

By Barry L. Brickner

Computer Usage by Michigan Lawyers

Personal computers were first introduced into the office setting 20 years ago. Today, there is nearly universal use of office-based computers by Michigan lawyers.

This article reviews contemporary technology usage patterns expressed by respondents to the 2003 Economics Survey.

Computer Usage Patterns

Attorneys often use computers for professional work beyond their offices. Home office computers and laptops are utilized by an increasing percentage of attorneys.

The 2003 Survey results revealed a logical progression in computer usage over six “Years in Practice” categories. The “Years in Practice” categories range from less than five years in practice to more than 30 years in practice. Refer to Exhibit 1.

Respondents’ firms or practices were size categorized as: Solo, Small Firm (2–5 attorneys), Mid-size Firm (6–20), and Large Firm (>20). Respondents from mid-sized firms were most likely to use a computer in the office, but least likely to use one at home. Large firms were close behind in office usage, but first in laptop usage and second in home computer usage. Small firms were a close third in office usage, first in home usage, and second in laptop usage. Solo practitioners lagged more than 10 percentage points behind in office usage to come in last and third in home and laptop usage. Overall, the solo practitioners’ use of computers was less than the other firm settings. Refer to Exhibit 2.

With respect to practice settings and firm size, private practitioners were least likely to use an office computer, while House counsel were most likely to do so, followed by the government/judiciary setting. House counsel

