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**Checking Bankruptcy Court? There's an App for That: Mobile Technology
for the Legal Professional**

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Introduction

The Incredible Shrinking Computer

“It’s a Small World” isn’t just a ride at Disney Land with one of the most notorious “earworms” (song that easily gets stuck in your head) in Western society. It also describes the future of technology and computing. Significant advances in the world of electronics are measured in how small and more powerful something can be rendered compared to previous versions. The microprocessor, the electronic brain of nearly every single piece of personal electronics and one of the most profound developments in modern technology, is still being miniaturized and beefed up. We currently have multi-core CPUs (Central Processing Units) available now, each core multiplying the unit’s capacity by two or four times, but recent advances have been made in adding up to 50 cores to a single CPU.

This miniaturization can be observed in the development of computers in the last 40 years: from the first computers that were the size of a barn and used paper punch cards to crunch numbers, to more traditional desktop PC towers, to the more mobile laptops, then the even smaller and mobile netbooks, and now smart phones and tablets. Each generation is smaller and more capable than the last. A desktop computer from 10 years ago and a hand sized smartphone today have almost the exact same computing power and the phone is capable of doing even more varied tasks. What characterizes the current trend is portability: modern tablet computers and smart phones are remarkably versatile devices, enjoying nearly unparalleled mobility and ever increasing computing power. This raises an interesting dilemma: how many tasks are people comfortable

performing on a full sized desktop computer as well as a smartphone? Reading and writing email? How about checking your favorite social networking sites? Finding cute pictures of cats or silly videos? What about writing and editing a professional document? Performing research? Reviewing documentation and material? Would you prepare a brief with the same device you update your Facebook status with? One interpretation of this apparent divide in the tasks is that traditional computers and their more portable companions serve different niches and needs. Another interpretation, the focus of this paper, is that with the help of some creativity and programming prowess, mobile devices should be able to do all that and even more. Enter the “app.”

What are Apps Anyway?

“Apps,” an abbreviation of “applications,” are computer programs designed to add functionality or perform particular tasks. If this definition sounds rather broad, that’s because it is; some apps you may have experience with include Microsoft Office and Gmail. It may seem unintuitive to categorize a popular software suite with an email service, but they fall squarely within the definition. Office brings word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation functionality to a computer, while Gmail allows you to send email from the same computer.

If apps are nothing especially new to the realm of computing, why have they suddenly become “the big thing” lately? It’s largely due to the decision of Apple to create their “App Store” and to release their “SDK” (Software Development Kit) to software developers. It may be anti-climactic, that a single company decided to call new pieces of software “apps” and the term just happened to stick, but considering the situation and the prestige Apple is held in, it’s hardly a surprise. By providing both the platform (the

App Store) and tools (the SDK) to create the apps, along with the incredibly popular iPhone, Apple created an explosion of popularity for these kinds of programs.

Apps developed for certain devices are called “native apps.” Native apps are written in a specific programming language for a particular mobile device. For example, a native app for an iPhone needs to be written in the ObjectiveC language and work with the iPhone’s operating system, iOS. Likewise, a native app for one of Google’s Droid phones would be written in the Java language and work with the Android operating system. Recently, “web apps” or “mobile web apps” are becoming increasingly popular. These apps are written in programming languages usually devoted to creating web pages; languages like HTML and JavaScript. As the name implies, web apps are accessed with an Internet connection and provide the functionality of a native app. These are distinguishable in that only one version of a web app needs to be made compared to making a separate version of a native app for every possible operating system. However, web apps were limited in what functions they could offer considering the necessity of an Internet connection and the limitation of the programming languages. These are now becoming more popular due to ubiquitous Internet connectivity, web apps with an offline mode that operate at nearly the same capacity as when they’re online, and new programming languages that can offer more functionality.

