

How to Move Documents From Your Computer to Your iPad and Back Again

By Brett Burney

May 31, 2011

Now that you've got a shiny new iPad, how best to deduct it from your tax return? Use it for documents! Draft contracts. Write letters. Review discovery documents. And tell the IRS to stick it because your iPad is no toy notwithstanding all those Angry Birds apps. There's just one problem — how can you move documents from your Mac or PC to your iPad and back again? In today's TechnoFeature newsletter, iPad and Mac consultant Brett Burney discusses four iPad document management methods, including recommended apps. He also hints at a fifth possible method that may surface next week. Bonus points if you read this issue of TechnoFeature on your iPad.

INTRODUCTION

The iPad is quickly becoming a must-have device for [mobile lawyers](#). There's just one problem.

"How do I get documents onto my iPad?"

That's typically the first question I hear from a lawyer trying to incorporate the iPad into their practice.

It's a legitimate question since the iPad enables you to carry stacks of documents on a small, fast device while leaving the boxes and binders of paper — not to mention your bulky laptop — back at the office.

The iPad is about the size of a standard sheet of letter paper

and the interactive touch screen almost gives you the tactile experience of holding a piece of paper.

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DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT ON THE IPAD

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Since the dawn of the graphical user interface on computers, we've attempted to mimic our paper-based traditions of filing documents into folders. It's no coincidence that the "folders" on our computers are little icons that look like ... manila folders.

The iPad takes a different approach in the name of simplicity. On the iPad, apps are the focus, not our files. Hence, you won't find any documents and folders on the iPad like you find on a Mac or Windows PC. You can't double-click a "Documents" or "My Computer" icon on the iPad.

The iPad doesn't even share files easily between apps. You can't

store a document on the iPad and have multiple apps open it like you can on a computer. Instead, each app works independently and manages its own files.

THE "OPEN IN..." MENU

One of the most useful tools on the iPad is the "Open In..." menu. It usually looks like a small rectangular box with an arrow swiping up and to the left out of the box.

When you have a document open on the iPad, you can tap the "Open In..." menu to send the document to another app. The list of apps available will depend on what type file you have open and what apps you have installed on the iPad.

For example, let's say you're using a document in the [Documents To Go app](#), but you want to open it in [GoodReader](#). Just use the "Open In..." menu to send a copy over to GoodReader.

Of course, the "Open In..." menu first requires getting documents onto your iPad — the subject of this TechnoFeature article. So let's explore the four methods currently available. A fifth method may or may not surface next week when Apple announces its new iCloud service. All we currently know about iCloud is its name, which Apple announced earlier today in a [teaser press release](#).

METHOD #1: EMAILING DOCUMENTS TO THE IPAD

The "Open In..." menu becomes especially helpful when you need

to manage documents sent to you via email.

The iPad's Mail app has an excellent document viewer — perhaps one of the best on any mobile device. The built-in viewer enables you to easily view a Word, PDF, or Excel attachment, but you can't make any edits or changes to the document. To do that, you'll need to tap the "Open In..." icon and send the document to another app.

For example, if you receive a Microsoft Word document as an email attachment, you can open it in Mail and then tap the "Open In..." icon to send it to word processing apps like Documents To Go or [Quickoffice](#).

Because this method works so well, many people simply email documents to themselves on the iPad. It can get a little clunky, however, because you can only move and manipulate one document at a time. It's definitely not the solution to use if you need to load hundreds or thousands of documents onto your iPad.

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METHOD #2: SYNC DOCUMENTS THROUGH ITUNES

The "official" method for getting documents from your computer to your iPad is through iTunes. When you connect the iPad to your computer with a USB cable, iTunes will sync information be-

tween your computer and iPad, including calendars, contacts, music, movies, and books.

iTunes also syncs apps that you've purchased. When your iPad is connected to your computer, you'll see an Apps tab where you can toggle specific apps on and off and re-arrange icons. If you scroll down, you'll find a section called "File Sharing" where you'll find a list of apps that enable you to "transfer documents back and forth between your iPad and your computer."

For example, if you have Documents To Go or Quickoffice installed on your iPad, you'll see those apps listed in the "File Sharing" section. When you click on one of those apps, another box lists the documents that are stored in the app. You can either drag and drop documents from your computer to this box, or use the "Add..." and "Save to..." buttons.

Syncing documents through iTunes works great but you have to physically connect to your computer, which doesn't help when you're away from your computer.

METHOD #3: AD-HOC WIFI APPROACHES

As long as both your iPad and your computer are connected to the same WiFi network, you can wirelessly copy files back and forth.

