

Apps to Make Your Work Easier

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Do you need to get docket information from a bankruptcy court? There's an app for that. How about referencing the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure at Starbucks? There's an app (or two) for that as well.

Need to calculate what the deadline is for filing a response while taking court holidays into account? Fortunately, there's an app for that, and it's less than one dollar.

There is an increasing number of apps that can make a legal professional's life more convenient.

Some such apps are fairly straightforward and could have practical application in any professional or business setting – document annotation apps or apps that scan business cards and enter the contact information right into your smart phone's address book.

An increasing number, however, are narrowly tailored toward the legal profession – mobile access to the Congressional Record or apps that serve as a portable interface to legal research systems like Fastcase, Westlaw and Lexis.

Apps for the legal profession

How do apps help someone with the practice of law or legal research? More than you would expect.

Maybe it is because lawyers are notoriously famed for their addiction to the BlackBerry, setting a precedent for the adoption of mobile technology. Maybe lawyers were quick adopters of the iPhone, the iPad and other smart phones and tablet computers. It may be something else completely, and whatever it may be, it has resulted in a net benefit for the legal professional.

Particularly helpful 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.

Some apps are also very narrowly tailored to perform a specific task, emphasizing the ease of use far more than heavier, feature-laden services available on conventional computers.

All of this results in a common story. A lawyer tries out an app, and it turns out to be kind of useful in court or in his practice. He tries it out a little longer – exploring everything that it can do – and before long the app is now his new standard way of interacting with the material.

The following will provide you with some apps you can try out to see if the same will happen to you.

Fastcase www.fastcase.com/iphone

One app everyone practicing law in Georgia should be aware of is the Fastcase app. To members of the State Bar of Georgia, the name Fastcase should be very familiar.

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 offers an impressive set of tools for something meant to be stored in your pocket. One review of the app appearing in *iPhone J.D.* by Jeff Richardson 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.”

The main screen of the app allows you to search for case law 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 searching for case law.

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 e-mailed, 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.



Court Days and Court Days Pro www.lawonmyphone.com/court-days and www.lawonmyphone.com/court-days-pro

These are date calculator apps – apps designed to figure out the deadline for 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 days from the current date.

The “court days” takes into account legal holidays like national or state holidays and weekends.

Court Days Pro takes this one step further by allowing the 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 is \$.99 and Court Days Pro is \$2.99.

FedCtRecords and FedCtBank www.fedctrecords.com

These iPhone apps, both created by the same developer, allow for access to the electronic records of the Federal District Courts (FedCtRecords) and the Federal Bankruptcy Courts (FedCtBank).

At \$10 apiece, 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 its site, but viewing actual documents is cumbersome.

Using these apps, 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.

QR Codes

To conclude, here is some information on a piece of technology that is enabled by apps. You may have seen the odd squares that look like pixelated glitches appearing on signs and advertisements. These are QR Codes, short for “quick reference” codes.

Rather than typing in Web addresses to get to websites, QR Codes provide an alternative way to navigate to the same online sites.

To use QR Codes, you need to get a free app capable of reading the code, like QR Code Reader and Scanner for the iPhone or ScanLife Barcode & QR Reader for Android enabled smartphones.

Opening the app and scanning the QR Code can direct you not only to a mobile website but also to images, audio or video clips.

The latter can be useful if QR Codes have been integrated into displays or informational signage, augmenting the content presented or providing additional information that can be stored on a mobile device (like a map or a schedule).



What is an app?

The word “app” is an abbreviation of the term “application.” Applications, in computer terms, are programs designed to add functionality or perform particular tasks. If this definition sounds very broad, that is because it is. Applications probably encompass a majority of your interactions with your computer, from word processing to e-mail to browsing the Web.

Types of 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. Being specifically designed for the devices makes them “native” in that they “belong” there or were at least programmed to be.

Mobile Web apps, or Web apps, are slightly different in that they are written in programming languages usually devoted to creating Web pages (e.g., 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, some Web apps are limited in what functions they offer considering an Internet connection was required to access them and the limitation of the programming languages. These are now becoming more popular due to ubiquitous Internet connectivity. Currently most Web apps are created with an offline mode that operates at nearly the same capacity as when online and utilize new programming languages offering more functionality.

Why a plethora of apps?

Why has the number of apps exploded? The same reason MP3 players, touch pads on smart phones and tablet computing have become so common – the tech juggernaut and cultural icon, Apple.

Apple initially decided to open up the development of applications for the iPod Touch and iPhone by releasing their “SDK” (Software Development Kit) to anyone that wanted to try, rather than try to limit development with a small collection of handpicked developers. They also provided a platform for distributing these products – the “App Store” – a sleek, intuitive interface for developers and consumers. Between the means (SDK), the method (App Store) and the motivation (Apple is just a little popular these days), the “app” was born in its modern incarnation.