

iPhone J.D. Lawyers using iPhones and iPads

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October 27, 2016

2016 ABA Tech Survey shows increase in attorney use of iPhones, iPads

ABA New survey results indicate that a record number of attorneys are using an iPhone in their law practice — 68.4%, up from 60.8% last year — and the number of attorney using iPads is also on the rise. These numbers come from the [ABA Legal Technology Resource Center](#), which conducts a survey every year to gauge the use of legal technology by attorneys in private practice in the United States. The 2016 report is just now being released, and as always, I was particularly interested in Volume VI, titled Mobile Lawyers. No survey is perfect, but the ABA tries hard to ensure that its survey has statistical significance, and every year this is one of the best sources of information on how attorneys use technology. Note that the survey was conducted from January to May, so even though we are looking at these numbers in the Fall of 2016, remember that the survey answers were given in the first part of 2016. My reports on prior ABA surveys are located here: [2015](#), [2014](#), [2013](#), [2012](#), [2011](#), [2010](#).

Almost seven out of ten attorneys use an iPhone

There were two notable changes in the survey results this year: more attorneys are using smartphones, and for those attorneys using smartphones, more of them are using an iPhone.

The survey asks each attorney "Do you use a smartphone (e.g. BlackBerry, iPhone, Android) for law-related tasks while away from your primary workplace?" In 2011 and 2012, the number of attorneys answering no was around 12%. In 2013, 2014 and 2015 that number hovered around 10%. In 2016, the number is down to an all-time low of 6.8%.

To be honest, I'm somewhat surprised the number is still that high. I find it hard to believe that there are many attorneys in 2016 not using a cellphone, and virtually every cellphone nowadays is a smartphone. And while I'm sure that there are some attorneys who have a smartphone or other cellphone and don't use it for a law-related task, I would expect that number to be very low. If nothing else, don't virtually all attorneys use a smartphone to check email? I guess not. According to this study, if you assemble a random sample of 100 U.S. attorneys in private practice, there still will be 6 or 7 in the group who don't use a smartphone to check work-related emails. Presumably, that number will get even lower in future years.

As was the case in the last few years, once again in 2016 there was a slight correlation between law firm size and smartphone use. For example, in 2016, 10.5% of solo attorneys do not use a smartphone and 7.6% of attorneys in a firm of 2-9 do not use a smartphone. On the other hand, in firms with 50-499 attorneys, the attorneys not using a smartphone goes down to 3%-4%. For those attorneys in law firms of 500 or more attorneys, the number increases somewhat to 5.7%.

For those 93.2% of attorneys who are using smartphones, 73.6% reported in 2016 that they were using a personally owned smartphone, and 28.5% used a smartphone permanently assigned by their law firm. These percentages haven't changed much in recent years.

Whether they buy it themselves or it is purchased by their law firm, what smartphones are attorneys using in 2016? In 2013, the big news was that over half of all attorneys were using an iPhone. In 2014 and 2015 the percentage was around 60%. But this year saw a big increase to 68.4%. Thus, we can now say that almost 70% of all attorneys in private practice in the U.S. are using an iPhone in their law practice, which is an all-time high.

Hopefully, all of them are reading iPhone J.D. regularly. Ahem.

