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iPad: Changing Computing for Lawyers

Happy Birthday iPad!

In less than 24 months the iPad has become the fastest adopted product ever. While products are generally created to fulfill specific needs, the brilliance of the iPad is that it was built as a general purpose device for both professional and personal use. Despite not having a category at the time of its introduction, Apple has sold 30 million iPads. PC manufacturers across the board are seeing year-over-year declines in PC desktop sales. Just this past December, Dell computers announced that they will no longer be selling netbook computers. Technology industry insiders are calling this the iPad Effect. What originally was labeled as an oversized iPod has become a trend for the legal profession. Whether Steve Jobs intended to or not, the iPad has caused a “Paradigm Shift.”



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The iPad has emerged as a new class of computing. In the beginning of personal computing there was the “text based” era (a series of what is now seen as arcane commands necessary to get the computer to perform tasks). This was followed by a shift to the “graphical user interface”

and the introduction of the mouse (which continues to be the primary way in which computers are used). Today, we are introduced to the “Tablet PC” era which, led by the iPad, combines the best of all computing, in a mobile device that can be controlled in a number of ways: by hand, with a stylus and soon by voice (as with Apple’s personal assistant “Siri”).

The dual capability of a business and personal device appeals to many professionals. The demand on professionals to be readily available has caused the line between office time and personal life to become blurred and the iPad serves this purpose extremely well. (Whether the blurring of this line is a good thing for the profession is open for debate and not a subject of this article.) A lawyer can now check email, read a book, watch a movie, write a brief and perform legal research all on a single device that weighs less than a hard cover book. Add to that the ability to configure a tablet for cloud based services and the attorney can now remotely access his or her office desktop allowing work to be done from multiple locations.

“Cloud based computing” has joined the iPad to provide another shift in the computing paradigm. While there are many variations of the definition of cloud based computing, for purposes of this article it is defined as: allowing the user to be able to access their data no matter

where they are. Cloud based computing can be further refined into systems that are in the “public” or “private” cloud. Public clouds allow businesses to store their data on a system that is shared by other users (with the business paying a recurring fee for this service). A private cloud exists when a business builds



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its own sealed environment allowing only its users to access the data from anywhere. File sharing services allow users to share and collaborate on documents, with the documents remaining in sync, whether the user is accessing the file on his or her desktop, laptop, or iPad. Allowing users to work on the same file can boost productivity and reduce errors that can occur when multiple versions a document need to be created and emailed back and forth between users. Cloud based Microsoft Exchange hosting can also allow any user to access email, firm calendars and contacts in real time, from any device, no matter the physical location.

As the shift to cloud based computing takes hold, the tablet is positioned to replace the desktop PC. Imagine the lawyer arrives at his or

her office in the morning and docks his or her tablet. It automatically connects to an external display (or multiple displays) as well as a keyboard and mouse. By entering a password on the Tablet, the attorney is connected to his or her office system and ready to work. When the attorney leaves the office for a meeting or a court appearance, the Tablet is “undocked” from the office system and goes “mobile.” No matter where that attorney is, he or she can connect to the office data files, access the business calendar, contacts or other applications and continue to be productive. Much of this vision of the future is already possible with the current generation of the iPad. Future generations provide for limitless opportunities.

We are also on the verge of the voice revolution in office computing. With Siri, Apple has brought to the forefront another shift in user interaction: The ability to use one’s voice as a mechanism for control as well as data input. Imagine being able to say to your tablet: “Appointment next Wednesday with Michael Glasser at 3 p.m. re: the Glasser Purchase of 123 Main Street” and having that appointment created on the calendar. While this may seem like a simple application of the voice command, what attorney would not appreciate having the event automatically linked with the appropriate case file? The voice revolution will one day allow an attorney to say to the tablet: “Revise the Glasser Purchase of 123 Main Street document” and have the document appear on the screen for editing. This will all happen; it will just take time for the software to catch up to the available technology.

The computing industry may not have been prepared for the iPad’s impact on business and specifically on the practice of law. With apologies to the film “Field of Dreams,” there may never be a more appropri-

ate use of the line “if they build it, they will come.” (Not exactly the line from the movie ... but close enough.) Programmers have and continue to design and develop Application Software (Apps) that allows the iPad to be a serious tool for business.

Over the next five years software will become optimized for the tablet PC environment. Presently, virtualization software allows programs such as Time Matters, Timeslips, QuickBooks and many others to be “published” to the tablet for use. Applications such as Dragon Dictation are already available to allow attorneys to dictate notes and briefs directly into the iPad. The days of old style dictation machines and tapes are waning.

Is the iPad a fad or a trend? A

“fad” is defined as something that people adopt rapidly with the behavior fading quickly once the perception of novelty is gone. A “trend” is the general direction something develops or changes.

The iPad is definitely a trend.

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