
23 Hot Techno.Tips for Every Lawyer!

By

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Alex, I'll take "Rhetorical Legal Technology Questions for \$500" please? And the answer is "Useful tidbits of information every lawyer and law office staffer can put right to use." Of course the question, a la Jeopardy would be "technology tips"! Here are a baker's dozen plus ten more, ranging the gamut from Y2K to office suites to Windows and everything in between!

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YEAR 2000 DATES AND OTHER SCARY THINGS THAT GO BUMP IN THE NIGHT

The actual transition from 12/31/99 to 1/1/2000 is not the only scary set of date changes technology has to deal with--there are several other problematic dates we have to deal with!

Leap Years - While your PCs and other electronic equipment might be ready to handle the 1999-to-2000 transition, they may still not recognize that 2000 is a leap year--talk about double whammies! This means they may fail to recognize February 29, 2000 and would then be off an entire day--even if you reset the date, the day of the week may be off by one day! This can be easily checked (backup first!!!) By doing a "rollover" test with the test PC set to February 28, 2000 at about 11:58:00PM - let the system tick over to see if it properly rolls over to the "leap day." Some Y2K testing software will check this for you. If your system doesn't recognize the "leap day", you're not technically Y2K compliant and you need to pursue getting an update or fix from your PC manufacturer or BIOS manufacturer.

Special Dates - Some older programs assign special meanings to certain date sequences that seemed unlikely to occur during the life cycle of the software. For example, one that stands out is 9/9/99 which some programmers used as a special code to note data for some kind of special occurrence--such as deleting data, testing a "condition", or trapping errors. While this is not likely to occur on PCs as

opposed to more likelihood on larger mainframe systems, it is still something to be aware of.

Miscellaneous Date Gotchas - All sorts of software has been written with internal date limitations. For example, it is commonly known that 32-bit programs, like many on your current Windows 95, 98 and Windows NT PCs have a date calculation failure point in the year 2036. This affects the massive body of software written in the popular C++ programming language. Certain programs like Microsoft's widely used Excel 95 can't handle dates past 2078, Windows 95's Win32 runtime library fails after 2099 and the NT 4.0 File System will fail in the year 29,602. The good news is that we would expect that you will have upgraded your PCs and software by the time these date problems happen--or that you'll upgrade now if your present data would be affected! God help the poor computing public in the second half of the 21st century .

Hot Y2K Website: Visit The Mitre Corporation's outstanding Y2K web pages at www.mitre.org/research/y2k and especially their page at <http://www.mitre.org/research/y2k/docs/DATES.html> which lists a slew of important and potentially problematic dates that extend all the way up to the 22nd century (when James T. Kirk and the crew of the Enterprise may need to be more concerned about these than we are). Two sidenotes about this superb site: (1) The Mitre Corporation is where renowned legal technonaut Burgess Allison and author (. . . of the original ABA LPM masterpiece, "The Lawyer's Guide to the Internet", not to mention the must-read monthly column "Techology Update" in the ABA LPM's Law Practice Management magazine) gets his paycheck; and (2) doesn't "Mitre" sound like it would have been one of either James Bond's or the Man from U.N.C.L.E.'s arch-enemies in the 60's?

HELP! MY PC'S FALLEN AND CAN'T GET UP! (OR: HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE ERA WHERE "TECH SUPPORT" IS MERELY A FOND MEMORY . . .)

So, you've just experienced the 11th crash of the day in your mission-critical Outlook 98 calendar and the friendly and amazingly chipper techno.guys and techno.gals at the \$40 per incident Microsoft Tech Support lines are even more clueless than you are about the cause of the problem. Or your brand-spanking new Dell laptop hangs on bootup with a

blue Windows Screen of Death claiming “System is Busy, Close all Programs” and you’re tired of explaining to the Austinians who are really trying to help but if they ask you one more time, “what new programs did you load that could have caused this, y’all?” Or that USB scanner you bought based on the magazine reviews touting how easy it was to install by just plugging in the USB cable . . . which of course has resulted in your scanner being so invisible to your PC that it might as well look like Calista Flockhart turned sideways . . .

Sound all too familiar? Welcome to the end of the second decade of the PC era. Sure you can buy really cheap stuff at buy.com and the latest, greatest WordPerfect 2000 Suite can be had for under a hundred bucks. Those are good things. But the era of low-priced, low-profit hardware and software has also brought the demise of vendor-provided technical support as we know it. Of course, this is not really a surprise, nor is it a new development—just read the article Dan Coolidge and I wrote in the Spring ‘96 issue of the ABA LPM Section’s “Network 2d” newsletter called “Unwilling Beta Testers: It’s Time to Rally!” Free tech support is as rare as an honest politician these days. “Per incident fees” dominate, but often the exchange of credit card number for alleged “solutions” ends up costing you money without any answers in return. So what’s a busy techno.using lawyer or law office staffer to do?