Exhibit 1
Use of Computers by Type and by Years in Practice, 2003

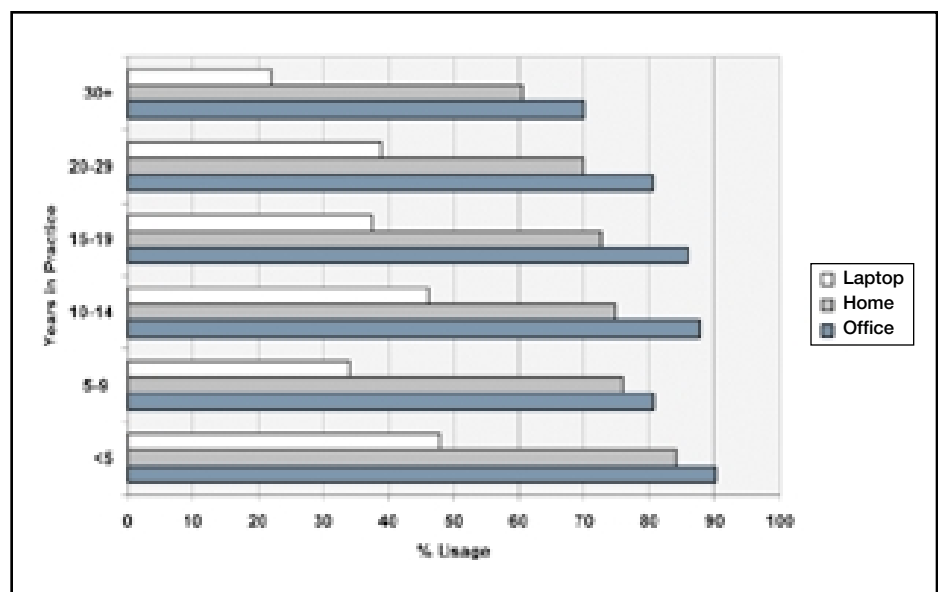


Exhibit 2
Use of Computers by Type and by Firm Size, 2003

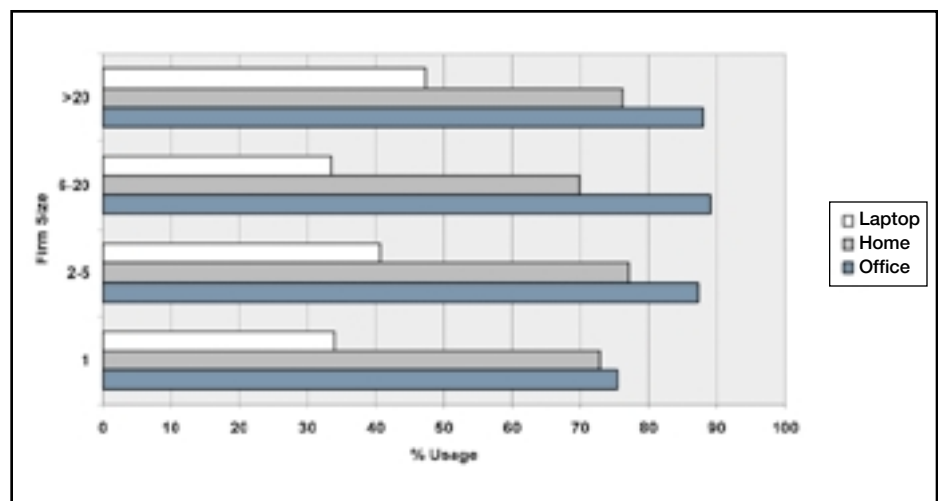
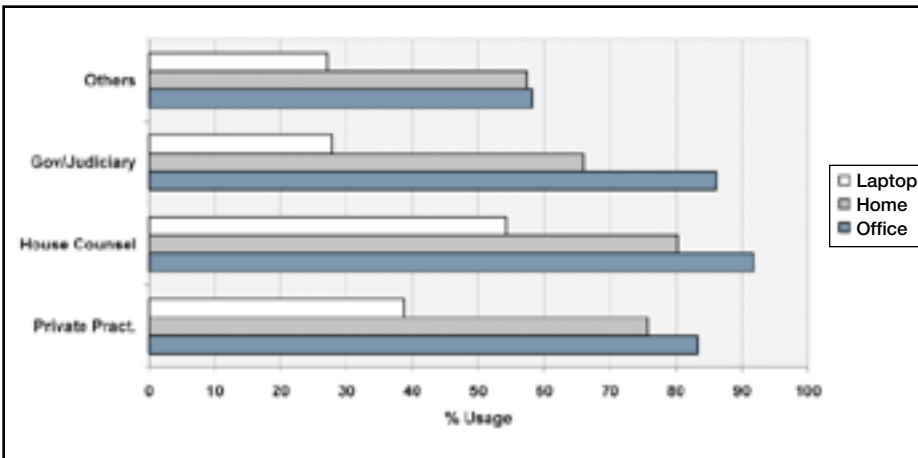




Exhibit 3
Use of Computers by Type and by Practice Setting, 2003



were also the most likely to use a home computer or have a laptop computer followed by private practitioners. Refer to Exhibit 3.

Frequency of Usage of Personal Computers and Laptops

Respondents were asked to categorize their computer usage as: “Constantly,” “Daily,” “Occasionally,” or “Never.” The Survey results show that computer usage is now basically ubiquitous among lawyers. Less than 10 percent of respondents report that they “Never” or “Occasionally” use an office-based computer. Exhibits 4, 5, and 6 summarize usage patterns.