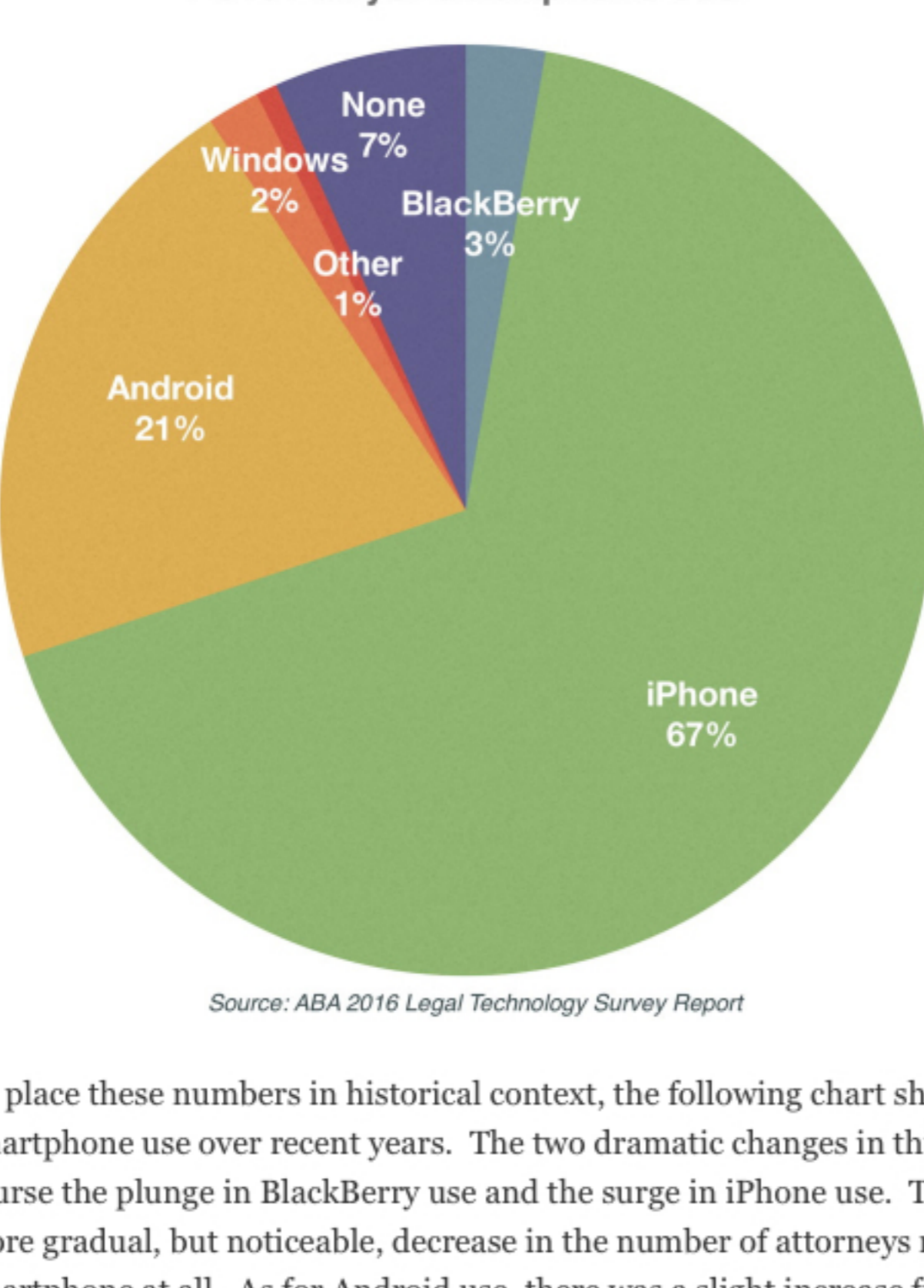
If 68.4% of all attorneys are using an iPhone, and 6.8% of attorneys are not using any smartphone, what are the others using? Most of them are using an Android smartphone, although that number is down from previous years. Specifically, 21.2% are using an Android phone in 2016. The Android percentage was 20% in 2013, 22.3% in 2014 and 23.9% in 2015.

What about BlackBerry? Back in 2011, 40% of all attorneys used a BlackBerry, and I'm sure all of us remember a time when it was incredibly common to see another lawyer with a BlackBerry. However, BlackBerry use by attorneys has dropped sharply since 2011. In 2016, the number reached a new low of only 2.8%. As you may have seen in the news a few weeks ago, BlackBerry announced late last month that it was getting out of the hardware business completely. It is going to continue to develop software, and it is going work with other companies who will make similar smartphones that use the BlackBerry name. But with BlackBerry itself no longer making BlackBerries, I suspect that we are not far from the day when virtually no lawyers are using a BlackBerry device. Indeed, we are almost there now.

