

Nine Mac Utilities That Will Boost Your Law Firm's Productivity

By Brett Burney

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In the Mac versus Windows debate, many law firms choose to go with the latter because of the abundance of legal-specific software. But Mac versions of Adobe Acrobat and Microsoft Office plus Windows virtualization software and Web-based legal applications make switching to Macs feasible for many law firms. In this TechnoFeature, technology consultant Brett Burney, author of the forthcoming ABA book "Macs in Law," reviews nine helpful Mac utilities that can dramatically enhance your productivity on the Mac should you take the plunge. These utilities can automate document creation, store and enter log-ins and passwords, manage your documents, and much more.

INTRODUCTION

Lawyers who choose to use a Mac quickly discover there's not a lot of legal-specific software available for the platform. But that doesn't mean that Mac-using lawyers are out of luck. Microsoft offers a version of [Office for Mac](#), Apple offers the [iWork suite](#), Adobe offers Acrobat for the Mac, and Mac OS X has excellent built-in mail, calendar, and address book applications.

For everything else, Mac-using lawyers have to wade through an intoxicating list of software to find what works for a law practice. The Mac software community is active and healthy — and poised to become even more robust thanks to Apple's forthcoming [Mac App Store](#). This article offers a list of the best software "utilities" for

lawyers using a Mac. These nine "utilities" are not major software applications, but are meant to enhance the daily computing activities of Mac-using lawyers.

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1. DEFAULT FOLDER X (CUSTOM OPEN & SAVE DIALOGS AND BASIC DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT)

Lawyers open and save a lot of documents, so anything that can streamline that process is welcome.

[Default Folder X](#) from St. Clair Software slyly takes over your open & save dialog box with a black border (or a small toolbar) that gives you one-click access to folders you've recently saved files into.

You can also pinpoint favorite folders that will show up in Default Folder X every time. For example, you can add a client folder to the list so you don't have to drill down to that specific folder every time you save a new document.

Default Folder X (\$34.95) also enables you to easily add [Spotlight-Comments](#) or [OpenMeta Tags](#) so you can take advantage of them for document management.

2. WITCH (ENHANCED APPLICATION AND WINDOW SWITCHING)

When I work in the Windows world, I'm a big fan of the left-handed "[Alt+Tab](#)" shortcut to swiftly switch between open windows.

In the Mac world, we have "Command+Tab" but that only switches between open applications. It works fine if you only have one window open for each application, but I often have several Word documents, email messages, and Finder windows open at any one time.

[Witch](#) (\$19) from Many Tricks is a customizable "keyboard-switcher" that allows me to swap between each individual window that I have open. I've set my keyboard shortcut to Alt/Option+Tab, which saves me several minutes each day.

3. TEXTEXPANDER (AUTOMATIC TEXT EXPANSION)

There are a number of typing "expanders" and "automators" for the Mac that will replace a few keystrokes with pre-defined text. My preference is [TextExpander](#) (\$34.95) from Smile Software.

TextExpander sits in your Menu Bar watching you type. Whenever you type a specified set of keystrokes, TextExpander immediately replaces it with a pre-defined "Snippet" of text (or images or scripts).

For example, I'm constantly typing my email address in various

places throughout the day so I programmed TextExpander to replace “bc@” with “burney@burneyconsultants.com.” I’ve also set up several “Snippets” for my email signatures and snail-mail addresses, so I can add the current date anywhere by simply typing ddt.

You wouldn’t think TextExpander would make much of a difference, but it has a nifty “Statistics” box that shows you exactly how many Snippets it replaces and how many characters it has saved you from typing. It also estimates how much time it saves you.

As a lawyer, TextExpander can streamline the composition of complicated documents because you can set up “Snippets” that contain boilerplate paragraphs or other frequently-used phrases and statements.

TextExpander is very customizable and now syncs with [Dropbox](#) so your “Snippets” are always backed up. Smile Software now also offers [TextExpander touch](#) for your iPhone and iPad.

While I prefer TextExpander, I know many other legal professionals who swear by similar utilities such as [Typelt4Me](#), [Typinator](#), and [QuicKeys](#).

4. ISTAT MENUS (CUSTOMIZABLE INFORMATION IN THE MENU BAR)

The right-side of the Mac OS X Menu Bar is a busy area that displays a lot of information, but you cannot customize it easily. For example, I like to have the day of the week show up along with the numeric date, and I’d like to change the font size and color. That’s all possible with [iStat Menus](#) (\$16) from Bjango.

iStat Menus enables you to add several icons to your Menu Bar to show memory, CPU and hard disk usage, as well as heat sensors, network activity, battery life, and much more.

iStat Menus is beautifully designed and drastically customizable. It’s an excellent tool to keep tabs on what’s going on under the hood of your Mac.