A brief history of mobile technology and apps is all well and good, but how does all of this apply to the legal professional? More so than one would initially guess, all things considered. Attorneys were very early adopters of mobile technology, with nearly universal acceptance of Research in Motion’s Blackberry devices early in their development. The proliferation of such devices has set a precedent that has given rise to

numerous apps designed specifically for lawyers, judges, law students, and other legal professions. Few other fields enjoy such consideration and development, perhaps behind only to the titanic entertainment industry with their non-stop flow of advertisements, media, and games. Particularly helpful for a legal professional is that many apps are in some aspects more convenient than their bulkier, desktop-bound counterparts. Apps are usually created for small-to-medium sized touch screens, and their simplified design and functionality reflects that. In streamlining the look and feel of an app, the final product is in many ways far more convenient and ultimately more efficient. What follows are descriptions of some of apps specifically designed to aid attorneys in their practice, enable them to perform tasks that would otherwise require access to a full desktop computer, or generally make their jobs easier. Many of these apps are available for the iPhone, and Android versions, when available, will be noted.

Legal Apps

Subscription Based Apps

Subscription based apps are apps provided to supplement or provide a mobile interface for existing access to sites that charge annually or for use. These apps are usually free but use is contingent upon being a subscribed user of the primary service. In general these apps provide different functions, including extensive access to a variety of materials, specialized ways of interacting with those materials, and some interoperability with the research service that offers the app.

FastCase (<http://www.fastcase.com/iphone/>): As members of the State Bar of Georgia, the name FastCase should be familiar to many. Freely accessible to any member of the

Bar, FastCase is a legal research service that offers access to the primary law of every state, federal material, cases, statutes, regulations, court rules, and more. The free iPhone app offered by FastCase offers an impressive set of tools for something meant to be stored in your pocket. One review of the app went so far as to say that the usefulness of the app “is a compelling reason for any attorney not using an iPhone to purchase one today.”¹

The main screen of the app allows you to search for caselaw or statutes with operators like “and,” “or,” specific phrases designated with quotation marks, and other functions. After searching you can narrow your results by jurisdiction and date range, or enable a feature called “Authority Check” when search for caselaw. Authority Check will note how many times the case has been cited, and how many times the case is cited by cases returned by the search. Full text versions of cases are available with links to cited cases within the document. Search terms are highlighted in cases, and a “Most Convenient” button will bring up the section of the case that has the best match with the search terms. Cases can be saved and recalled at a later time but cannot be emailed, so it serves more as a reminder when sitting in front of a full computer or laptop later. Searching for statutes is similar, but with a few restrictions. After finding a desired law, you cannot navigate to the next or previous section of the code, and to locate a specific statute you must browse by title, then chapter, then section.

Lexis Advance (<http://www.lexisnexis.com/newlexis/mobile/>): Available for free to subscribers to the new Lexis Advance research system, this app is available for both the iPhone and the iPad. One of the most appealing features of the app is the simplicity of

¹ Jeff Richardson, *Review: Fastcase -- free caselaw and statute research for the iPhone*, http://www.iphonejd.com/iphone_id/2010/02/review-fastcase.html (Feb. 2012)

the interface and ease of use. A search can be executed without narrowing any of the options, but cases, statutes, jurisdictions, or specific practice areas can be searched. Results are listed by relevancy but can be reordered by court, jurisdiction, date, and others. When searching caselaw, cited cases are linked and a Shepardize button retrieves the full history of the case. Cases can be saved into customizable folders for later reference, or PDF copies of the case can be emailed. As of this writing, the Lexis Advance App has only just launched, so expect more features in the future.

Westlaw Next (<http://store.westlaw.com/westlawnext/mobile-ipad/ipad-app/default.aspx>): Like the other two subscription based apps, the Westlaw Next is free for people who pay for the next generation Westlaw research system. What is far more noteworthy the availability of the app: there exists a version of the app for just about every type of smartphone or tablet computer, not just the iPhone or iPad. This wide adoption allows for synchronization across platforms. Research performed on a mobile device can easily be retrieved on another device (a computer or even another mobile device) using your account to match and display the data. The search interface is relatively simple with the option to search specific materials (cases, regulations, etc.), but the primary search bar is rather smart in finding the item without any adjustments. A list of the search results appears on the left, categorized by material type, with the search terms highlighted in short summaries that appear on the right. Copying text and adding notes is feature that seems fairly straightforward and helpful, but this functionality is unique to Westlaw Next. Useful material can be saved in customizable folders for reference later, drawing on the functionality provided by the aforementioned synchronization.

Primary Material Apps

“Primary Material Apps” are apps designed to allow direct access to important laws and documents. Some of these are offered by governmental organizations, while most are offered by individuals or companies that have taken the time to repackage freely available information into a mobile format.