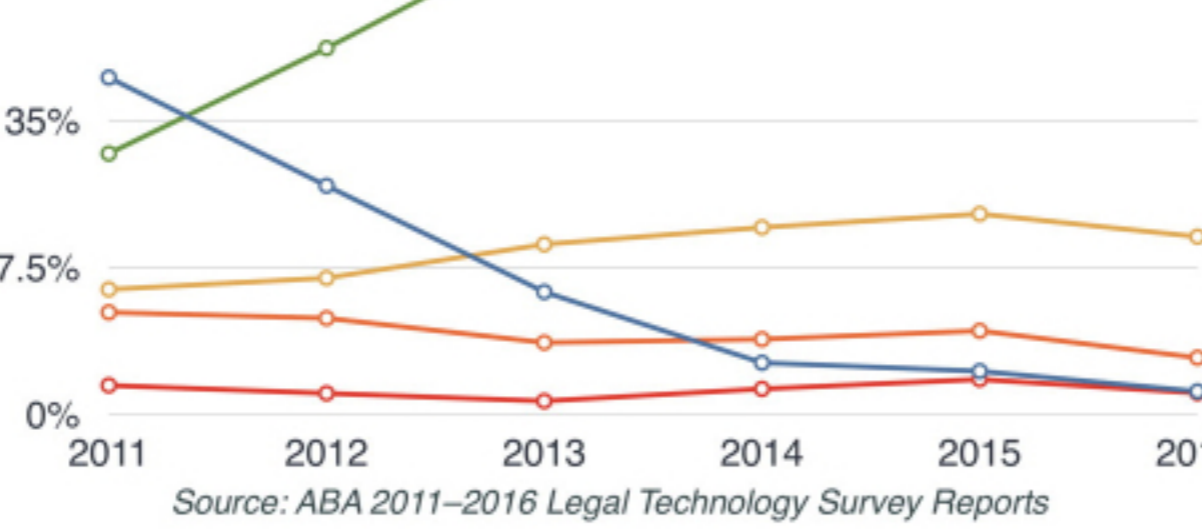
Finally, there are 1.9% of attorneys using some sort of Microsoft Windows operating system on their smartphone in 2016, and 0.7% of attorneys who say that they don't know what kind of smartphone that they use.

If you add the numbers, you'll notice that they add up to 101.8%. But it makes sense for the number to be slightly over 100% because I know that a small number of attorneys use multiple smartphones.

