
SmallLaw: Stein on Technology Products He No Longer Recommends Plus a Client Alert System

I WAS WRONG: TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS THAT I RECOMMENDED BUT NOW DON'T

By [Joshua Stein](#)

If you write about computers and computer products, you run the risk of being proven wrong in hindsight. Usually, you never look back. But for this issue of [SmallLaw](#), instead of reviewing a new product, I decided to review some of my previous reviews (all of which appear on www.joshuastein.com, under "Publications," "Computers"). Below you'll find some wrong turns I made, why, and what I learned. I also discuss some cases in which advancing technology got the better of me.

VOIP Telephone Service

In 2010, I recommended [Toktumi](#) telephone service, which runs through a USB port. I first tested the service at home for several months and found it serviceable. Its web site and call flow options worked well. It included a neat USB device so I could use a regular phone. But then the company phased out sales of the USB device, offering only "softphone" service, which I didn't like. When I started using Toktumi in my new office in August 2010, I found that it dropped calls, randomly ignored digits when I dialed phone numbers, suffered from poor sound quality, couldn't gracefully handle call transfers, and sometimes just stopped working.

I then signed up for 30-day test periods with both [Nextiva](#) and [8x8](#) VoIP service. Based on a poll of my friends, Nextiva had slightly better sound quality for calls, so I ordered four lines for my office. After the free trial period, though, Nextiva started to drop calls. Clients complained. For many weeks, I tried to solve the problem with Nextiva's tech support people. They were knowledgeable, accessible, responsive, and friendly. They tried everything. I tried everything. I even upgraded to Time Warner Business Class Internet service (another negative review for a future column).

Someone said I shouldn't expect uninterrupted telephone service from VoIP, so I should just give up and try some other technology. That didn't sound right. I signed up for another test of 8x8 VoIP service. The sound quality didn't quite match Nextiva's, but at least 8x8 didn't drop calls. My clients are happy.

I still use Toktumi at home, where it is sort of adequate. Although I cancelled Nextiva, if/when Nextiva solves its "dropped calls" problem, it will

be a good candidate for small law firms choosing a VoIP system. And anyone making that type of a choice should test the various possible services much more rigorously than I did (limiting my due diligence to a "sound quality" poll among my friends) after dropping Toktumi.

Pogoplug

The "[Pogoplug](#)" device lets you use an external hard drive as a file server in the cloud — a private cloud. It's a good idea. It worked for me, so I recommended it in 2010. Over time, though, I found it often didn't launch or configure itself correctly, or it stopped working for no reason. One of its software "upgrades" blew up the drive mappings on many of my computers. Opening and saving files took a long time, because each process went over the Internet, which is much slower than a local hard drive.

I switched to [Dropbox](#), which lets me work with local files. Dropbox synchronizes them with the "cloud" only after I finish. When I open or save files, I don't need to wait for data to travel through the Internet. And Dropbox has become so popular that the network effect propels its wide adoption and use.

Both Pogoplug and Dropbox are supposed to let you share files with external users. In my experience, this feature rarely works, at least for external users at law firms, banks, or other large organizations because of overly restrictive security blockages imposed by IT departments, which are trying to "protect" corporate computer users.

Dropbox has the potential to largely replace my network, but only if it adds a read-only capability and file-locking to prevent two users from editing the same file at the same time. I'd also like to see some form of version management, though that's probably not in the cards.

PC-Outline

In 1988, I started using PC-Outline, a very simple outline processor, to keep notes and checklists. It outperformed Microsoft Word for section numbering, hierarchies, and outline formatting. I thought it was terrific. I said so in a 1998 article.

PC-Outline was, however, a DOS program, never revised for Windows. It used a proprietary file format. It still worked, just barely, under Windows XP. It finally stopped working entirely in Windows 7. I needed to use one of my remaining Windows XP computers to export all my PC-Outline outlines in "WordStar" format — ASCII flat text with a few consistent formatting codes. I then used Word macros to clean up and reformat those rescued outlines so I could edit them in Word.

My recommendation of PC-Outline was not a mistake at all. The software just became hopelessly obsolete. If that hadn't happened, I would still use it today to edit outlines. If you haven't read it yet, take a look at fellow *SmallLaw* columnist's Yvonne Renfrew's column on outliners, [Revisiting the Super PIM: CaseMap, OmniOutliner, and Zoot XT](#).

Act! v. Outlook

In 1998, I described Act! 3.0 as a superb contact manager. Little did I know that the onslaught of Microsoft Office would soon eliminate my practical ability to use Act!. More than ten years later, I still think Microsoft

Outlook, as a contact manager, doesn't match the flexibility and features that Act! 3.0 offered. I'd gladly return to Act! if I could stay compatible with the rest of the world.

Act! 3.0 has been replaced by a series of new editions, most recently [Sage Act! 2012](#). The extraordinarily negative reviews of the new editions (and their customer support) on Amazon terrify me. Given my longstanding disappointment with Outlook, though, I keep an open mind. I want to want to reinstall Act!.

Hard Drive Capacity

In 1987, I said that if a lawyer wanted to use a computer, they needed at least 10 MB of hard drive capacity. At the time, law firm word processing departments could get by with 500 MB of hard drive capacity, typically in a large and expensive box with a sign that said "IBM." Today, of course, my recommendation sounds like a bad joke.