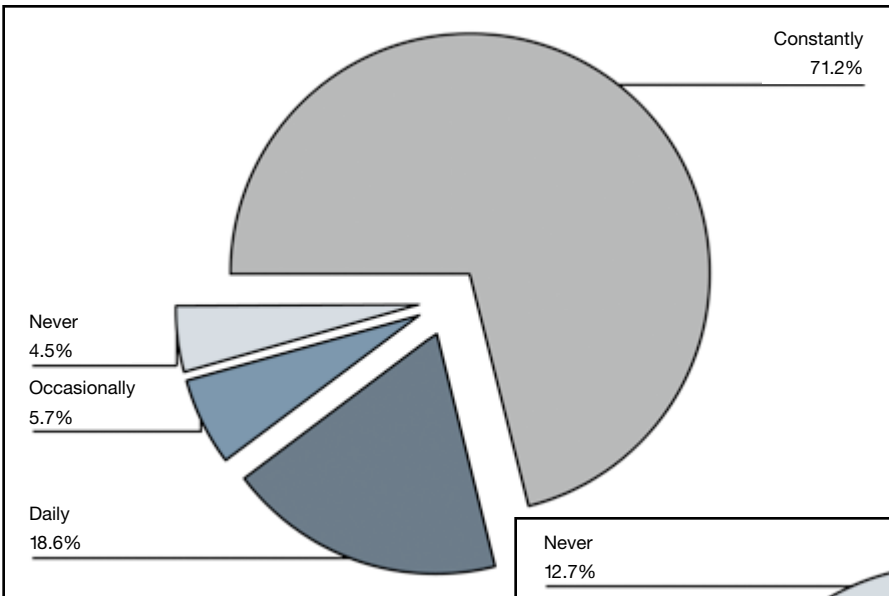
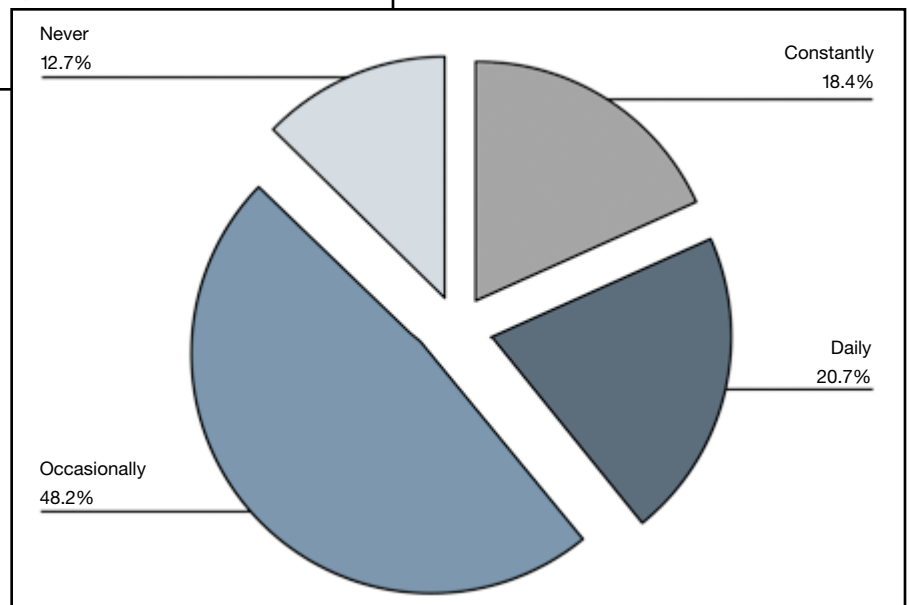


Exhibit 4
Frequency of Use of Office-Based PCs, 2003

Exhibit 5
Frequency of Use of Home Computers, 2003



Not surprisingly, frequency of use of personal computers and laptops varies by years in practice, as shown in Exhibit 7. Younger attorneys use their office-based computers on a daily basis 95 percent of the time. Attorneys in practice for 30 years or more utilize their office computers on a daily basis about 60 percent to 80 percent of the time.

Overall laptop usage is much less, ranging between 22 percent and 48 percent usage. Again, their highest use is by attorneys practicing less than 5 years. Their lowest use is by attorneys practicing more than 30 years. However, there is no consistent declining usage pattern as with home computer usage based upon length of practice.