Help each other—that’s the answer these days. Virtual communities of lawyers, legal professionals and legal technologists have sprung up all over. Further, the world of “lay users” has built a sprawling web of online technical resources staffed by “real users” who have solved the same “real problems” you’ve faced. Several general types of community-based self.techno.help are available:

Electronic Resources: these consist of websites, e-mail listserves and newsgroups. In the legal-specific segment:

- ⇒ Look to the major legal tech-oriented listserves including the ABA LPM Section’s “Network2d” (go to www.abanet.org/discussions/M-rlists.html to subscribe) (a close-knit group where some of the most well-known legal techno.dudes hang out); Lawtech, another ABA listserve run by the organization’s Legal Technology Resource Center (again, go to www.abanet.org/discussions/I-llists.html to subscribe) (tends to be a little less collegial than Network 2d, but tons of great answers to the most obscure and perplexing problems are offered up daily by a savvy group of

participants); Netlawyers - Lew Rose's respected and widely-subscribed discussion on all things Net-related with occasional general technical diversions (go to www.net-lawyers.org to subscribe) and the Technolawyer List, a topic-driven listserv run by New York lawyer and entrepreneur Neil Squillante (go to www.technolawyer.com to subscribe) (tends to have lengthy and meaty postings of periodic immeasurable value).

- ⇒ In states like Wisconsin, take advantage of the State Bar website-based legal discussion forums that may be available. In Wisconsin, for example, any State Bar member can participate in an active discussion on legal techno.topics by visiting www.wisbar.org/dg-menu.htm.
- ⇒ Check out the non-legal-specific support websites that are cropping up. These include Ask-a-Tech (www.ask-a-tech.org) which promises e-mailed help within 48 hours (free). This site is run by experienced help-desk tech Miquel Zlot and two of his techno.knowledgeable pals in their spare time. There's also Experts Exchange (www.experts-exchange.com), another free website that bills itself as a "knowledge-sharing community" built around 70 message boards where over 5000 registered experts answer posted questions. Woody Leonhard's "Windows Annoyances" sites provide great tips about the line of products from Microsoft that some people feel are actually viruses, rather than applications (check out www.annoyances.org). A couple more freebie help sites include World O'Windows (www.worldwindows.com) and Tom's Hardware Guide (www.tomshardware.com). For small firm Windows-based networking, you can't beat the technical information presented by Intel at their web page called "Networking with Windows 95 - A Primer" located at <http://support.intel.com/support/inbusiness/24057.htm>.

All on the Web isn't necessarily free and there are some "fee-based" support resources available online as well. These include the Intel AnswerExpress Support Suite which costs \$20 per question or you can sign up for \$100 a year (www.answerexpress.com); the PC Crisis Line which bills \$3/minute for the first 10 minutes and \$1/minute thereafter at www.pccrisis.com and also the PC Techline at a flat \$2/minute via a 900 number with its website at www.pctechline.com.

By all means, try out the free resources first, especially the listserves. If those avenues turn up a blank, consider the paid resources. But the bottom-line is that you aren't alone out there when it comes to solving irritating and productivity-sapping PC problems, even if it feels that way when you try and seek help from your vendor . . . !

NETWORKING ISN'T JUST FOR THE OFFICE ANYMORE: THE RISE OF THE HAN (HOME AREA NETWORK)

Networking computers has traditionally been viewed as something best left for our offices with our local area networks (LAN) and wide-area networks (WANs) that connect our LANs. More and more of our families have more than one computer at home. Dad's got his laptop that he brings from the office. Mom's get that hand-me-down Pentium 233 that was obsoleted when the kids gaming needs demanded the latest mega-screamer box. And the kids? Well, after all, to run all those hot games, one needs sheer horsepower so they have the latest greatest AMD K6-3 500 or Pentium III 550 machine decked out with hot rod video, DVD and enough RAM and hard drive space to handle the data processing needs of a multinational financial institution. All of this means no more "take a number and wait your turn" to get on the the home PC. No more issues with the kidlets digging around in Quicken and writing checks for snowboard accessories. No more hassles when "Half-Life" refuses to blow up bad guys with full sound effects because Mom installed the update to her "Martha Stewart Does Decorating" program.

But what are you going to do about printing? How about backup? How about dealing with the Internet access needs of three different PCs? Enter stage left, the HAN (that's my terms folks—me—I came up with it—mine)—the Home Area Network. Using a combination of traditional and now super low-cost Ethernet networking and/or wireless connections, the Connected Family of the 21st Century Minus Six Months can share everything, electronically-speaking, that is.

If your home "Computer Center" is all one room, you can connect multiple PCs with traditional Ethernet network cards and hubs - quality brand-name network cards from companies like 3COM (www.3com.com), Netgear (<http://netgear.baynetworks.com/> products) and D-Link (www.dlink.com), among others can be had for as little as \$25.00 per PC. And Dad's (or Mom's) office laptop probably has a network card in it already. Connect them together with an Ethernet hub (same companies, as little as \$45 for a

genuine, honest-to-goodness 4-port Ethernet hub like the 3COM Office Connect TP4 (3COM no. 3C16704) or even two PCs with a cross-over Ethernet cable and no hub at all (try the model A3X126-10 10' crossover Category 5 cable from Belkin for a budget-friendly \$9). Also, if you have two PCs to connect and both are equipped with USB ports (i.e. connecting that office laptop to your home multimedia PC to transfer files and share a printer) be sure to check out the 10 minute network (literally has taken me 10 minutes or less to set this up on several different pairs of PCs—cool!) called EZ-Link from AnchorChips in San Diego (www.ezlinkusb.com). Then to make your connection, if you visit the nifty Intel Small Firm Networking Primer at <http://support.intel.com/support/inbusiness/24057.htm> and mentioned in a previous tip, you're ready to connect Windows 95 and/or Windows 98 stations together and share printers, tape backup units, etc. in a peer-to-peer network.

