

Molder adds, mentioning his two young children: "Many times, we work until 11 o'clock at night. We couldn't do it if we had to be in the office."

Such mobility means smartphones can be practice management tools as well — not that this would be everybody's cup of tea. "I wouldn't want to do any of this stuff on a BlackBerry," Yelin says. "It's too small to work with." ...

By **Luigi Benetton**. Read the complete article online at www.cba.org/practicelink/virtuallaw.

Your invisible assistant

Virtual legal assistants (VLAs) are poised to redefine the traditional legal secretarial position.

Both virtual and bricks-and-mortar lawyers frequently find they prefer to hire a virtual legal assistant (VLA) who works completely online. Kate Kerans, for instance, provides legal research and other administrative support to lawyers in and around the Calgary area from the comfort of her own home.

Kerans came upon VLA services almost by chance. While on maternity leave from her law firm with her first son, she was looking for a way to earn some extra cash to pay for a new computer purchase. She discovered virtual assistance when researching online and never went back to her job. Although she was happy at her firm, the flexibility and diversity of offering legal services to several sole practitioners and small firms via the internet was too attractive for her.

Laurie Mapp also established her virtual legal assistant business, Halo Secretarial, while on maternity leave, with her third child. "While I had a good government job, there was no way I could afford daycare for three children," she says. Mapp's clients are not in Edmonton, where she lives, or even in Alberta, but in the United States.

Not every VLA, of course, is a mother of young children. After more than 30 years working as a legal assistant, most recently for Toronto firms, Marion McDonald now provides digital transcription services and other administrative support to those same firms and others from her home in Muskoka, Ontario.

A VLA's tasks could include preparing a rough draft of affidavits or agreements, proofreading and formatting documents, conducting and summarizing legal research, liaising with clients, and transcribing audio and digital files. And the advantages of lawyers hiring VLAs are proving tangible.

For one thing, there are none of the overhead costs associated with having a staff person on hand. Kerans' hourly rate may be higher than a regular legal assistant's, but it doesn't include paying for office equipment, benefits, sick days, vacation days, bonuses, and so on. Plus, she bills only for the time she works. "I find my clients are usually quite surprised by how much I do in an hour," she says.

One concern lawyers may have about hiring VLAs is maintaining the security of documents and client information. Kerans offers clients a secure log-in on her website and sends only encrypted files by email. She doesn't transport client information on USB sticks, and her laptop has at least three levels of security. She also performs conflict of interest checks before taking on new clients and offers non-disclosure agreements. ...

By **Alison Arnot**. Read the complete article online at www.cba.org/practicelink/virtuallaw.

Eyeing the iPhone?

Apple's famed smartphone can also be a law practice tool.



“On the weekend, I worked on a closing,” Rob Hyndman recalls. “Documents were sent to me. I reviewed the black-lines, took two or three minutes to compare them to the list of items on my checklist, and fired off a quick note telling everybody I was finished with the document.”

Nothing unusual about that, you say? Consider this: Hyndman, a Toronto solo specializing in information technology, managed the entire closing at home on his iPhone.

Yes, *that* iPhone. Few handsets have hogged as much limelight for as long as Apple Inc.'s first-ever smartphone, featuring PDA-type features, an iPod and a phone all wrapped up in a touch-screen package. Smartphones — primarily BlackBerrys, on which Hyndman notes the foregoing transaction could also have been done — appeal to mobile lawyers who frequently find themselves on the road visiting clients and don't want to haul notebook computers with them.

Now, lawyers are starting to learn the pros of the iPhone as a practice tool. Hyndman's iPhone use mirrors his computer use — it's just another way to access the applications he uses in the office. Phone and email are only the beginning. Third-party developers offer thousands of extra tools, commonly called apps, for smartphone users. The iPhone developer roster includes names like Cisco, Google, the *ABA Journal*, LinkedIn.com and the *New York Times*.

Hyndman is happy to try these applications. “All the apps I've installed on the iPhone were two or three dollars, if they weren't free, and they install in 30 seconds,” he says. “You only spend two or three dollars to explore a new technology.” At the office, Hyndman subscribes to the online file backup service SugarSync. He can also pull files onto his iPhone using SugarSync's iPhone app.

Minute book records reside in the office, but Hyndman shares an index to those records with a virtual assistant using Google

Docs. Google's iPhone app lets Hyndman review and update that index. Toronto-based FreshBooks contains Hyndman's billing and timekeeping on their servers, while the iPhone app lets him track and record time spent on specific projects and tasks.

