting tasks and for basic networking or other work if I don't feel I can or want to do it myself—but I usually try first. I work with the Business Division of my local Apple Store, and if I'm stumped, I get Genius help. Apple started a new program called Joint Venture for business users. At \$499 per year it's not cheap, but it gives you priority service both online and in store, three training sessions for staff on any topic you want, tuneups, and other benefits. It has provided me with needed assistance when my out-of-warranty or non-AppleCare items have issues. The expense has been a form of insurance, and because the training and priority treatment save time and money, I'll probably renew it.

### **The Benefits of Integration**

Obviously, a lawyer's choice of computer systems is a personal one, based on budget, projected use, and tech savvy. But in my view, the solo or small firm practitioner would be well advised to look seriously at having a Mac/Apple office. Your iPhone, iPad, and computers can communicate with each other, and each can be used for multiple purposes. Having a well-integrated system is a benefit when it's David against Goliath. The playing field between small and larger firms has become increasingly more balanced, and one reason is the ability to choose and use Mac and iOS devices and computers in your law office.