When the iPad connects to your WiFi network, it's assigned an IP address by the router, usually something like <http://192.168.0.12> or <http://10.0.1.2>. If you know the IP address of your iPad once it's connected to your WiFi network, you can type it into your Web browser to access files stored in certain apps.

For example, you can wirelessly access documents stored in [ReaddleDocs](#) by:

1. Opening ReaddleDocs on your iPad.
2. Clicking the WiFi Transfer icon to enable the service (which will show you the iPad's IP address).
3. Opening a Web browser on your computer and typing in the iPad's IP address.

You'll see a list of your documents stored in ReaddleDocs on the iPad which you can download or view within your Web browser. There's also a button for uploading documents to the iPad from your computer.

If the thought of parsing IP addresses makes your head spin, you're not alone. Some apps attempt to demystify the process by offering a free software tool for your desktop computer. For example, you can download the [Documents To Go "Desktop Application"](#) that takes all the pain out of wirelessly copying and syncing documents between your computer and the Documents To Go app on your iPad.

Each app offers its own method for wirelessly managing documents, but a few standalone "file management" apps exist such as [Air Sharing](#) and [iFiles](#) that enable you to wirelessly copy and manage files between your computer and iPad.

The ad-hoc WiFi method works fine regardless of what method you use — just be sure to read the instructions for the specific app you want to share with. It's still a manual process to sync files, and you must be on the same WiFi network (i.e., near your computer) for it to work.

METHOD #4: DROPBOX

Once you use Dropbox on the iPad, you'll agree with me and my fellow iPad experts [David Sparks](#) and [Josh Barret](#) among others:

If you have an iPad, Dropbox is mandatory.

For purposes of this *TechnoFeature* article, I will set aside the ongoing debate about the confidentiality of documents stored in cloud services. Suffice it to say that Dropbox has become the easiest and most efficient method for getting documents on to your iPad — much as un-secure, un-encrypted email is now accepted as the easiest and most efficient method for confidentially communicating with clients.

While Dropbox is primarily known as a “cloud service,” the power of Dropbox starts with a local folder on your computer such as the “My Documents” folder. You probably store documents in this folder much the same as you store paper documents for your client — a main file for each client and sub-folders for correspondence, pleadings, contracts, etc.

When you install Dropbox on your computer, it monitors a local folder and syncs the documents in that folder up into the cloud. When you have another computer connected to the same Dropbox account, the folders on each computer are kept in sync. But the main point is the folders are just regular, local folders like you've always used.

The iPad can also connect to your Dropbox account. The free [Dropbox app](#) enables you to view the entire folder structure of documents and files located on your computer(s). You can't edit documents in the free Dropbox app, but you can use the “Open In...” menu to send a document to another app such as GoodReader or Documents To Go.

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The better method, however, is to have each app connect directly to your Dropbox account so you can access your foldered documents directly within each app. Setting up each app can get a little tedious as you'll need to repeatedly enter your Dropbox credentials, but once connected you can launch an app and navigate around your Dropbox folder until you find the document you need.

It can get a little tricky when you need to upload a document from your iPad to your Dropbox account, but many apps now offer to “sync” a changed file back to Dropbox. For example, Documents To Go will recognize when

you've saved changes to a document opened from Dropbox and alert you that it needs to sync that file back to Dropbox. Other apps such as GoodReader and ReaddleDocs wait for you to manually tap a sync button.

Once everything is synced, any changes you made to a document on your iPad will now be reflected back to your Dropbox folder on your computer(s). So in short, Dropbox becomes your wireless document management system tying together your work laptop, your home computer, and your iPad.

The downside of Dropbox is that your iPad must be connected to the Internet to access files. Dropbox could also be in danger of losing its corner on the market if Apple unveils a competing service next week as noted above. One of the reasons that Dropbox has become so popular, however, is because Dropbox gives app developers a lot of freedom to connect to their service. Apple isn't as open-minded about letting other kids play in their sandbox, but Apple may have learned from Dropbox's impressive success.

For the time being, Dropbox remains the easiest and most efficient method for getting documents on to your iPad. A free Dropbox account includes 2 GB of space, which is more than sufficient to hold a large number of documents.

Brett Burney is the Principal of Burney Consultants LLC, a legal technology consulting company that specializes in supporting Mac-using legal professionals. Brett authors the [Macs in Law](#) blog which covers the use of Mac and iOS devices (iPhone and iPad) in the practice of law.

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