If your home PCs are scattered all over la maison, then consider one of the wireless home networking kits. I personally like the Passport system from Intelogis (www.intelogis.com). This system uses the AC power lines in your home to establish a Windows 95/98 peer-to-peer network. The network "devices" connect to a PC or a printer's parallel port, then plug directly into an AC power outlet. Not a particularly speedy connection (about 1 mbps data transfer speeds) but that was enough to enable fellow legal techno.freak Dan Coolidge and I to fly head-to-head in a bit of networked WWII air combat courtesy of "Jane's WWII Fighters" between two Passport-connected PCs at his home-turned-techno.shrine. Other products like this include the HomeFree Wireless Desktop Pack from Diamond Multimedia Systems (www.diamondmm.com). There's even a "Networking Home PCs for Dummies" book now available from IDG books (www.dummies.com) - talk about "mainstream"!

CONDUCT ON-LINE DISCUSSIONS AND CONFERENCE WITH YOUR CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES . . . FOR FREE!

Use Microsoft's latest conferencing software called "Netmeeting" (download it from <http://www.microsoft.com/netmeeting>), PeopleLink 2.1 (<http://www.peoplelink.com>), I-Chat (<http://www.ichat.com>) or America Online's free (that's the operative word with all of these!) AOL Instant Messenger that now comes with Netscape Communicator (<http://www.aol.com>) to conduct multi-person, private online conferences with friends, colleagues, expert witnesses and your clients. Just type what you want to say and

everyone else conferenced in through their Internet connection sees what you type and can then type their responses. These are very much like the “chat” groups on private services like America Online or the forums CompuServe but they offer privacy and more features, like the ability to save the “conversation” of all parties as a text file for later recall. With Netmeeting, you can even voice conference, share documents transfer files and share a “whiteboard” over the Internet.

Think about how you can use this capability for marketing . . . how about signing up existing clients for a one hour a week “free chat” on a scheduled legal topic, moderated by one of your lawyers? My clients have tried this and invariably get tremendous positive reaction from their clients and inevitably generate business . . . in addition to spreading lots of good will for very little cost.

YEAR 2000 TESTING PRODUCTS - MANY ARE FREE! PART TWO

The bottom-line with Year 2000 compliance is whether your PC hardware is ready to handle the date challenges ahead. Since your PC software gets its dates from the PC hardware, if your hardware isn't up to the task, your software will fail. The good news is that there are a number of free testing products to check the Year 2000 readiness of PCs. Some examples follow:

National Software Testing Labs - the *de facto* standard among Y2K PC testing products. Originally developed by the Canadian government, the Ymark2000 software from the National Software Testing Labs has been endorsed by many major hardware makers--it tests a PC's real-time clock and its BIOS for Y2K compatibility. This product can be downloaded from <http://www.nstl.com/downloads/y2000.exe>. There's also a raft of Y2K info at their site at http://www.nstl.com/html/nstl_y2k.html.

Test2000: get it from <http://www.rightime.com>

Millenium/Pro Check: get it from <http://www.unicore.com/millenium.html>

Check 2000: <http://www.gmt-uta.com/welcome.cfm>

Lots of other important and useful Y2K info, news and links to vendors' Y2K sites are accessible from the mother of all Y2K megasites: Peter de Jager's Year2000.com (<http://www.year2000.com>).

TESTING FOR Y2K COMPLIANCE

So exactly how would you go about testing an office or home PC for Y2K compatibility? There are several levels of testing and investigation that need to be done. You have both hardware and software and quasi hard/software to test and verify. From the hardware and quasi-software perspective, you need to test your PC's two key timekeeping components: the BIOS (**B**asic **I**nput **O**utput **S**ystem - sort of the "personality chip" that give that pile of metal and plastic on your desk it's character as a working (most of the time), functioning (we hope) PC system and the RTC (**R**eal **T**ime **C**lock - think of this circuit as a little quartz watch inside your PC that tells time - and sends that information to the BIOS which in turn, decides what to do with the time information). But there's more. Every PC has software that is it's internal traffic cop, it's Operating System (usually some version of Windows these days). The Operating System takes care of those useful things like telling your screen what to display, lets you access your applications, sends documents to the printers when you ask it to, etc. Your Operating System has to be Y2K-compliant as well. And finally, once your hardware and Operating System have passed the tests, you still have all your application software AND sometimes the data in your programs that have to be individually checked for Y2K-compliance. So it's really a 4-step process for any given PC station, whether desktop, notebook or even a network fileserver: PC hardware (BIOS and RTC), Operating System (whether it's some flavor of Windows, Linux, UNIX, Mac OS, or a network Operating System like Windows NT Server or Novell's NetWare) and finally, whether you have Y2K-compliant data in your programs (i.e. dates in a divorce financial disclosure spreadsheet use four digit years, etc.).

REALLY COOL SHAREWARE AND FREWARE MAKES YOUR LEGAL COMPUTING EXPERIENCE EASIER!

In addition to the freeware product previously mentioned called Topdesk, the following are some of my favorite freeware and shareware utilities--all widely available on the Web:

Showcalc - a terrific replacement for the pathetic Windows calculator - this one has a cool scrollable tape that makes it easy to look back at previous calculations - Get it from the author's site at <http://www.winsite.com/info/pc/win95/misc/scalcv20.zip> or from just about any shareware site like <http://www.shareware.com>

DUNCE 2.5.2 - this is an invaluable addition to the oft-confusing Windows 95/98 Dial-Up-Networking (DUN) function that enables your Internet connections. This adds all the features you wished Windows DUN had--in fact, the program's name stands for Dial-Up-Networking Connection Enhancement. From better redialing capability to user name/password insertion, DUNCE does it all. Get it from any popular shareware site or straight from the developer at <http://www.dunce.com>.