Computerized Applications Employed

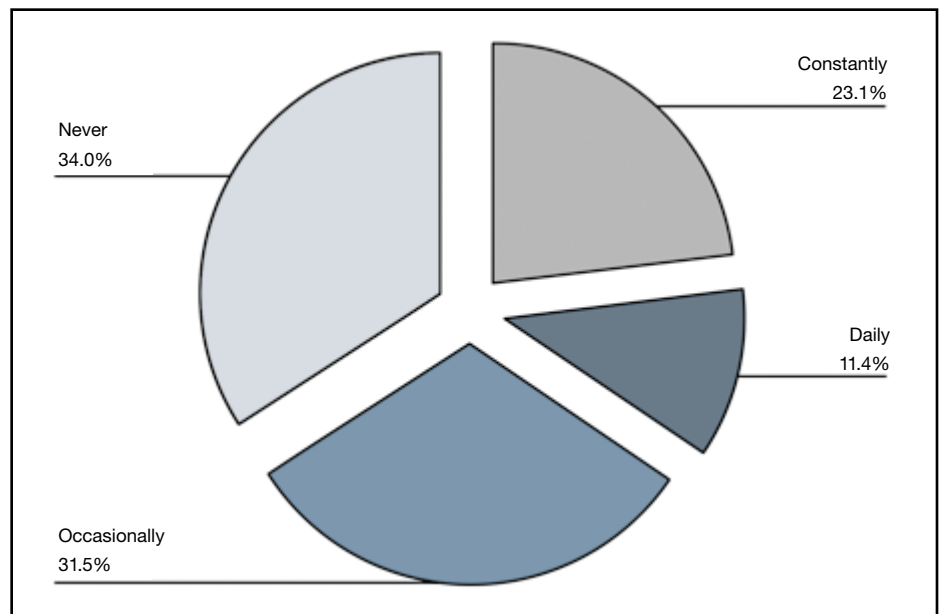
The survey also examined application usage. Attorneys were asked to rank order

the top five applications used from a list of 23 activities or processes. Exhibit 8 distributes the percentage of survey responses for the top five priorities.

The top six applications comprise about two-thirds of the responses. With little surprise, the number one application was creat-

ing work product. It was followed by online research, client communication, calendaring, internal office communication, and time and billing. These are mature applications owing to proven software as well as considerable experience and learning on the part of practitioners and vendors alike.