5. 1PASSWORD (SECURE PROTECTION FOR PASSWORDS AND LOGINS)

We’ve all heard the persistent directive to pick strong passwords, but most of us defiantly carry-on with easy-to-remember passwords for the sake of convenience.

[1Password](#) (\$39.95) from Agile Web Solutions is one of the most mature and attractively designed pieces of Mac software. You pick one very strong, very secure password to use as the main key to 1Password. It then handles all of your other password-related needs.

1Password does a fabulous job of embedding itself into all of the major Web browsers, so it can seamlessly enter all of your logins from your bank account to Facebook.

1Password can do much more than manage passwords. It also keeps track of the serial numbers and licenses for your Mac software, and stores “Identities” for pre-filling most forms on the Web. You can also store “Secure Notes” that can contain free-form text notes for any sensitive information you need to hide from curious eyes.

The 1Password keychain can be stored in [Dropbox](#) to ensure the

information (your keychain) is backed up at all times. Agile Web Solutions also makes a version of 1Password for the iPhone and the iPad and have started development on a Windows version (currently in beta).

1Password allows for syncing and backup through Dropbox, but you might prefer a pure Web-based service in which case I recommend [LastPass](#).

**You pick one very strong,
very secure password
to use as the main key,
and 1Password handles all
of your other password-
related needs.**

6. LAUNCHBAR (EXTENSIBLE REPLACEMENT FOR THE DOCK)

The Dock in Mac OS X is beautiful and useful, but sometimes I feel like it takes up unnecessary space I could otherwise use for my work (I auto-hide mine on the left side of my screen).

That’s why I use [LaunchBar](#) (\$32.95) from Objective Development, which enables me to launch any application with a few keystrokes. I can also instantly perform Web searches, access my clipboard, and a myriad of other functions.

For example, to open Mail, I press Command+Space (which has completely replaced my Spotlight shortcut) to bring down the LaunchBar “bar.” I then type “m” and hit Return. I could obviously launch Mail from the Dock, but with LaunchBar my hands never

have to leave the keyboard to grab the mouse.

I also use LaunchBar to perform Web searches, regardless of what application I'm currently using. I press Command+Space, type "goo" (for Google), press the spacebar and type in my search terms. As soon as I press Return, my Web browser opens with a page of my Google results.

LaunchBar is now one of the must-have utilities on any Mac I use. I really can't use a machine without it.

Many of the Mac faithful have long used [Quicksilver](#), but I'm one of those who never quite got the hang of it. When the development of Quicksilver fell into question (the developer now works on Google's Quick Search Box), I turned my attention to LaunchBar. A newer alternative to LaunchBar is [Alfred](#).

7. FOLDERBRANDER (CUSTOMIZED FOLDER APPEARANCE)

Every folder has to have a name, but why can't they also have custom colors and visual labels? [FolderBrander](#) (\$19.95) from Yellow Mug Software enables you to easily customize the color and text labels for your folders so you see at a glance what the folder contains.

It may sound like a nonessential extra step, but having certain folders branded with a color or a la-

bel can cut down the time spent searching for the proper folder. Plus it looks nice too!

[Candybar](#) from Panic Software offers a few more layers of customization for folders and other icons in Mac OS X.

8. TEXTSOAP (TEXT SCRUBBER)

Lawyers deal with a lot of text that can come from scads of different sources — email, court documents, scanned PDF files, Web browsers, etc. When you copy text from one source into a Word or Pages document, you might get weird results because of hidden formatting.

[TextSoap](#) (\$39.95) from Unmarked Software tackles the unenviable task of cleaning up text that has extra carriage returns, HTML tags, oddly placed paragraph breaks, email forwarding marks (>), and much more.

You may not need TextSoap all that often, but when you do, it can save you a lot of frustration and time.

[CleanText](#) from Apimac can also help you accomplish the same task.

9. APPZAPPER (COMPREHENSIVE APPLICATION UN-INSTALLER)

Most Mac users know that you can uninstall an application by simply dragging it to the trash. It really is just that simple, but certain applications will sometimes

leave little bits and pieces lingering around.

[AppZapper](#) (\$12.95) uninstalls an application as well as all the related files that need to go too. You simply drag an application icon to the AppZapper window, click Zap!, and wait for the cool laser gun sound.

AppZapper has been around a long time and has some nice features, but you can also try out [CleanApp](#) or [AppDelete](#).

**LaunchBar enables me
to instantly perform Web
searches, access my
clipboard, and launch any
application with a few
keystrokes.**

CONCLUSION

While legal-specific software is scarce for the Mac, the outstanding software utilities listed above can help Mac-using lawyers take better advantage of their chosen computing platform. These utilities cannot replace large software applications such as Microsoft Office or Adobe Acrobat, but they certainly support the daily use of those major packages. Your Mac will run just fine without any of these utilities, but Default Folder X, TextExpander, and LaunchBar in particular can dramatically enhance your productivity.

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