

Business & Careers

Tablets becoming better tools thanks to useful apps



Luigi Benetton
Hi-Tech

Each lawyer in Russell Alexander's firm has an iPad. The founder of Russell Alexander Family Lawyers has been using one since Apple Inc.'s tablet debuted four years ago.

Donna Neff, founder of Neff Law Office Professional Corporation, started her tablet experience on an iPad 2, a device she rarely uses now that she has an iPad Mini. Lighter weight and less bulk sold her on it, and she admits her initial concerns over its small size have proven unfounded.

Neff and Alexander are just two Canadian lawyers who look upon their tablets much like Boy Scouts regard their Swiss Army knives. Light weight, fast boot-up, long battery life and just enough of a computer's functionality have them using tablets regularly at work.

Tablet-toting lawyers still appear to be ahead of the curve.

"Lawyers are kind of quirky," Alexander says. "You'll often see lawyers going to court with boxes

of files. They may only need a handful of those documents... They're going towards laptop computers and iPads but the majority of lawyers I go to court with still prefer paper."

Not carrying paper around can take some getting used to, he notes.

Tablet usage is largely driven by the applications available for them. Since the tablet market tends to copy iPad's minimalist design, few physical characteristics distinguish one model from another outside of size, weight and ports. Even the same types of accessories can be had for various models. (The lawyers I interviewed use iPads. That said, as long as the apps mentioned are available for other tablets, this article applies to Windows- or Android-based tablets as well.)

Alexander's iPad connects to his firm's Microsoft Exchange server "out of the box" (without needing additional software). Lawyers access their Exchange information using iPad's native calendar, e-mail, contact and reminders apps.

Alexander likes how discreet the tablet is compared to notebook computers, especially in courtrooms where he reviews and annotates court transcripts using TranscriptPad and organizes and presents evidence using TrialPad.

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Russell Alexander

Russell Alexander Family Lawyers

Productivity on a tablet frequently involves handling documents. When Asim Iqbal takes documents with him to court, he copies them on to his iPad from his firm's document management system before leaving the office. The Pallett Valo lawyer advises other lawyers not to rely on wireless Internet access in court.

David Feld uses a stylus and the iAnnotate PDF app to sign documents on the screen, then saves said documents to the cloud so both Feld, a partner at Feld Kalia Professional Corporation, and his staff can access them later. Iqbal annotates documents using GoodReader ("It's the best \$5 you'll spend," he says) while Neff prefers neu.Annotate PDF.

Iqbal also uses a stylus he picked up for \$15 to write on the screen, while Neff writes mostly with her

finger on-screen.

Feld also reviews documents with clients using the big-screen TV in his boardroom on which he wirelessly shares documents on his iPad. "It somehow makes it more real, more exciting, more official for the client," he says, while admitting he still prints paper for them to sign.

Few people create documents using tablets. Alexander dictates documents and sends them to his assistant to type, though he concedes that the Documents to Go app is OK for quick edits.

Iqbal says formatting on a tablet is tedious. He uses the Pages app to create content and leaves the formatting to an assistant. When he creates content, however, he doesn't type as much as he uses his iPad's built-in voice recognition feature. He finds it accurate, though he notes that a slow Internet connection can cause more mistakes that he needs to clean up.

Neff avoids the on-screen keyboard since it lacks things like the function and arrow keys one finds on a physical keyboard. She defaults to a desktop if she needs to write things from scratch — which isn't often. "Most of the work that I do is reviewing and revising and marking up someone else's writing," for which she uses her tablet. Neff figures she spends 80 per cent of her

work time on the iPad and the rest on a desktop.

Iqbal cuts down on the time it takes to share documents using Genius Scan — PDF Scanner. "If I'm in court and I get an order that I know people are looking for right away, I'll take a picture of it once it's issued and send it to people who need it," he says.

Alexander keeps his paper document load even leaner by relying on apps for the *Ontario Rules of Civil Procedure* and *Ontario Reports* while in court.

Neff figures the usefulness of a tablet corresponds to how "paperless" a law office is. Given her policy of digitizing every document that arrives at her office, she can access everything she needs remotely.

Tablets offer Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connectivity, and some also feature cellular radios that enable Internet access when outside the range of trusted Wi-Fi hotspots. Iqbal tethers his non-cellular tablet to his Android phone so he can also access data on the road.

Connectivity helps lawyers access applications and files kept at the office. Alexander uses Microsoft's Remote Desktop Connection to access his firm's servers. Neff uses LogMeIn. "That and e-mail see the heaviest use," she says.

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Business & Careers

Adapt: Firms better to be 'nimble' than the 'biggest'

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"They realize that because there are more lawyers out there and less work, lawyers are becoming more aggressive in their pricing models. It's a supply and demand issue."

Bongard says there's been a very noticeable shift in how lawyers are compensated, with some firms cutting wages for service partners and increasing them for rainmakers.

"These firms are looking at their ranks and saying, 'Who can we not afford to lose and who can we afford to lose?' That's sort of a crass way of describing the reality of it."

Bongard adds that he's also noticed that many young lawyers have already begun starting their own practices right out of law school because they can't find a full-time job.

"The young lawyers that aren't being admitted have no choice but to sort of hang out a shingle and say, 'Well, I've gone to law school and I've become an attorney now and I want to practice and make money but I have no job.' You become an entrepreneur."

In another break from tradition, Bongard

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Warren Bongard
ZSA Legal Recruitment

says many of the bigger law firms are no longer obsessed with being No. 1.

"Big law firms would always be proud to boast they're the biggest firm or were trying to become the biggest firm and now it's not so in vogue to be the big firm. In fact, it's much better to be able to be more nimble and more profitable."

Big picture: Larger screen comes in handy for lawyers

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Neff videoconferences using join.me (part of the LogMeIn application suite) as well as Skype and Facetime. She also "attends" Law Society or OBA webinars using her tablet.

Multi-use security tools include passcode protection of devices, the ability to find lost devices and wipe them remotely, and setting tablets to erase all data after a set number of unsuccessful password attempts.

When the iPad first hit the market, many people derided it as an overgrown iPod Touch. Alexander points to the larger screen size as something that makes tablets useful. As an example, he mentions Digits, a straightforward calculator with large numbers and buttons flanked by a ticker tape that shows calculations performed. "You forget about the little things like that that you can use a tablet for," he says.

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