The Congressional Record (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/the-congressional-record/id492077075>): This is a free iPad app offered by the Library of Congress that offers access to the Congressional Record back to January 25, 1994. You can select a specific day and view the four parts of the Congressional Record for that day (the House of Representatives, Senate, Extension of Remarks, and the Daily Digest summary) or the entire Congressional Record for that day. After selecting a section, a searchable PDF that looks exactly like what would be printed or found on FDSys.

Constitution (<http://cbagwellconsulting.com/const.html>): This free app for the iPad and iPhone is relatively simple, tiny, and straightforward. The main page of the app is a table of contents corresponding to the parts of the U.S. constitution. The entirety of the Constitution is available, with some additional information like the biographical information about the signers or the dates the sections were signed into effect. This is an accessible app that provides some fundamental legal information.

FedCtRecords and FedCtBank

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fedctrecords/id476096463>): These iPhone apps, both created by the same developer, allow for access to the electronic records for the Federal District Courts (FedCtRecords) and the Federal Bankruptcy Courts (FedCtBank). At \$10.00 a piece, these apps are designed to provide an iPhone friendly interface for

PACER. An account with PACER is still required, and any fees that would normally be accrued will still apply when viewing a docket. PACER does have a mobile version for their site, but actually viewing documents is cumbersome. Using the app, you can select a court and search using the fields typically found on PACER. Dockets retrieved can be viewed with the app and saved as a PDF (the app will not open the PDF, though). Cases can be saved in a My Cases location for quick reference later.

LawStack and Federal Civil Procedure (<http://www.lawstack.com/> and <http://www.puglabs.com/apps/fcp/>): These are two different apps that present roughly the same information in different formats: frequently used rules and procedures. LawStack is a free app with the federal rules of civil procedure, criminal procedure, evidence, etc. The app displays all of the groups of laws and allows you to navigate to a desired section or search through the text. The app also includes a “store” that allows you to load more free or paid laws, bills, statutes, and other collections. Federal Civil Procedure is a \$1.00 app that, like LawStack, lets you reference various bodies of law from your iPhone or iPad. When browsing a rule, after the end of the text, various Internet resources (like related forms or advisory notes) are linked. The search feature is more robust, integrating Boolean operators (AND and OR) into search results. Relevant rules can be saved, grouped together, and if the device is configured for it, printed.

General Legal Apps

“General Legal Apps” are apps that would be beneficial in the everyday life of an attorney, either in their practice or their general productivity.

Black's Law Dictionary, 9th Edition and Nolo's Plain English Law Dictionary

(<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/blacks-law-dictionary-9th/id312542731> and <http://itunes.apple.com/app/nolos-plain-english-law-dictionary/id319070903>): Legal dictionaries made the obvious jump to apps relatively early; early enough that 9th edition of Black's is an update to the 8th edition app. While typing a term into Black's Law Dictionary app, results will begin appearing (not unlike Google's predictive search technology). Underlined terms are links to other terms in the dictionary while double underlined terms are links to Westlaw.com. Many terms have an audio pronunciation guide, and frequently used words can be bookmarked for later use. Nolo's dictionary has definitions for hundreds of terms, as well as explanations for important cases and other materials. The central icon towards the bottom of the screen navigates the app to Nolo's lawyer directory. The app designed for non-lawyers, and that is apparent in the coverage, features (shaking the iPhone with the app open displays a random term), and price. Black's Law Dictionary is \$55 compared to the free Nolo app.

Court Days and Court Days Pro (<http://www.lawonmyphone.com/court-days/> and <http://www.lawonmyphone.com/court-days-pro/>): These are date calculator apps: apps designed to figure out the deadline of when documents are due, when responses are required, how much time is left, etc. With Court Days, after selecting a jurisdiction, start date, and whether you want to find dates before or after the start date, the app will calculate the number of court days and calendar from the date. The "court days" takes into account legal holidays like national or state holidays and weekends. Court Days Pro takes this a step further by allowing a user to program in "rules" to help calculate dates based on specific "events." An event is an occurrence, something like a motion being

filed. A simple rule would be something like having 30 days to respond after that motion was filed. Using the app to create the event and the associated rule, whenever a motion was filed, the date of the event would be entered and the app would calculate the date 30 days out while also accounting for legal holidays. Rules can become rather complex and programming them all in can take some time, but after the initial investment of effort, the app will help track a myriad of deadlines automatically. Court Days and Court Days Pro are both free apps.

