

Mythbusters: Should Your Law Firm Switch From Windows to Mac?

By Christel Burris

August 18, 2009

If your law firm switches to Macs you'll lose about 50 pounds and get to hang out with the cool crowd. That's what Apple's TV advertisements would have you believe. Meanwhile, Microsoft's commercials claim that you'll pay an Apple tax. Legal technology consultant Christel Burris suggests you ignore all the claims and instead focus on real-world usage in law firms and the products that exist on both platforms. In this TechnoFeature article, she engages in some mythbusting based on her experience this year with a law firm that uses both operating systems. What does Christel conclude? Read her analysis to find out.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last year and a half, I have had the opportunity to work with Macs in a legal environment from not only a technical standpoint but also from a user standpoint.

I started working with Macs when a law firm client that relied on Tabs3 and PracticeMaster and Windows Small Business Server 2003 brought on a partner who wanted to use his Mac along with one for his secretary. So it was my task to find software that would work seamlessly on both platforms.

To better evaluate cross-platform legal applications, we added two

Macs (MacBook Pro and a Mac Pro Desktop) to the Windows Small Business Server 2003 environment. I installed and tested quite a few of the cross-platform applications recommended by Apple (Brief Accounting, LawStream Law Office Management, Daylite 3, OPTIX, and PIP). None was as robust and stable as what the firm already had.

As a result, the firm decided to keep Tabs3 and PracticeMaster and the Mac partner and his secretary now use VMWare Fusion for running Windows so they can use PracticeMaster and Tabs3.

Introducing Macs into a Windows environment and expecting current staff to work as efficiently as they did in the Windows environment is an unrealistic view.

MYTH #1: MACS ARE EASIER TO USE

Many tout the ease of use of Macs as one reason for switching from a Windows environment. And, that may be true for the novice computer user. However, introducing Macs into a Windows environment (or replacing Windows altogether) and expecting current

staff to work as efficiently as they did in the Windows environment is an unrealistic view.

The differences between operating systems are many, and Mac folder/file manipulation leaves much to be desired. In my opinion, the only way for a law firm (or any business, for that matter) to remain competitive is to be efficient. And, efficiency will suffer in this scenario.

In the event a law firm must hire new staff, finding someone with the same expertise using a Mac as using Windows will prove difficult. Presenting new law firm staff members with an entirely new OS in addition to all the other things they need to get up to speed with respect to that specific firm, may increase the level of inefficiency.

MYTH #2: EVERYTHING WORKS PERFECTLY ON A MAC

I've seen Macs lock up with annoying frequency; granted some of those lockups occur when trying to use VMWare Fusion. A well maintained Windows machine (with the requisite amount of memory and processing power) will, in my experience, be at least as stable as a Mac machine and you don't have to pay a premium for that Windows machine.

I recently had to replace a defective hard drive in an iMac. The process took nearly a week: (1)

I took the computer to an authorized service center so they could determine that the drive was defective; (2) The authorized service center ordered a replacement from Apple (as required by Apple warranty); (3) The authorized service center replaced the drive (as required by Apple warranty); and, (4) I picked up the computer from the authorized service center and returned it to the law firm. Then I had to reinstall the software.

In 10 years, I've had fewer than 10 hard drives fail under warranty on Dell Windows machines; the turnaround time for replacement and reinstallation was less than 2 business days. (I manage over 200 Windows workstations and servers and 4 Macs — you figure out the percentage of failure.)

Yes, you can use VMWare Fusion or some other Mac application to create a virtual Windows environment but why bother?

MYTH #3: MACS ARE MORE SECURE

Many pundits have stated that Macs don't get viruses/malware and are more secure than Windows. That is just flat-out wrong.

Here is a short list of viruses/malware that can infect a Mac:

- Virus.Multi.Esperanto.4733
- Virus.MSExcel.Extras.a
- Mac.Simpson
- Melissa.W

- Inqtana.A Worm
- Leap.A aka Oompa-Loompa

Granted, there are not as many viruses designed for Macs as there are for Windows machines (yet), but it only takes one to cripple a Mac or expose sensitive data to prying eyes.

As for the Mac OS being more secure than Windows, in 2008 a hacker's contest awarded \$10,000 to the first person who successfully hacked into one of three laptop computers (a Sony Vaio, Fujitsu U810, and a MacBook Air). It took 2 minutes for one of the hackers to hack into the MacBook. [You can read the article here.](#)

And, more recently, [a vulnerability was discovered in an Apple keyboard](#) (of all things)!

MYTH #4: ANY SOFTWARE (OR AN EQUIVALENT) CAN RUN ON A MAC

Some Mac users claim that virtualization programs (Codeweavers' Crossover in particular) will enable you to run Windows applications on a Mac. Yes, they have a comprehensive list of applications that will run on a Mac using their software. But just check that list. Any legal application on that list is designated as "untested" (with the exception of E-Transcript Viewer, Family Lawyer 2004, and RealFast). Most on that list are gaming applications.

As for applications that are cross-platform, most (if not all of them) do not integrate well with each other. Something is always missing. But if you don't know what

you're missing, I guess these products will work for you.

In a perfect legal technology world, I see complete integration among apps. Nothing I have seen in the Mac world does that. But you can do that in the Windows world. For example, take a look at the integration between Outlook, Worldox, PracticeMaster, and Tabs3 (including the Tabs3 financial back-office software modules). These apps integrate so well you might think one company makes them.

One application Mac users rave about is Rocket Matter, but, at the time I conducted my research about three months ago, Rocket Matter did not include a back-office accounting package, integration with Outlook/Entourage, document management, or document assembly.

And, speaking of document management, there is no "real" document management solution at all for the Mac. Worldox Web will provide some functionality but as far as true document management (Worldox, Hummingbird, Interwoven, etc.), the Mac apps just don't do it.

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CONCLUSION

If you seek efficiency and want to use best of breed software tools to manage your practice, use a

Windows machine. Yes, you can use VMWare Fusion or some other Mac application to create a virtual Windows environment but why bother? You can buy a less

expensive Windows machine and save additional funds by not having to buy virtualization software and a second operating system. Mac OS X is an elegant operating

system, which I suspect offers a superior experience for certain industries such as publishing. But can it outperform Windows in the legal profession? Absolutely not.

Christel Burris has been providing legal technology consulting and implementation to law firms of all sizes for over 25 years. She is CEO of [Push One Button](#), a legal technology firm that provides training, legal-specific technology and consulting to businesses from California to the UK. Having started her legal career as a receptionist for a small law firm in San Francisco, she has held positions in law firms ranging from the previously mentioned receptionist to IT Manager (and everything in between). She understands how law firms work and how lawyers think.

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