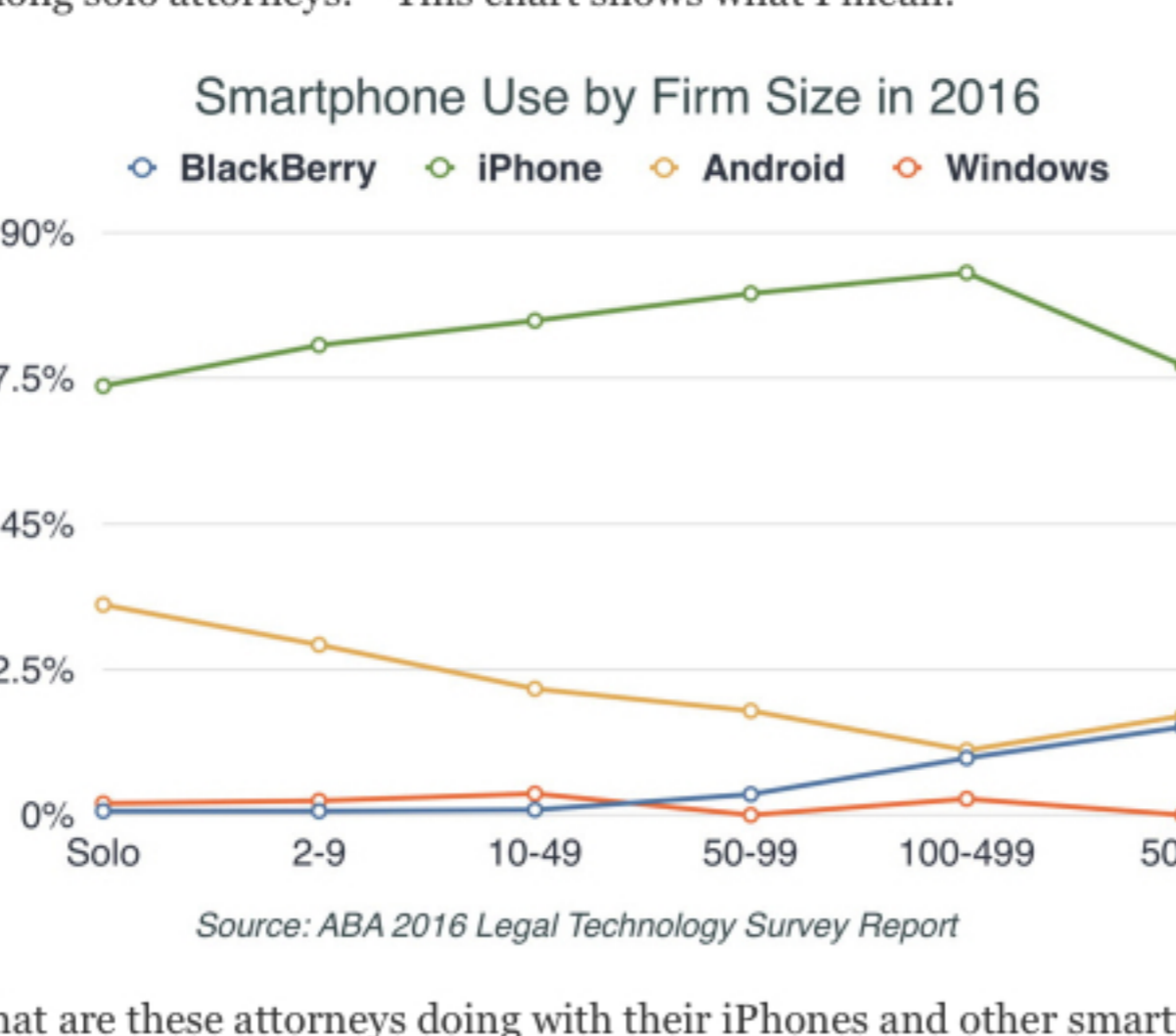
The following pie chart is somewhat imprecise because, as I just noted, the actual numbers add up to just over 100%, but if you don't pay attention to the percentages listed on the pie chart and instead just generally look at the size of each slice of the pie, this pie chart gives you a general, graphical sense of the relative use:



To place these numbers in historical context, the following chart shows lawyer smartphone use over recent years. The two dramatic changes in this chart are of course the plunge in BlackBerry use and the surge in iPhone use. There has been a more gradual, but noticeable, decrease in the number of attorneys not using a smartphone at all. As for Android use, there was a slight increase from 2011 to 2015, but then a slight decrease in the last year. Microsoft Windows smartphone use over the years is so small that I have grouped together Windows, other, and those who don't know what smartphone they are using into the "Other" category.



Why are attorneys choosing iPhone, Android or BlackBerry? Much like previous years, firm size seems to have something to do with it. Almost all of the attorneys still using a BlackBerry are at larger law firms, and the percentage of BlackBerry users increases as firm size increases. On the other hand, Android use is highest among solo attorneys. This chart shows what I mean:



What are these attorneys doing with their iPhones and other smartphones? Almost all are using them to make phone calls and handle emails. Around 75% are regularly using smartphones for calendars and contacts. Other popular uses are internet access, text messaging, GPS/maps, taking pictures and mobile-specific research apps. Only 10% use a smartphone to track time and expenses.

