iPhone J.D.

Lawyers using iPhones and iPads

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December 11, 2018

2018 ABA Tech Survey shows over two-thirds of attorneys use iPhone, over one-quarter use Android

ABA

The iPhone remains, by far, the most popular smartphone for attorneys. Nevertheless, in 2018 an all-time high of one-quarter of all attorneys reported using an Android phone, and that increase is mostly attributable to sole practitioners, where iPhone-to-Android use is a 2-to-1 ratio.

Every year, the ABA's Legal Technology Resource Center conducts a survey to gauge the use of legal technology by attorneys in private practice in the United States. The 2018 report (edited by Gabriella Mihm) was recently 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 June to October, 2018, so these numbers don't reflect any changes in what attorneys started using when Apple introduced the 2018 versions of the iPhone or iPad Pro. This is the ninth year that I have reported on this survey, and with multiple years of data we can see some interesting trends. (My reports on prior ABA surveys are located here: 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2010.)

Over two-thirds of all U.S. attorneys use an iPhone, and Android use hits all-time high

The 2018 survey revealed that around 95% of all attorneys use a smartphone to get work done out of the office. For attorneys using a smartphone, over two-thirds use an iPhone, and for the first time ever more than 25% report using an Android, with the highest Android use among solo attorneys.

The survey asks each attorney "Do you use a smartphone (e.g. iPhone, Android) for law-related tasks while away from your primary workplace?" Back in 2010, the number of attorneys answering "no" was around 12%. That number decreased over the years to 2017 when it hit an all-time low of only 4.4%. This year, the number increased only slightly to 4.9%. We can still say that over 95% of all attorneys use a smartphone to get work done.

In 2013, the big news was that, for the first time, over half of all attorneys were using an iPhone. In 2014 and 2015 the percentage was around 60%. In 2016, there was a big increase up to 68.4%. In 2017, the number was up to 74.9%. In 2018, the number is down slightly to 72%. Taking into account that 4.9% of all attorneys are not using a smartphone, we can say that 68.4% of all attorneys in private practice in the U.S. are using an iPhone in their law practice, which is the same percentage as

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2016. According to the ABA 2018 National Lawyer Population Survey, there are 1,338,678 attorneys in the U.S., which suggests that there could be over 916,000 attorneys in the U.S. using an iPhone.

If 68.4% of all attorneys are using an iPhone, and 4.9% of attorneys are not using any smartphone, what are the others using? Most of them are using an Android smartphone, around 25.4%. That is an all-time high for Android, so 2018 marks the first year in which more than one-quarter of all attorneys are using an Android phone.

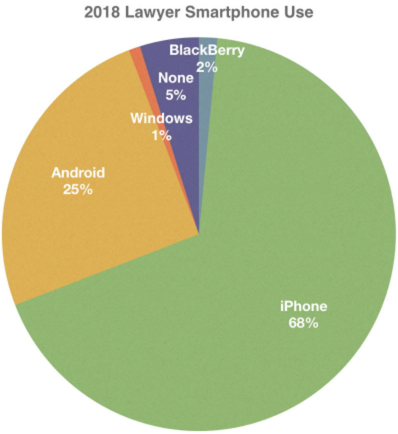
Back in 2011, 40% of all attorneys used a BlackBerry, and there was a time when it was incredibly common to see another lawyer with a BlackBerry. However, BlackBerry use by attorneys has dropped sharply since 2011. In 2018, the number reached a new low of only 1.5%. According to the survey, the most significant use of BlackBerry devices this year is in law firms with 50-99 lawyers; in those firms, 100% of the attorneys are using a smartphone, and while iPhone use is a little higher than the national average at 72.7%, Android use is down to 18.2% and BlackBerry use is at 9.1%. If you are looking for an attorney who is still using a BlackBerry phone, your best bet is to look at a law firm with 50-100 attorneys.

