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## Ten Must-Have Apps for the Solo Practitioner

By Rick Georges  
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This month I'm focusing on application software. Although there are different software preferences for every lawyer, I'm sticking to [Windows](#), since most lawyers use it. As with last month's article, "[Ten Must-Have Web Sites for Solo Practitioners](#)," picking the best of anything is difficult, so I'll focus on what I use every day in my practice. I'm sure I'll hear from you about software you use, that I missed.

1. First and foremost, I use [Amicus Attorney](#) and [Amicus Accounting](#) for case management, and time and billing. There are other programs that do the same thing, so pick your poison. These programs allow the solo to be in computer-control of his or her practice, and to keep track of calendar, tasks, contacts, e-mail and everything else that a lawyer has to be on top of every day. I start every day with a look at the Amicus Calendar, and the list of tasks remaining to be accomplished.

The benefit of a legal specific case management system like Amicus is that it's keyed to the things lawyers do. it's matter-centric, and allows the creation of precedents (case-specific task lists) that are linked to each other. Getting an all-in-one solution that synchronizes seamlessly with time and billing is also important. Any data about a client or matter that is entered in either Amicus Attorney or Amicus Accounting is written automatically to the other database. No duplication of data entry. Another great thing about Amicus is that it syncs seamlessly to Outlook. I know that many attorneys and law firms use Outlook as a generic calendar and contact management solution. Your firm can use Outlook, and you can still use Amicus in your practice.

2. The second type of software that lawyers use every day is word processing and document assembly. Here, I freely admit that I'm a [WordPerfect](#) lawyer. I love the fact that it's not Microsoft, and that it's coded so that I can get under the hood of any document and manually change things. I have a copy of Microsoft Word -- since so many lawyers use it -- but I prefer the free Microsoft Word clone, [OpenOffice](#). Free to download and use, OpenOffice is a great way to view and create Word-style documents.

3. Lawyers create documents every day, and document-assembly programs allow the easy creation of form documents, as a beginning place for custom drafting. My favorite generic document assembly solution is [HotDocs](#), even though it's now owned by LexisNexis, which has been swallowing up smaller companies in the applications arena.



image: James Oda




Rick Georges, author of the Future Lawyer blog  
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While large corporations like LexisNexis have many resources, applications can get lost in the shuffle. HotDocs has remained solid, however, and I use it all the time. HotDocs is user-customizable, and you can automate the creation of your own forms and documents.

4. Some forms software apps that I use all the time are state-specific. Two specific documents for me. My favorite is David Collyer's automation of the on to Microsoft Word and WordPerfect, and will work with either program. package and stand-alone document-assembly program for real estate closing Florida. The Attorney's Title Insurance Fund has a competing document package for Florida lawyers as well. The best state specific package that I use, however, is [ProDoc](#), which has automated form preparation in many areas of law. ProDoc is expanding into other states, so check it out if you are interested.

5. After creating documents, recording time, billing and managing a law office caseload, what is it that lawyers do the most? If you are like the FutureLawyer, you spend a lot of time gabbing on the telephone. Two of my top ten slots are reserved for voice specific software solutions. The first is [Express Dictate](#), and its free corollary software, [Express Scribe](#).

Express Dictate sits in my taskbar, waiting for me to click it and bring it alive. I have my sound and mike system transmitted to my Motorola BlueTooth earset, so when I dictate into Express Dictate, the recording is saved on my hard drive. With BlueTooth, I can even walk around the room while I'm dictating. I hate those earphones that insert in the ear, and have a boom mike sticking out. I feel tethered to the computer by the cord, and my wonderful hair gets messed up. Express Dictate can send my dictation to my secretary over the office network; but, I can just as easily e-mail my voice anywhere in the world. She transcribes the dictation with Express Scribe, which is a free download.

6. For gabbing on the telephone, however, nothing beats [Skype](#). Download the free Skype application software, and you can call any phone in the world for tiny amounts of money. For \$29.95 a year, you can call any phone in North America for a year -- for free. I also route Skype calls to my BlueTooth headset, so that I'm free to move about the room, or type on the keyboard, or take notes during phone calls. I also have a SkypeIn phone number (727-565-1762) that anyone can call; but, I haven't given up my landline yet. (I think it's a security blanket.) In the future, you'll be using Voice over Internet Protocol software for all of your calls.

7. [Efax](#) appears on the software list, as well as on last month's Web site list. It was the first computer to e-mail to fax solution, and is the only one that uses a client software program that sits on a lawyer's computer. Efax Messenger is my primary fax software, and I fax everything from it. If I create a document in WordPerfect, or in my real estate closing software, Displaysoft, I merely print to the Efax client. Efax Messenger pops up, asks me where I'm sending the document and creates a cover page according to my template. The beauty of a client-side fax application is that I can create faxes even when I'm not Internet-connected, and then send them when I am. Essential. I use Efax every single day.

8. For Web browsing and e-mail, there is no contest as to the best two applications: [Firefox](#) and [Thunderbird](#). FireFox 2.1 is the best, safest and most customizable browser out there, and the companion Thunderbird e-mail client is competent and thorough, and filters spam with the best of them.

Firefox is a more secure browser than Internet Explorer, and has dozens of add-in extensions that perform specific tasks. For instance, tabbed browsing enables me to have several legal research sites available with a click, and extensions like text messaging allow me to cut and paste web text into SMS messages to myself, a client or a colleague. For its part,

Thunderbird permits me to send e-mails to the Efax application, from which they can be faxed to any fax machine. My secretary receives a lot of e-mails via fax. That way, I know that there are eyes on the document, since the fax machine sits next to her desk. Both applications have the additional advantage of being FREE. Just as solo practitioners are, in some sense, mavericks, Mozilla believes in free, open source software that anyone can use.

9. All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy, and I'm honestly trying to list the software I use every day. So, without blushing, I admit that I watch Court TV and the news channels all day on my computer, using [SlingMedia's Slingbox](#) and companion client software. I fire up the application on my office screen, and -- bingo -- I'm watching cable TV from my home.

Okay, honesty. I occasionally watch the SciFi channel during working hours. (Shhhh ... don't report me, as my secretary already thinks I don't work hard enough for my money.) I can also report that the new Sling-Palm client software for the Treo is now in public beta testing; I have installed it, and can now watch my home cable channels on the Treo smart phone. A version also exists for Windows Mobile devices. Mobile video is clearly the future of broadcasting.

10. I could probably devote a complete column to Treo applications that I use every day. Suffice it to say, for this column's purposes, I use Treo software every day and everywhere. As an example, I check e-mail and browse the web with the built-in applications, and the calendar, contacts and task application automatically syncs with Outlook and Amicus. [PalmDictate](#), a third-

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Florida. The Attorney's Title Insurance Fund has a competing document package for Florida lawyers as well. The best state  
specific package that I use, however, is [ProDoc](#), which has automated form preparation in many areas of law. ProDoc is expanding into other states, so check it out if you are interested.

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party application, is my favorite. I can dictate to the Palm, and e-mail the resulting audio file directly to my secretary's desk from anywhere in the world. it's the perfect corollary to the ExpressDictate Windows application. The Treo is glued to my hip, and is NEVER far from my cold hands.

As with last month's article, there are many other software applications that I could have mentioned, as I'm certain that there are a few that you might suggest. However, I use every application in this column at least once each day of my life, and my law practice would be lost without them. If you have an essential application that is important to your law practice, send me an e-mail and let me know. Now, go out and use computer software to improve your life and your law practice.

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