WinZIP 7.0 - it would be hard to imagine not having this compression/decompression utility. The perfect way to smash massive files down to a reasonable size for archival purposes or to make them small enough to send across the 'Net as e-mail attachments. Better than the original PKZIP program, WinZIP is a marvel of point and click simplicity for zipping and unzipping files, including spanning large files across multiple floppy disks. Get it from <http://www.winzip.com> or just about any shareware site.

Paint Shop Pro - whether you use the shareware version or pony up the \$70 or so for the commercial product, this is an invaluable utility for dealing with the kinds of graphics files more and more lawyers are inserting in their documents. Whether it is using the great screen capture function to take parts of PC screens and insert them into your client docs or grabbing a Web graphic, converting it to another format or touching it up, there's no better tool to use. Available from <http://www.jasc.com> or most shareware sites.

Net.Medic - this is a great tool for helping you understand what's happening with your Internet connection. Having a problem with a slow connection? Get accurate real-time info as to your connection speed, the number of "hops" between you and your Net-destination and more. Available from <http://www.vitalsigns.com> and most shareware sites.

SOLO AND SMALL FIRM LAWYERS: THEY'RE ALL TALKING ON SOLOSEZ!

Guess what? You're not alone, even though sometimes it seems like it. Your fellow solo and small firm lawyers, literally worldwide, are helping each other every single day. How are they doing it? They're part of the ABA's Solosez virtual community. Solosez is a project of the ABA Solo and Small Firm Standing Committee in conjunction with the General Practice/Solo and Small Firm Section and the Law Practice Management Section. It's a listserv (yep, that's spelled right!)--an electronic discussion group that takes place via e-mail. If you know how to use e-mail, you know how to use Solosez! There are literally hundreds, if not more lawyers who participate daily. Messages and topics cover such subjects as any aspect of small firm law office technology to phone systems to substantive practice questions. Even referrals have been made on the listserv! The community is warm, friendly and fun - a great place to share the ups and downs of small firm practice! Solosez is also a great place to pick the brains of others to avoid reinventing the wheel--now that's efficiency! To sign up for Solosez (basic requirements: you don't have to be an ABA member; you do need to be a small firm lawyer or small law firm staffer; you need to start by posting a message introducing yourself and listing your favorite pet, favorite drink, etc.), send an e-mail message as follows:

Send to: listserv@abanet.org
Subject: Subscribe
Message: subscribe solosez (or subscribe solosez-digest) (with NOTHING else in the message body including a "signature")
Posting: Post your messages once subscribed to solosez@abanet.org

Or go to <http://www.abanet.org/scripts/listcommands.asp?parm=subscribe/solosez> and follow the website instructions. We hope to see you there!

"CHANGE THE OIL IN YOUR PC EVERY 3000 MILES" - IN OTHER WORDS, A LITTLE PREVENTATIVE PC MAINTENANCE GOES A LONG WAY

Everyone knows that our cars run better if we take good care of them--regular preventative maintenance can keep our mortgaged rolling pride and joy in tip-top

condition so that it lasts as long as our payments are still due . PCs aren't any different--well cared for PCs simply work better, crashing less often, working when we need them to. The following are some simple self-maintenance tips to keep your PC working at peak abilities--you should consider performing these tasks monthly ideally, or quarterly at a minimum:

Delete all files and folders with dates older than one week from your C:\WINDOWS\TEMP folder

Purge your web browser's history and cache files - they take up space, slow browser performance and can also pose a security risk

Run SCANDISK (located in Start | Programs | Accessories | System Tools). Select the "Standard" option and also turn on "Automatically Fix Errors." Click on the "Advanced" button and under "Log File", pick "Replace Log"; for "Cross-Linked Files" select "Delete"; click "Free" under "Lost File Fragments"; under "Check Files For" pick "invalid dates and times" and finally, disable "Check Host Drive First" unless you have a compressed hard drive - then let 'er rip

Empty your Recycle Bin--it can be a real space hog (be sure and undelete any files you need to recover from it first!)

Run "Disk Defragmenter" (located in Start | Programs | Accessories | System Tools) - the program will tell you if your drive needs defragmenting or not - at least once a quarter for a heavily used PC is recommended

Update your anti-virus software (you **DO** have anti-virus software, right?) By downloading new virus databases or signature files from your software's website - do this at least monthly in order to be able to detect and kill the latest damaging viruses that might infest your system. If you still are skeptical about the likelihood that a virus will hit your firm, take a pill and get over it. Just ask any of the poor buggers who suffered public embarrassment or had client confidentialities breached due to the recent Melissa virus infestation or worse, had their hard drives irrevocably wiped out by the CIH or "Chernobyl" virus--it was hard not to hear about these in the news--consider it your wake-up call to take anti-virus software updating seriously.

Perform a "test restore" with your data backup system at least once a month, or more often if you have time (you can't do it too often). Backup systems that aren't working properly have the insidious characteristic of looking like they're working just fine. It's just plain too late when you need to restore from a backup and you get nothing more than "tape empty" messages--talk about a Roloids moment! To test your backup system--regardless of type, try and select perhaps a few

documents and restore them to the system (move the originals first to a safe folder or a floppy so that you have an “empty” area to restore to) and then see if you can access them--*i.e.* pull up a WordPerfect document in WordPerfect. If this works, the likelihood is that your entire backup session is restorable when the chips are down. By the way, the next time you test it, test restore different files than the previous time.