In recent years, more and more attorneys have said that they use a password to protect their smartphone — from 77% in 2011 up to 94% in 2015. I was disappointed to see that number drop slightly to 92% in 2016. Smartphone security is a big issue in the news, and of course security is especially important for attorneys who have confidential attorney-client information on their smartphone. It is time to see 100% of attorneys putting a passcode on their device. In 2016, that 100% number was reported for lawyers at larger firms (50 or more attorneys), but was as low as 88% for solo attorneys.

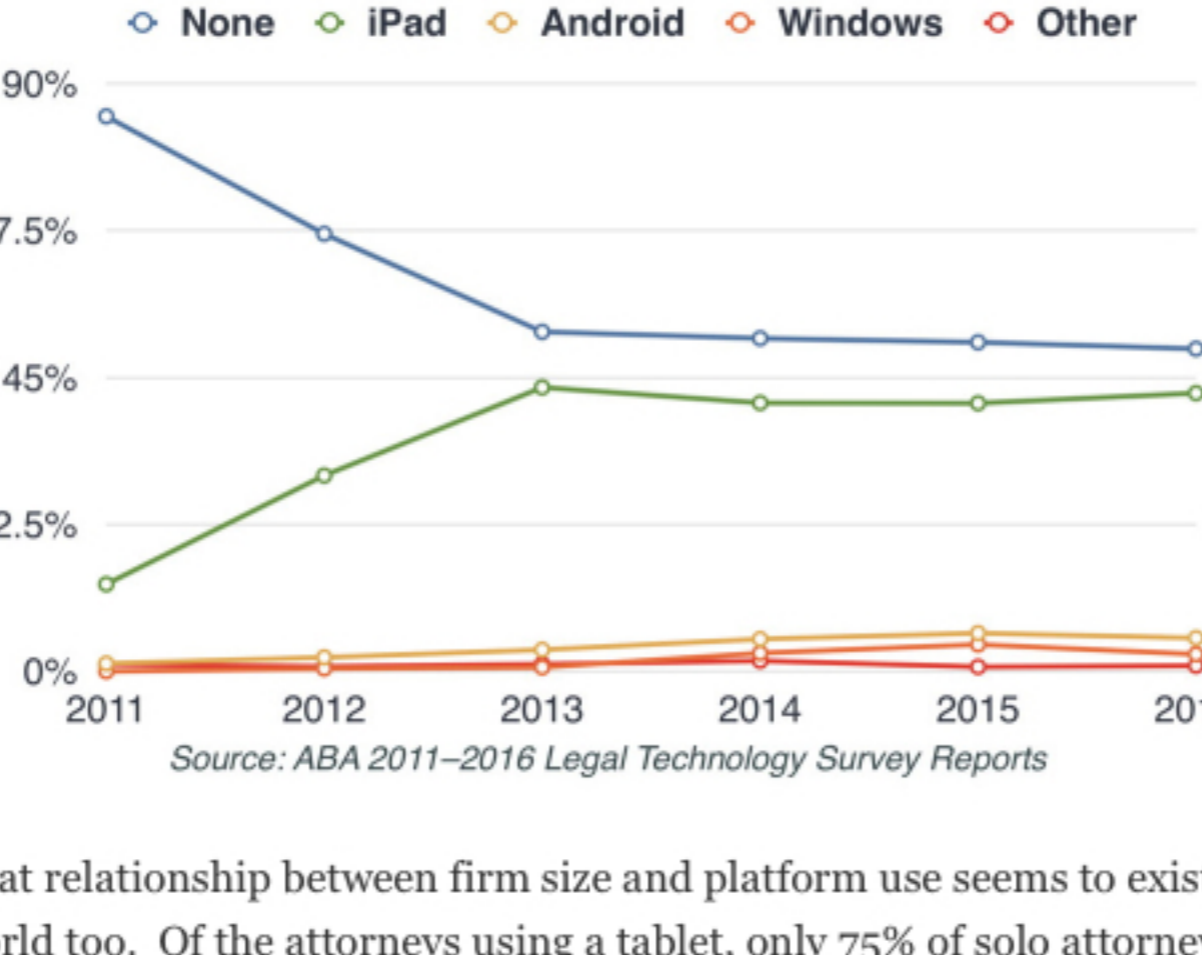
43% of attorneys use an iPad

Apple introduced the original iPad in 2010, and for the first few years it resulted in a surge in lawyer tablet use. In 2011, only 15% of all attorneys responded that they use a tablet. That number more than doubled to 33% in 2012, and rose to 48% in 2013. But since then, the number has essentially held steady: 49% in 2014, 49.6% in 2015, and 50.6% in 2016. Having said that, we can finally say that more than half of all attorneys now use a tablet in their law practice.

It used to be that around 90% of attorneys using a tablet were using an iPad. It was 89% in 2011, 91% in 2012, and 91% in 2013. From 2014 to 2016, that number has stayed around 84%.

As for attorneys using a tablet but not using an iPad, in 2016 10.1% use Android, 5.2% use an older Windows Mobile device, 1.4% use the new Windows Surface, and 1.7% use something else or don't know what they use.

Looking at the past six years on a chart shows visually how the percentage of attorneys using a tablet increased substantially from 2011 to 2013, and then has slowly inched to just over 50% this year. And even though iPad marketplace has been slightly lower in the last few years, the iPad is still the overwhelming choice for attorneys who use a tablet device.



That relationship between firm size and platform use seems to exist in the tablet world too. Of the attorneys using a tablet, only 75% use solo attorneys use an iPad, but that number is over 90% in many larger firms. Android tablet use is highest for solo attorneys, at 16%, but much lower in larger law firms, at only 2.1% in firms with 100 to 499 attorneys.