As enthusiastic as Hyndman is about the iPhone, he's just as blunt about its shortcomings. Inadequate battery life tops the list. "If I use it intensively to access the web, I get two or three hours," he says. And for some reason, Apple omitted tasks, universal search, copy-and-paste and the ability to type an email while holding the phone on its side....

By **Luigi Benetton**. Read the complete article at www.cba.org/practicelink/mobiletech.

Don't leave home without it

Laptops are becoming indispensable for lawyers on the go.



Laptop computers are nearly ubiquitous in the business world, and even in the legal profession, they're well on their way there. But many lawyers don't make full use of all the laptop's features and benefits. Dominic Jaar, Montreal-based principal of Ledjit Consulting, provides a snapshot view of laptops' possibilities.

Before flying to Victoria recently to address a meeting of the National Judicial Institute, Jaar backed up his conference PowerPoint presentation files to a hard drive. "Both my notebook drive and the backup drive are encrypted," he says, adding that his notebook sports a fingerprint reader.

During his cross-country flight, Jaar revised, polished and practised his presentation. He also spent time in Microsoft Outlook to answer emails he had downloaded prior to takeoff and worked on litigation files in Summation. Since both programs function offline, all this work carried out in the air automatically synchronizes when he next connects to the web.

"At first, I didn't like working in an

airplane," he notes. "Now, it's the place I like best. I'm never disturbed. I never receive any email. I can't make or receive phone calls. I can focus on what I need to do." And while three-hour layovers annoy most people, not Jaar. "I love Vancouver's airport! It's one of the rare airports that offer free wireless Internet access."

While in Vancouver, Jaar synchronized Outlook and Summation, replied to email, downloaded more pictures for his presentation that he thought of while in the air, and participated in a conference call using Skype. "My office can be anywhere," he says, "and my clients think I'm always connected."

Meanwhile, his notebook started a background backup that it performs whenever it connects to the Net. Jaar uses a "cloud" application called Mozy that automatically backs up all changes to data files, like his PowerPoint presentation, to a server on the Internet. "If I'm on a trip and I can't access files on my computer, I can connect remotely to Mozy and get what I need," he says.

During the presentation itself, Jaar used a display switch to run two screens from his laptop: the PowerPoint presentation and his Windows desktop. Rounding out his travel equipment list are a MicroSD card reader to transfer files between his BlackBerry and his notebook, noise-cancelling earphones to help him concentrate when working on planes, a USB memory stick, and a USB conversion cable that attaches many types of hardware to his notebook.

On his chiropractor's advice, Jaar no longer tows a laptop case on wheels — he's switched to a backpack.

— Luigi Benetton

• Mobile broadband wireless

Mobile broadband wireless is a technology that provides mobile access to the internet using laptops and smartphones via wireless cellular phone networks. The range of mobile broadband wireless is much greater than the limited range of WiFi hotspots that have traditionally been used for wireless internet access.

This increased range enables users to roam without having to worry about finding internet access in a hotel, library or café, even allowing continuous access in moving vehicles such as automobiles and trains. Additionally, cellular mobile broadband wireless signals are generally encrypted between your laptop or smartphone and the cellular system to somewhat protect the contents of your transmissions, unlike many unencrypted WiFi signals in public spaces.

Mobile broadband wireless access is especially useful to those who regularly rack up bills paying for hotel and coffee shop internet access on the road. Additionally, users of online software may consider mobile broadband access as a back-up internet connection in case the connection for the office goes down temporarily.

Mobile broadband wireless affords users a much farther range of mobility than landlines and WiFi internet access — users are not constrained by a local ethernet cable or by the typical WiFi hotspot range of 100-300 feet. Mobile broadband wireless service is more akin to cellphone service, covering wide areas and affording non-interrupted service where coverage is adequate, including in moving vehicles. However, keep roaming charges in mind when traveling across borders.

A potential drawback to 3G mobile broadband wireless is that maximum access speeds are several times slower than the maximum speeds offered by WiFi and landlines.

Excerpted from "Mobile broadband wireless for laptops and smartphones," in the September 2008 edition of Your ABA (<http://www.abanet.org/media/youraba/200809/article12.html>)

• Loose security

Most "Mobile Lawyer" respondents to the ABA technology survey report using password protection and antivirus software (92% and 87%, respectively). [But] the use of security measures drops from there — 24% use data encryption, 12% other means of authentication, such as tokens or biometrics, 9% cable/docking station with a lock, 4% tagging/engraving, 3% tracking software, 2% remote data wiping, 1% firewalls and 1% chose "other."

From "2008 ABA Tech Survey Sees More Mobility," by Catherine Sanders Reach & Josh Poje, Law Technology News (<http://tinyurl.com/6m3rv2>)