MPEP Plus (http://www.iphonejd.com/iphone_jd/2012/02/review-mpep-plus.html):

MPEP Plus is app for patent agents and attorneys to navigate U.S. Patent and Trademark Office resources. The app features a copy, as well as the index of, the Manual of Patent Examining Procedure, a patent finder (implemented via a “card game”), a patent term adjustment estimator, recent Supreme Court decisions, and more. Retrieved patents can be opened with the iPhone’s Safari browser and saved as a PDF.

PaperPort Notes and Notes Plus (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/paperport-notes/id476134017> and <http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/notes-plus-handwriting-note/id374211477>): Each of these apps provide note taking functionality to the iPad

beyond those offered by a true word processor. PaperPort Notes is a free app performs some basic note taking tasks. The basic interface looks like a yellow legal pad and takes input from a keyboard (both real and on-screen), stylus (or fingers), and voice-to-text. The app can also annotate and add sticky pad-esque notes PDFs. Note groups can be emailed, sent to another iPad, or downloaded as PDF. Notes Plus is a far more robust app that costs \$8.00. The app handles handwritten input with a stylus rather intuitively, providing ease of manual input. Circling hand written text allows for various

manipulation, including copying, deleting, or converting the handwritten text to computer text. Similarly, shapes drawn in the app can retain the form drawn or be automatically corrected into cleaner or more symmetric shapes. Pictures can be inserted, text can be highlighted, and documents can be saved as PDFs locally or into the cloud on Google Documents or Dropbox.

TranscriptPad (<http://itunes.apple.com/us/app/transcriptpad/id400464448>):

TranscriptPad is a transcript management app of note for attorneys that review depositions on a regular basis. After loading a text file of the deposition into the app, it automatically detects information about deponents, dates, and other identifying information. Touching the first and last line numbers of a noteworthy section lets you highlight and assign a label or designation (like “infringement” or “causation”) to it. Highlighted sections are displayed on the left or as an index depending on whether the iPad is using landscape or portrait format. The labeled text can be output in multiple formats: print, emailed, a report with just the labeled text, or a report with the full text of the marked up text in a table format.

TrialPad and Evidence (<http://www.trialpad.com/> and <http://www.reaction-apps.com/content/evidence>): These apps are designed for the purpose of displaying and marking up documents in court, during mediation, or other kinds of meetings on an iPad. Exhibits or documents can be loaded into the apps and manipulated to enhance readability or clarity. Zooming, highlighting, underlining, and annotating are each handled by the apps, albeit in slightly different manners. When an exhibit is fully marked up and ready for use, the apps will operate in “presentation view,” displaying the content on the entire screen and transitioning between all of the documents like a

Power Point presentation. The difference in the apps comes in the ease of managing multiple cases and file locations. TrialPad is designed to handle different cases at the same time, while Evidence will only handle one presentation at a time. For one off situations or if the iPad isn't going to be a constant presence, Evidence is a satisfactory app that does plenty for \$5.00. However, if there are multiple court appearances or meetings that will feature multiple exhibits concurrently, the more robust TrialPad would be the more stable choice at \$90.00.

Wolfram Lawyer's Professional Assistant

(<http://products.wolframalpha.com/professionalapps/lawyer.html>): Wolfram Alpha is a search engine unlike traditional search sites. Rather than linking to content out on the web, Wolfram Alpha uses its own database of information to compute an answer.

Applying this database of information to legal minded folk, the Lawyer's Professional Assistant app is a set of tools likely to be useful to attorneys, judges, law students, and others. Included are some tools that seem obvious, like the statute of limitations in different states, interest and tax rates, and settlement calculators. More arcane and unexpected tools include occupational salaries, Roman numeral conversion, and blood alcohol calculators. While this may seem like a convenient collection of tools for only \$5.00, none of these are inaccessible outside of pointing the Safari web browser to Wolfram Alpha and accessing it freely. The price reflects a more efficient layout on the iPhone and iPad, as well as lawyer-specific search fields that increase the efficiency of some tools.