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Ten Must-Have Web Sites for Solo Practitioners

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Picking the best of anything is difficult. However, I decided to take a stab this month at the Web sites I use most frequently during a typical day of practicing law. I'm not including the obvious ones: legal research and general search sites. I'm aiming to point to sites that create a new source of information on the Web, and that leverage the interactive Web 2.0 space.

Here goes:

1. GoToMyPC is a remote-access Web application that permits me to access my office host machine anytime I like. It allows me to run updates, check my calendar and contact changes created by my secretary, and, in general, prevents running to the office to maintain the server, or to practice law. It's the solo lawyer's best friend, runs flawlessly and costs only about \$20 a month per machine.
2. There are conflicting views about the new property valuation site, Zillow.Com, which is a mashup of Google Maps and property valuations and other information culled from public records. My take on this is that the range of values is a good starting point for looking at a residential property, and is better than no information at all. This is a great reason why Web 2.0 is going to change the landscape of real property law. I use it all the time in my residential transactions practice.
3. What if sending transcribed memos or notes was as easy as picking up the cell phone or telephone? Enter a new free beta called Jott. Remember that name, because I predict that lawyers will be using this service all the time. Just call Jott's toll-free number, speak your message and Jott will transcribe it and e-mail it to you. Sweet, simple and utterly addictive. Jottcasting, jottmumbling -- whatever you call it -- is cool, cool, cool.



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4. What? Too lazy to pick up the phone? Joopz allows text messages to be sent directly from the Joopz Web site. Joopz is a Web-based text messaging service that enables "Web texting" -- two-way communications from the Web to any mobile phone in the U.S. and Canada ... and back!
5. By way of full disclosure, I am a Law.com affiliated blogger. Simply put, I don't get paid to blog, but I get the exposure provided by the best law-related Web site in the world. I'm not pandering to my publisher when I say that the Legal Technology page is one of the resources I check every day for tips, software, advice and education about my law practice. There are tons of free and trial software packages available for download, and the editors highlight the best law technology blogs on a regular basis.
6. I'm amazed I'm getting such use out of the ScanR application. In the past, there never seemed to be a scanner around when I needed one. I have flatbed scanners at home and at the office. But they don't fit in a briefcase, do they? Enter a great new Palm application, ScanR, that uses the Palm camera as a portable scanner. Just shoot a picture of a page and e-mail it to the ScanR people. They convert it into an image and make it available at the Web site. Very nice.
7. Google Maps is the ultimate mapping site. Enter any address, and up pops a street level map. Enter two addresses, and street level directions pop up. But the really cool thing is that, with the click of the mouse, a satellite view of the address and surrounding area comes up, giving a real-life view of the location. There is even a mobile version that works with my 3G enabled Treo. Who needs a GPS?
8. Wikipedia is fast-becoming the single most authoritative resource for knowledge about anything. It rivals Britannica for accuracy, and is the starting point for any research project. In fact, I have installed the FireFox plug-in, which puts the relevant Wikipedia article right alongside any Google search, on the same page.
9. Skype is still the cheapest, best way, to call any phone in the world. For \$29.95 a year, you can call any phone in the U.S. and Canada anytime you like. You are already paying for the broadband Internet access. Now, use it. I re-route my office computers sound to my Bluetooth headset, and I can talk to clients or prospective clients or colleagues anywhere for almost nothing. VoIP is here to stay.
10. Google News is a fast, easy way to customize the news you receive, and to get every conceivable point of view from all over the world. Over 4,500 news sources are culled for the top stories of any given moment, and are presented in an organized way according to your preferences. The power of the best search engine on the Net is clearly shown at this site.
11. OK, OK, this is number 11. But I just couldn't leave out the most useful of them all. Efax has become my most-used fax machine. When I am away from the office, my secretary e-faxes every piece of paper that comes in to the office while I'm gone. I can then view them in all their glory wherever I am. I can fax documents back to her, or to anyone, from anywhere. I can use ScanR to take a picture of a document, e-mail it to myself and then e-fax it to my secretary. The possibilities are endless.

There are so many other sites and resources that I could've mentioned, and I'm certain there are a few that you might suggest. If so, shoot me an e-mail, and I'll update this list periodically. Now, go out and use the Web to improve your life and your law practice.

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