Keep your PCs and printers clean! Dust and paper particles and other miscellaneous PC-hostile gunk trashes PCs and cripples laser printers. Use a can of compressed air which you can get at any office supply store to blow out the crud from inside your laser printer--do this monthly if possible or at least quarterly. Take the covers off your PCs and blow them out as well--quarterly or bi-annually should do the trick.

Consider keeping some spare PC parts on the shelf for the components you would feel comfortable replacing on your own. For example, you might keep a spare mouse and a spare keyboard handy--those devices are very mechanical and do wear out--usually at the worst possible time. Make sure the replacements are **precise** replacements--either identical to the most common keyboard and mouse you use in your office and with the same kinds of connectors. You might also keep a network card, some network cables and perhaps a video card on the shelf as well--all pretty inexpensive, but sometimes days away if service is needed and your vendor doesn't carry them in stock.

Finally, have a plan--be ready for disaster by knowing what to do if key parts of your system fail--such as your PCs, your printers, your network system, etc. This means knowing what diagnostic steps to take, who to call, having a list of all your key software and hardware with version numbers and serial numbers. Be prepared--it **WILL** happen to you one day!

AMERICA ONLINE DISKETTES, PART 356

Some of us have accumulated enough of those mega-ubiquitous America Online diskettes and CD-ROMs that we could pave a road from here to Jupiter . . . and back. Most simply get thrown away--or turned into coasters . . . or frisbees. But there actually is a really good reason to carry one of these with you even if you don't have, don't want and don't really need an America Online account. If you're like many of us, your practice lives and dies with the ability to get e-mail. If you're away from the office with your laptop and you

can't seem to get any kind of Internet connection to get that critical document your biggest client absolutely, positively needs you to see--yesterday, what do you do? Cry? Whine? Change your identity and move to an island in the South Pacific and hide out (well, actually, that last one doesn't sound like such a bad idea . . .). No, you take out that irritating little AOL disk and you take advantage of their free 30 day or 100 hour deal! Instant e-mail without doing anything other than loading the software, baring your charge card number and getting online! A perfect emergency backup--you can cancel it as soon as you're done and do it all over again with another of those 99,000 disks you have back at the office!

11 Y2K NON-COMPLIANT DATA IN Y2K COMPLIANT PROGRAMS? A QUICK WAY TO PREVENT IT FROM HAPPENING

OK., so you've done your Y2K due-diligence and religiously inventoried, verified and updated all your software to be Millenium compliant. Everything's hunky-dory and you can just sit back and relax and wait for the Big Y2K Bang, right? Sorry pal, you may still actually be entering Y2K non-compliant dates in otherwise Y2K-compliant applications. Just because a program is compliant doesn't mean it will necessarily handle two-digit year entries correctly. It might only handle four-digit years properly! Holy missing digits Batman! What's a Y2K-crusader to do?

Well for Windows 95/98 users, there is some hidden help available. One way to reduce the possibility of this happening is to change the default date format in Windows to be four digits instead of the standard two-digit "Windows Short Date" format so it always displays the full year. To make the change, you go to Start | Settings | Control Panel | Regional Settings and under the Date tab, change the "Short Date" format from "m/d/yy" (two digit years as a default) to "m/d/yyyy" (four digit dates as a default). While this won't change any existing two digit entries in all those divorce property division spreadsheets you have, it will help you with future entries.

1 TOP REASONS FOR UPGRADING TO THE LATEST WORDPERFECT OFFICE 2000

By the time you read this, WordPerfect 9 as part of the latest Corel WordPerfect Office 2000 suite will be widely available. The question when any new upgrade hits the streets is “why should I bother?” Whether you’re using an older version of WordPerfect like 7, 8 or even the venerable classic 5.1 for DOS, there’s enough reason to jump through the upgrade hoop. And certainly for long-suffering Reveal Codes-deprived Microsoft Word users . . . well, let’s just say that you can always come back home Here are some of the most useful new additions to WordPerfect 9:

Real-Time Preview: One of the most intriguing new features of WordPerfect 2000 is a real-time preview of changes to text. Let’s say you have a document on the screen and wonder how that paragraph would look if the font changed from “Times Roman” to “Arial.” Furthermore, how might that font change affect the layout and pagination of the document--certainly real considerations when you’re under the auspices of court-prescribed formats. Well, just drop down the font list from the screen and let your mouse “hover” above the desired font. The text automatically changes so you can visually see what the result. If you like it, “click,” and it’s selected. If you don’t like it, just move away from the font drop-down list and the document remains in original format. Just think, we learned how to left click, right click, drag and drop and point and click. Now we have a new technique — “point and hover.”

Autoscroll - For those lawyers generating long documents and a need to proofread in detail, the new “autoscroll” feature is a welcomed addition. You click on the icon and then move the pointer towards the top or bottom of your screen. As you move in that direction the text scrolls up or down. This is not unlike using the “hand” icon Adobe Acrobat Reader presents. The closer you go to the top or bottom of the screen, the faster the scroll. You set the speed with the positioning of the icon—the closer to the top of the screen, the faster it scrolls towards the beginning of your document; the closer to the bottom of the screen, the faster you scroll towards the end. Move to the center of the screen and you can shift Autoscroll into “neutral.” No longer do you have to keep hitting the down arrow or page down key to move through a document in a smooth fashion.