If you are looking for an attorney who is using an Android phone, your best bet is to look for a sole practitioner. Only 91.4% of solo attorneys use a smartphone, fewer than the statistic associated with any other firm size. 60.1% of solo attorneys use an iPhone, and 30.4% of solo attorneys use Android. So for solo attorneys, almost 1/10 are not even using a smartphone, and for those who do, Android is half as popular as iPhone. That's still a large number of solo attorneys using an iPhone, but it is interesting that Android phones are more popular with solo attorneys than with attorneys who work with other attorneys at a law firm. I just did a quick search and couldn't find recent numbers, but historically I know that almost half of all attorneys are sole practitioners, so that is a big market.

Finally, there are almost 1% of attorneys using some sort of Microsoft Windows operating system on their smartphone in 2018, and another almost 0.7% say that they don't know what kind of smartphone they are using.

If you add the numbers, you'll notice that they add up to over 100%. 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 it gives you a general, graphical sense of the relative use:



Source: ABA 2018 Legal Technology Survey Report

J.D. the best Legal Technology blog in 2010, 2011 and 2013, and added iPhone J.D. to its Hall of Fame in 2014:

ABA JOURNAL
BLAWG
100
Hall of Fame

The Expert Institute named iPhone J.D. the Top Legal Tech Blog in 2017:

1ST PLACE
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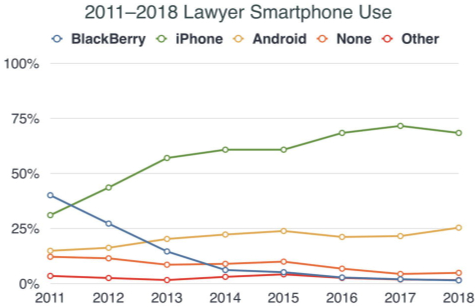
To place these numbers in historical context, the following chart shows lawyer smartphone use over recent years. The two dramatic changes in this chart are of course the plunge in BlackBerry use and the surge in iPhone use. There has been a more gradual, but noticeable, decrease in the number of attorneys not using a smartphone at all. As for Android use, there was a slight increase from 2011 to 2015, then a slight decrease for two years, and then the all-time high this year. The "Other" category in this chart includes Windows, something else, and those who don't know what smartphone they are using.



Source: ABA 2011–2018 Legal Technology Survey Reports

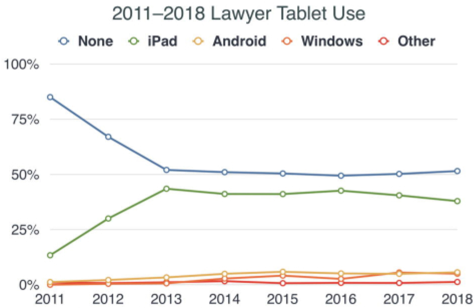
Almost 40% of U.S attorneys use an iPad

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. Since 2013, the number has stayed between 48% and 50%; in 2018, it was 48.5%. Suffice it to say that about half of all U.S. attorneys in private practice currently use a tablet, and that has remained true for the last five years.

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 stayed around 84%. In 2017, that number dropped to 81.3%, and in 2018 it is at 78.1%.

It looks like the very slight drop in attorneys using iPads is mostly attributable to slightly fewer overall attorneys using tablet devices. Android and Windows tablet use by attorneys has really changed very much. That surprises me on the Windows side because I do seem to hear more attorneys talking about using a Windows Surface device.

Here is a historical chart of attorney tablet use:



Source: ABA 2011–2018 Legal Technology Survey Reports

Popular apps

The survey also asked attorneys to identify apps that they use. I want to start by making the same objection that I have been making for many years now: 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 2018, 49.4% 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, and TranscriptPad is one of my favorite legal specific apps.

So while I question how much value you can put in these answers, for what it is worth, the top 13 apps listed are, in order of the percentage of attorneys mentioning them:

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

Congrats to Ed Walters and the team at Fastcase for moving up to the #1 spot this year.

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 (50.2% said yes in 2018), 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. LogMeIn
5. Documents to Go
6. GoodReader
7. Box
8. QuickOffice
9. MS Office/Word
10. Notability
11. QuickBooks

It amazes me that Microsoft Word is so low on this list (only 4.5% report using it). I consider Word an essential app for attorneys using an iPhone or an iPad.