

Business & Careers

Smartphones offer lawyers many options



Luigi Benetton
Hi-Tech

Last time in this space, we covered security, IT support, keyboards and e-mail features offered on Android, Apple, BlackBerry and Windows smartphones. Here in the second part, we'll cover other business features that help lawyers work on the go.

Synchronization of business data

BlackBerry is known for keeping calendars, contacts, tasks and other such data synchronized between the handheld and Outlook. Norton Rose Fulbright Canada partner Chris Hunter, a longtime BlackBerry user, trusts its synchronization. He sets rules like "in the event of a conflict, desktop wins," or "handheld wins."

"It just works," he says. "That's a boat I don't want to rock."

Davis LLP associate Brigitte Lenis finds synchronization of e-mail drafts on her Q10 to be an improvement over her old 'Berry. "If I start typing a draft on my phone in the Métro, the draft will appear on my computer," and vice-versa, she says.

Apple, which has long supported Microsoft Exchange, more recently introduced iCloud to synchronize data across iPhones, iPads and Macs. Hunter knows about iCloud from his wife, who uses an iPhone. "I don't want that," he says, concerned about the possibility of work data landing on the wrong devices.

Predictably, Outlook synchronization isn't a problem with Windows Phone. Qadira Jackson's data syncs across her Windows phone, tablet and PC, and she uses SkyDrive for file synchronization.

In Jackson's eyes, Microsoft took contact synchronization to the next level. "Right out of the box, LinkedIn, Twitter and Facebook are all integrated with your contacts. On other phones, you have to open apps. I don't have to open any apps," says the Fleet Street Law real estate and business lawyer.

Web browsing

Norton Rose senior partner Andrew Fleming noticed a difference in the browser that came with his new BlackBerry Q10: "You can actually use it now," he says. "On the Bold, using the browser was like going back to the dark ages."

Pitblado Law partner Adam Herstein's opinion of the old BlackBerry browser was as harsh as Fleming's. He notes that the iPhone browser's only shortcoming is that doesn't support Flash, although this doesn't cause him difficulty. Web developers increasingly avoid Flash ever since Adobe, which created Flash, stopped developing it for mobile platforms in November 2011.

Operating system

The operating system tends to fade into the background as people work on their phones. Still, operating systems may drive more

debate about different platforms than anything else. "I have a raging argument with my brother because he has [an] iPhone and he tells me how good it is," Fleming admits.

Hunter's kids both have Android phones. He notes that one can tinker endlessly with the OS. "It's an operating system that I would have loved 20 years ago," he says. "At my stage in life, I don't care."

Jackson appreciates Microsoft's design direction. "My phone interface looks like my computer," she says. For instance, both feature Live Tiles, which enable Jackson to quickly view real-time updates of unread messages and other data.

Herstein's experience resembles Jackson's. iPhone's oft-vaunted "halo effect" has led Herstein to acquire an Apple TV and an iPad. "Once you can use one Apple device, you can use them all," he says.

Productivity apps

A wide range of apps, like calendars, contact lists and e-mail, are packaged on all smartphones.

To extend a phone's usefulness, many lawyers acquire third-party apps. In general, these apps arrive first on iPhone, then Android, and then on other platforms.

App selection for iPhone and Android is far wider than that for BlackBerry and Windows Phone. Lenis notes that Skype, for instance, which has been available for years on iPhone, only recently arrived for the BlackBerry. "The Bixi bike-sharing app hasn't arrived on BlackBerry yet," she adds.

Microsoft Office

This summer, Microsoft released dedicated Office apps for iPhone and Android, and it's available as a "web app" on BlackBerry.

Jackson didn't have to wait as long. Office, predictably, came pre-installed on her Windows phone. Other third-party apps enable users to view and work with Office documents.

Firm-specific applications

Certain platforms enable companies to create their own private app distribution mechanisms, chiefly using mobile device management systems. Fleming's BlackBerry holds the token he needs to access the firm's Citrix platform, as well as WorkSite document management software.

Client applications

Norton Rose Fulbright patent agent Anthony de Fazekas keeps his business phone "clean" of apps, but he also has an iPhone that he uses when software development clients of his need to show him applications that are, initially at least, created for iOS only.

Camera

Years ago, a BlackBerry public relations representative scoffed at the idea that one of her company's handsets would ever have a camera. Times have changed, and not just because of people wanting to snap personal photos.

Jackson's Nokia sports an eight-megapixel camera that she uses during the workday. "If I meet clients off-site, I can take a really good picture of their ID and it comes out

“

I have a raging argument with my brother because he has [an] iPhone and he tells me how good it is.

Andrew Fleming
Norton Rose

better than a photocopy," she says.

"Given that I do patent law, I find the most efficient way to do a drawing is to quickly jot it down on paper, take an image and send it to the people who render those images," de Fazekas says.

Herstein does something similar when he uses whiteboards with clients. And

when he travels, he uses iPhone's front-facing camera to videoconference with his iPod-Touch-toting daughter.

Screen size

BlackBerry and Apple offer phones in a very limited selection of sizes.

At the other end of the spectrum, many smartphone manufacturers have put Google's free Android operating system into a wide range of devices. Screen sizes range from small up to near-tablet size (also known as phablets).

Heenan Blaikie partner Subrata Bhattacharjee's Samsung Galaxy Note 2 sports a 5.5-inch screen. Since he travels internationally, he sought a fast device that offers web access comparable to that of a tablet. "I found iPhone's screen way too small," he says. The Samsung's larger display lets him work on documents, "especially because the device has a stylus."

ANNOUNCEMENT

POLLEY FAITH LLP

We're reaching for the stars
so we hired one.

Polley Faith welcomes Jake Wilson as our newest rising star. Jake was a gold medalist in his year, clerked at the Supreme Court of Canada and worked at two top Wall St. law firms. He's committed to helping us build an unparalleled team of litigators. Get to know Jake and the rest of our team at polleyfaith.com.

www.polleyfaith.com

357 Bay St, Suite 900, Toronto M5H 2T7 | 416.365.1600