Browser-like “Back” and “Forward”: two little arrows on the WordPerfect 9 toolbar do something pretty cool. Much like the use of the Back and Forward buttons in a web browser, in WordPerfect 9 these move you to the prior or subsequent insertion points in your document. In other words, say you want to go

back to the third last paragraph you edited. Do you even know where it is in the document? Maybe not. But click the “Back” button three times and it goes right where you want it to. Secretaries will LOVE this feature! Why didn’t someone think of this before—it sure would have made document editing easier.

Block “Make it Fit”: the “Make it Fit” expert, first introduced in WordPerfect 7, provided invaluable capabilities when you had to squeeze a too long (or I guess, too short) document into a specific number of pages. If you were writing a trial brief, where, for example, the judge imposed a 12 page limit, and try as you might, your necessary arguments took you three paragraphs into your 13th page, you had a problem. Given that most judges don’t take kindly to 1/4 inch margins, less than single line spacing and microscopic 7 point typestyles, you were previously faced with potentially hours of touchy little changes to all sorts of different document settings. The “Make it Fit” expert changed all that—it put document sizing on autopilot, automatically mixing and matching document layout and text format changes to ever so subtly cram in that extra text without making it look totally obvious. But that worked only for entire documents . . .

In WordPerfect 9, “Make it Fit” goes a step further. What if you only want to force one paragraph, or maybe one table onto a single page and the old Block Protect just doesn’t cut it. Now you can select a chunk of text—any size you want—and apply “Make it Fit” just to that block. Cool, huh?

While there are lots of other additions ranging from XML capability to the inclusion of Microsoft’s VBA as an alternative macro programming language, the items above are the big additions!

1 GET A COPY OF TOPDESK - AND ACCESS YOUR DESKTOP SHORTCUTS ANYTIME!

While Windows 98 makes it possible to add taskbar access to your desktop shortcuts while you are running a program in full-screen mode (and thus obscuring the desktop), there’s a much better way to do it that also works for Windows 95 and Windows NT users. Get a copy of the freeware product called “Topdesk 3.0” from Snadboy Software (download it from the publisher at <http://www.snadboy.com/TopDesk.shtml> or from many shareware/freeware sites like <http://www.shareware.com>). This nifty little program puts an

icon in your system tray. A single click brings up a menu that lists all your desktop shortcuts as well as giving you access to My Computer, Network Neighborhood, the Recycle Bin and Dial-Up Networking--incredibly handy--a utility I use many times every day!

① NETWORK FAXING ON THE CHEAP - LOOK INTO WINFAX PRO V. 9 AND ITS NEW FAX SHARING FUNCTION

WinFAX Pro has been the mainstay and benchmark of the workstation PC FAX software marketplace for years (info at <http://www.symantec.com/winfax/index.html>). But for network FAX capabilities, even for smaller firms, it has meant spending money on often expensive and complex dedicated network FAXing hardware and software. Not any more! With the ver. 9 release of WinFAX Pro, Symantec has added simple network FAX sharing, even for your smaller peer-to-peer networks. With the help of a setup wizard, WinFAX Pro ver. 9 guides you through setting up a FAX/modem-equipped PC as a FAX "host." You then can install WinFAX Pro ver. 9 on any PC on the network and send FAXes through the FAX/modem-equipped PC--even though you don't have a FAX/modem in your own PC. The software "queues" the FAX requests and sends them out on a first-come, first-served basis. And all this capability runs in the background of the "host" PC, only nominally affecting its performance--most users won't even notice. Save thousands of dollars with this new feature of this inexpensive software!

① CONDUCT ON-LINE DISCUSSIONS AND CONFERENCE WITH YOUR CLIENTS AND COLLEAGUES . . . FOR FREE! PART TWO

Previously, we talked about using Microsoft's Netmeeting and Peoplelink conferencing software (download them from <http://www.microsoft.com/netmeeting> and <http://www.peoplelink.com>, respectively) or America Online's free (that's the operative word with all of these!) AOL Instant Messenger (<http://www.aol.com>) to conduct multi-person, private online conferences with friends, colleagues, expert witnesses and your clients. Just type what you want to say and everyone else conferenced in through their Internet connection sees what you type and can then type their responses.

The next development in these “instant virtual communities” is embodied by Egroups (www.egroups.com). You absolutely HAVE to try this thing out! Egroups allows you to create your own private web-based chat rooms and/or discussion forums and/or webconferences and you can invite anyone to take part. Think how efficient this would be for meetings of a State Bar or an ABA committee you work with—and how much money it would save on megabuck teleconference calls. You could conference with clients this way. You could conference with co-counsel, and yes, even opposing counsel. How about a web-based, browser-drive status conference with a court at some point in the future. Heck, how about a virtual family reunion using a system like Egroups? The possibilities are endless and the cost? How does “free” sound?

① **SMALL FIRM NETWORKING RESOURCES**

Building a network in a small law firm need not be a daunting or expensive task. While it usually makes sense to avoid the offers of “free” help from your AOL-whiz brother-in-law geek and seek professional help, there are several interesting resources to help you become the most educated possible network consumer. The first is Intel’s great information about creating Peer-to-Peer networks--the online article is called “Networking with Windows 95 - A Primer” (find it at <http://support.intel.com/support/inbusiness/24057.htm>). While focused primarily on Windows 95, much of the information is applicable to Windows 98 as well--easy to understand and very thorough in a methodical, step-by-step approach.