What are these attorneys doing with their iPads and other tablets? Pretty much the same thing that they are doing with their smartphones (other than the phone function), with over half of attorneys reporting that they are regularly using their tablets for internet access, email and calendars.

Popular apps

The survey also asked attorneys to identify apps that they use. I want to start by making the same objection that I made last year: I don't like how the ABA asks the question. The ABA first asks "Have you ever downloaded a legal-specific app for your smartphone?" In 2016, 40.3% said yes. When I see the word "smartphone" in this question, I think of my iPhone, not my iPad. Then the next question asks: "What legal specific app(s) did you download?" When I read the questions in that order, I'm thinking of the apps that I downloaded on my iPhone, not my iPad. But others must be reading the question differently because I see TrialPad and TranscriptPad in the answers, and those apps exist only on the iPad, not on the iPhone. I would have never mentioned those apps when answering the question, even though I use them on my iPad.

So while I question how much value you can put in these answers, for what it is worth, the top 12 apps listed are, in order of the percentage of attorneys mentioning them:

1. Westlaw
2. Fastcase
3. Lexis Advance
4. A legal dictionary app
5. TrialPad
6. TranscriptPad
7. Courtlink
8. HeinOnline
9. LexisNexis Get Cases & Shepardize
10. LexisNexis Legal News
11. Clio
12. Westlaw News

The ABA then asked about general business apps, and the questions have the same ambiguity: the ABA first asked if the attorney ever downloaded a general business app to a smartphone (40.2% said yes), and then the ABA asked which apps were downloaded, without making it clear whether the question was asking about the iPhone and iPad. The answers provided were, in this order:

1. Dropbox
2. LinkedIn
3. Evernote
4. GoodReader
5. Documents to Go
6. QuickOffice
7. Box
8. LogMeIn
9. Notability

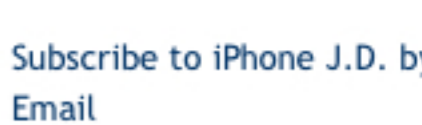
It amazes me that Microsoft Word is not on this list (nor was it on the list last year). It is surely one of the most useful general-purpose apps for lawyers, and it is now available for both iOS (iPhone and iPad) and Android.

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