Looking back over all the recommendations I've made, though, the vast majority have stood the test of time. For about 10 years, my top two favorites have been [NetDocuments](#) for document management and [Nelson Email Organizer](#). That's still true.

[Click here if you liked this issue of SmallLaw.](#)

Joshua Stein, a charter subscriber to TechnoLawyer, is a leading commercial real estate lawyer. After 20+ years as a partner at a global law firm, he established [Joshua Stein PLLC](#) on August 1, 2010. In 1982, he bought his first computer, a Kaypro II. Ever since, he has used computers for all his written work.

Contact Joshua:

E: joshua@joshuastein.com

[Respond to This Issue of SmallLaw](#) | [Back to Top](#)

Use This Color-Coded Chart to Evaluate Prospective Clients

Alert Level Green: Potential client appears to be generally sane, understandable, and understanding. While occasionally indicating certain trust issues, they've resigned themselves to trusting a lawyer in their legal matter. They respond generally, within a few days and seem prepared to assist in their case. Expect at least one negative incident during representation, but nothing that will severely damage the case/your practice, usually. Not all of these "Greenies" are equal, though. Some remain at Green while others deteriorate to Yellow or Orange. Proceed with guarded optimism.

[Continue Reading the SmallLaw Pick of the Week ...](#)

IS YOUR BILLING SYSTEM ON THE NAUGHTY LIST?

Your wish for better time and billing software is granted! Tabs3 is the most award winning time and billing software for solo to mid-sized firms. If you are a current Timeslips user, receive up to a 20% discount and a free program that can convert your data for use with Tabs3. You will also receive outstanding local (not outsourced) technical support, a free license of PracticeMaster practice management software, and the peace of mind that comes with using a time and billing system that has been on the Nice List since 1979.

[Visit us online for your free trial.](#)

RECENT ISSUES OF SMALLLAW

[This Video Ought to Be a Crime Plus Inside Super Lawyers](#)

[Top Five Ways to Use Evernote Plus a Lawyer's Favorite Apps](#)

[Small Law Firms Unite and Fight Plus Playing the Solo Card](#)

[Lawyer's Guide to Siri Plus Task Management on Your iPad](#)

[Reviews of Five Task Managers Plus Paperless Pre-Billing](#)

[Review of Outlook Add-On EmailNotes Plus Networking](#)

[A Texas Lawyer Drops a Bombshell Plus Rise of the Boutique](#)

[Top Five Google Reader Tips Plus Answers to 15 Lawyer iPad/iPhone Questions](#)

[A Foolproof Document Management System Plus Referral Fees](#)

[Make a Good Law Firm Video Great Plus Time Matters](#)

[Respond to This Issue of SmallLaw](#) | [Back to Top](#)

About SmallLaw

Small firm, big dreams. Written by practicing lawyers who manage successful small firms and management and technology consultants who have achieved rock star status in the small firm world, this newsletter provides a mix of practical advice that small firms can use today, and insight about what it will take for small firms to thrive in the future.

Published every Tuesday. [Your friends and colleagues can subscribe here.](#)

Did you receive this newsletter from a friend or colleague?

If so, join TechnoLawyer, and sign up for your own FREE subscription today at: www.technolawyer.com

Contribute a Post

post@technolawyer.com

Ask a Law Practice Question

myquestion@technolawyer.com

Customer Service

customerservice@technolawyer.com

TechnoLawyer Help

[My TechnoLawyer](#) is a private, personalized Web page from which you can change your profile, manage your email newsletter subscriptions, temporarily suspend service, or unsubscribe and deactivate your account.

[Change My Email Address](#)

[Change My Password](#)

[Change My Newsletter Format \(Plain Text or HTML\)](#)

[Change My Newsletter Subscriptions](#)

[Temporarily Suspend Service](#)

[Unsubscribe and Deactivate My Account](#)

If you prefer, you can also unsubscribe and deactivate your account by contacting our Customer Service department (see above), or by replying to this newsletter (please allow up to 7 days if you use the latter method).

Caveat Lector — Read with Care

The newsletters we (PeerViews Inc.) distribute consist largely of contributions written by TechnoLawyer members and other third parties, none of whom are under our control. As set forth in greater detail in the governing Terms of Service, we do not edit these contributions, nor do we represent or endorse their accuracy or reliability. Instead, these contributions represent only the opinion of their respective authors, and should not be relied upon without conducting corroborating research.

Search the TechnoLawyer Archive

The TechnoLawyer Archive is a searchable Web-based repository of all TechnoLawyer Newsletters and Posts, including some material never distributed via email. Updated with new material on a daily basis, the TechnoLawyer Archive is the most extensive legal technology and practice management resource in the world.

[Search the TechnoLawyer Archive.](#)

Advertise with Us

Over the years, TechnoLawyer has earned a reputation as an extremely cost-effective legal marketing channel. Our sophisticated advertising technology coupled with the rich contextual framework provided by our popular email newsletters is unrivaled in the legal market.

[Learn more and download our Media Kit.](#)

About TechnoLawyer

TechnoLawyer is a popular legal technology and practice management resource that consists of a network of free, critically-acclaimed email newsletters, and a searchable Web-based repository of all TechnoLawyer content. To join, search, or learn more about TechnoLawyer, visit the following Web site: www.technolawyer.com.

TechnoLawyer
PeerViews Inc.
100 Church Street
Eighth Floor
New York, NY 10007