Next, be sure to check out Novell’s high-value NetWare for Small Business 4.2 suite. This is an aggressively-priced bundling of the company’s vaunted NetWare 4.11 network operating system, the terrific GroupWise 5.2 networked calendar/e-mail/scheduling/to-do list system and a slew of other useful utilities including ToBit’s great network FAX software. This package is priced at roughly the price of NetWare **alone**, saving thousands of dollars in some cases--with a setup routine that keeps your costs down, although use of a pro is recommended--this is not a hobbyist’s evening project. A dedicated server is required, but that’s always better anyway and in this age of super-cheap hardware, is practical for even the smallest firms.

Small Firm Networking Horror Story - avoid Microsoft’s counterpart to the NetWare for Small Business Suite. Avoid it like the plague, actually. Here’s something I recently wrote on a legal technology listserv about my

own experiences with this product that clearly falls into the category of "crapware": ". . . .NT Small Business Backoffice Server 4.0. This is the biggest piece of junk I have ever seen. While unethical or greedy consultants could look on it as a full employment act, it's so bad the collection of patches for this thing take up 865 meg--two CDs--so massive that of course a download isn't possible--you have to order it and wait two weeks to get it. That's obscene!! How about a server suite with a crippled older [Microsoft] Exchange [Server] that refuses to allow a persistent Internet connection for the network if you are on an ISDN [line]--one of my clients experienced 505 reconnects in a week--at 20 cents each. Microsoft's answer is to throw up their hands and say "we didn't think it would be a problem" but you can upgrade to Exchange Server 5.5 for about \$1800 (more than the cost of the entire Microsoft NT Small Business Backoffice Server Suite for that client) and that will "fix" the problem. How about a myriad of other things that just plain don't work--like supporting two network adapters in the server - no patch available but a Microsoft tech admitted they have an unofficial "hotfix" that we can download. All in all, we had to download four of these "hot fixes" - fixes to known problems which the public does not and will not know about unless you spend hours on the phone with Microsoft network technicians. Please tell me how that is a "good product". NT Small Business Backoffice Server Suite is nothing more than a badly slapped together collection of software in response to the marketing need to meet and compete with NetWare for Small Business Suite which is a nicely integrated mix that we can usually install and fully configure in about 2 hours or less." Get the picture? (NOTE: Supposedly the about to be released (as of this writing in mid-May '99) version 4.5 will resolve these problems--that remains to be seen . . .)

①

BACKING UP WINDOWS 95/98 CRITICAL SYSTEM FILES - YOU NEED TO KNOW HOW TO DO THIS!

Anyone who uses Windows 95/98 and has installed new software has or will eventually experience some sort of a system meltdown. Software that doesn't play by the rules can devour your system, optimizing everything for its own operation, but rendering the rest of your system totally unusable. There is a cheap and easy homegrown way to protect

yourself--aside from religiously backing up your **entire** system and performing all-important regular data restore tests (hint, hint). You can create a batch file--remember those from the DOS and Windows 3.x days of yesteryear? This batch file--with a single mouse click--can protect all your critical Windows 95/98 configuration and system files before you install potentially roguish software. Here's what's in the file--you can create it with the Windows 95/98 Notepad utility and save it in a new folder that you might call C:\SAFE as in our example below (or even better, to also store it on a floppy disk so that you can copy it back to your system when needed):

Call the file something easy to remember like SAFETY.BAT or SAVEMYBUTT.BAT:

```
copy c:\autoexec.bat c:\safe
copy c:\autoexec.dos c:\safe
copy c:\config.sys c:\safe
copy c:\config.dos c:\safe
copy c:\windows\control.ini c:\safe
copy c:\windows\system.ini c:\safe
copy c:\windows\win.ini c:\safe
attrib -r -h -s c:\msdos.sys
attrib -r -h -s c:\windows\user.dat
attrib -r -h -s c:\windows\system.dat
copy c:\msdos.sys c:\safe
copy c:\windows\user.dat c:\safe
copy c:\windows\system.dat c:\safe
attrib +r +h +s c:\msdos.sys
attrib +r +h +s c:\windows\user.dat
attrib +r +h +s c:\windows\system.dat
```

Running this file will protect your Windows 95/98 Registry files, your older 16-bit Windows INI files if you have them and your boot-up files if you have them--they're neatly tucked away in the C:\SAFE folder and can be copied back to their original locations if needed. Just put a Windows 95/98 Shortcut to this batch file on your desktop and protection is one-click away--practicing safe computing never got easier!

①

WINDOWS, WINDOWS EVERYWHERE . . . BUT HOW DO YOU KNOW WHICH VERSION YOU HAVE?

Sometimes it is very important to know precisely which version of Windows 95 or 98 you have. This may bear on how you install new software, or which patches or fixes you might acquire from the Microsoft website to “tune” or update your Windows operating system. Unfortunately, it’s not entirely obvious as to which Windows 9x version you might have. Note that you can find your Windows release number by right clicking on the “My Computer” icon on your desktop, selecting “Properties” from the menu that appears, then looking at the “General” tab--the version number will be listed in the upper right-hand corner. The following is a quick table to help you figure it out:

Windows Version Number	What it Means
4.00.950	Windows 95 - the original release
4.00.950A	Windows 95 plus the Service Pack 1 update or sometimes referred to as OEM Service Release 1
4.00.950B	Windows 95 Service Release (OSR) 2.0 or 2.1 (note that OSR 2.1 has a “USB supplement” to OSR2 in “Add/Remove Programs” under the Control Panel)
4.00.950C	Windows 95 SR 2.5 - the last release of Windows 95
4.10.1998	First release of Windows 98

① NEW EMPLOYEES CLAIMING ALL SORTS OF COMPUTER KNOWLEDGE? MAKE THEM PROVE IT!

As an employer there is nothing more frustrating than hiring a new employee who has claimed to have a raft of computer skills and then to find out they were merely blowing smoke. One way to head off this expensive problem before it happens is to test their skills as part of the interviewing process. For example, there is a company called Know it All, Inc. (<http://www.knowitallinc.com>) that has a series of testing software products called,

not surprisingly, “Prove It!”. These are interactive programs that you can install that test knowledge in actual common PC software systems and also gauge general technical knowledge. Whether it’s Microsoft Word 95 or Corel WordPerfect 8 or Microsoft Access 97, the list of testable products they offer is significant with costs ranging from about \$200-\$600. While this is not an insignificant amount of money, it pales in comparison to the wasted time and money that results from recruiting, interviewing and training a new employee, only to find out after the fact that their skills were misrepresented.

❶ USING WORDPERFECT 8 WITH STYLE!

(Nope there’s no number 20!)

Microsoft Word users hardly have a corner on the concept of using “styles” to change text appearance in their documents. WordPerfect 8 has a really cool feature that most of us who cut our teeth on “Reveal Codes” may not know about: it’s called “QuickStyles.” These let you save all sorts of time creating a heading in a particular layout or changing the appearance of whole blocks of text. To use this feature, first format the text as you want it. Then click anywhere in the text, then select Format | Styles from your menu. Click the QuickStyle button, name the style when prompted, then pick OK | Close. To use your new QuickStyle, click in the document where you want to use it or select the text you want affected. Then simply pick your style from the Select Style drop-down list on the Property Bar--fast, consistent, effective and very cool. Take that Microsoft Word !

MOBILE LAWYERS: LOAD UP ON THE LATEST PORTABLE COMPUTING ACCESSORIES

Let’s be honest. Those of us who use laptops as our daily PCs tend to be gadget nuts--we just love our techno.tools and one can **never** have enough portable computing goodies to play with . . .er . . . work with. Two great sources of portable gear for the legal road warrior are Mobile Planet (<http://www.mobileplanet.com> and be sure to get on their mailing list for their great print calendar too) and 1-800-Batteries (<http://www.1800batteries.com>). Both companies offer a raft of portable gizmos ranging from batteries for every laptop that ever existed to modem savers to test phone lines, to carrying cases, to GPS systems to keep you from getting lost, to surge protectors in every size, shape and flavor imaginable, to portable ZIP drives and portable CD-writers, to

laptop security systems and everything in between. Be sure you have plenty of room left on your charge card when you visit these sites!

THE WEB IS NOT ALL FREE: SO COMPLETE WEB SEARCHES AREN'T WHAT YOU GET IF YOU'RE NOT CAREFUL

For some reason, the Internet has become synonymous with the word “free.” Many people think that once you’ve paid your monthly fee to your Internet Service Provider, it’s a free ride from that point forward. The reality is that as much as 40% of the content available via the ‘Net is not free--it’s locked away in paid websites that range from newspapers like the Wall Street Journal to technical databases that you might need to view for that environmental claim on that real estate lawsuit you’re handling to some information about a cardiological procedure for that PI case you’ve taken on. So what happens if you do an AltaVista search and it says that nothing is found? What kind of lawyering are doing if you tell your client, “sorry, it’s not there”? Potentially, malpractice methinks. But to try and sign up for and pay for every fee-based website that might contain the information you’re looking for would be impossible. That’s where a cool website called Northern Light comes in (<http://www.northernlight.com>). This is a search engine with a difference. In addition to the expected searchability of free web info, Northern Light can also search a “Special Collection” of over 5000 fee-based journals, publications, periodicals and databases. You pay for what you read--from \$1.00 to \$4.00 per viewed article. The attraction is that you don’t need to sign up for and pay any of those services directly--Northern Light has already done that--all you do is open an account with the search engine provider and all that additional information is unlocked. Well worth it and perhaps even necessary to conduct proper legal/technical research on behalf of your clients.

Ross Kodner is a lawyer who some say “saw the light” when he founded Milwaukee, Wisconsin’s MicroLaw, Inc. in the early years of the PC age, back in ‘85. He spends all his time working with his team of 13 professionals have helped over 450 law firms and legal departments across North America integrate technology into their practices. He is also the developer of the ground-breaking “Paper LESS Office™” concept and co-writes a regular column for the Law Office Computing magazine called “The Circuit Court”. He is very active in his own State and County Bar’s technology groups and is the Chair of the ABA Law Practice Management Section’s Computer & Technology Division as well as serving

as a member of the Executive Board for ABA TECHSHOW 2000 and the ABA Program Planner for Legaltech Dallas, Legaltech New York and Legaltech Chicago. His personal motto, which appears at the end of all his e-mail messages is “Friends don’t let friends word process without Reveal Codes.” He can be reached at rkodner@microlaw.com and via <http://www.microlaw.com>.