**Exhibit 6
Frequency of Use of Laptop Computers, 2003**



**Exhibit 7
Use of Computers by Type and by Years in Practice, 2003**

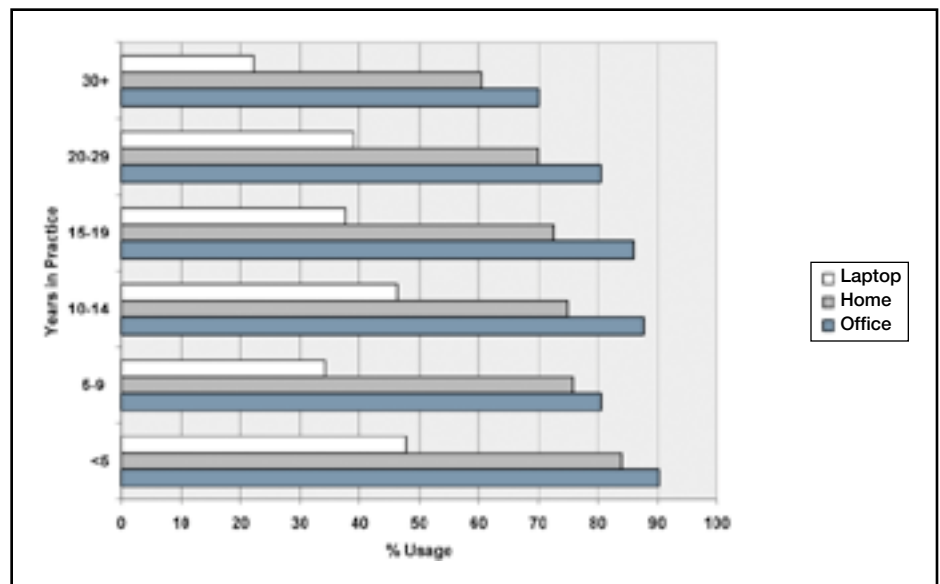


Exhibit 8
Top Ranked Applications by Attorneys using Computers, 2003

Task	Priority Application					All Five
	First	Second	Third	Fourth	Fifth	
Creating work product	56.2	8.8	6.0	4.5	3.8	16.9
Online research	10.7	14.6	12.2	12.6	13.1	12.6
Client communication	4.4	10.7	14.8	16.5	11.2	11.4
Calendaring	4.9	12.8	11.5	9.9	7.1	9.3
Internal office communication	6.1	8.8	11.3	9.1	7.8	8.6
Time & billing	4.0	16.9	6.0	5.3	5.4	7.6
External attorney communication	1.2	5.4	7.9	10.5	11.3	7.0
Document assembly	3.1	7.3	5.5	6.9	5.6	5.7
Case/matter management	2.2	2.7	2.9	4.6	4.3	3.3
Accounting	1.0	1.8	7.2	2.8	2.2	3.0
Website	1.8	1.8	1.7	3.5	6.3	2.9
Court communication	1.1	2.2	3.6	3.1	4.2	2.8
Conflict checking	0.3	1.6	2.0	2.6	6.3	2.4
CD Rom research	0.8	1.4	1.3	1.2	2.4	1.4
Trial presentations	0.4	0.3	2.1	1.4	2.0	1.2
Scanning text	0.1	0.7	0.7	1.9	1.8	1.0
Scanning images	0.5	0.5	0.7	1.3	1.6	0.9
Online CLE	0.7	0.5	0.8	1.0	1.3	0.8
Other distance learning	0.3	0.2	0.7	0.6	0.7	0.5
CD Rom CLE	0.2	0.2		0.2	0.6	0.2
Voice recognition	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.2
Other marketing uses		0.2	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.2
Marketing database		0.2	0.5		0.2	0.2
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

While time and billing received the most votes for second priority application, it ranked sixth overall in priority usage. External attorney communication, document assembly, case management, and accounting rounded out the top 10 applications in the survey. Trial presentation software showed little usage. Voice recognition and marketing uses were almost non-existent.

Technology Embracing

Survey respondents were asked to indicate—from a list of five factors—the types of problems they face in adopting and using technology. Respondents could indicate more than one problem area.

Sole practitioners were more concerned about the lack of time to research and implement new technologies as well as lack of training or in-house knowledge. They also consider the lack of knowledgeable and trustworthy vendors to be a problem more than attorneys in larger practices. This might be due to vendors concentrating their efforts on larger firms with greater purchasing power and niche needs. Larger firms face management resistance as an additional concern, a problem absent among solos.

Exhibit 9 summarizes all responses by firm size.

Exhibit 9
Problems Associated with Embracing New Technologies by Firm Size, 2003

Problem Mix	Firm Size									
	1	%	2 to 5	%	6 to 20	%	>20	%	All	%
No time to research/implement	160	31.4	112	23.9	108	22.8	101	26.4	481	26.3
Lack of training/in-house knowledge	132	25.9	105	22.4	98	20.7	80	20.9	415	22.7
Lack of time and training	88	17.3	63	13.5	60	12.7	42	11.0	253	13.8
Resistance from senior lawyers/staff	6	1.2	43	9.2	45	9.5	51	13.4	145	7.9
Lack of knowledgeable vendors	35	6.9	30	6.4	28	5.9	20	5.2	113	6.2
Lack of management interest	14	2.8	21	4.5	31	6.6	21	5.5	87	4.7
Lack of time and vendors	24	4.7	22	4.7	22	4.7	14	3.7	82	4.5
Lack of training/knowledgeable vendors	22	4.3	21	4.5	19	4.0	11	2.9	73	4.0
Lack of time and resistance	3	0.6	18	3.8	24	5.1	22	5.8	67	3.7
Lack of time, training and knowledgeable vendors	21	4.1	18	3.8	17	3.6	9	2.4	65	3.5
Lack of time and management disinterest	4	0.8	13	2.8	16	3.4	11	2.9	44	2.4
All factors	0	0.0	2	0.4	5	1.1	0	0.0	7	0.4
Totals	509	100.0	468	100.0	473	100.0	382	100.0	1832	100.0

Exhibit 10
Problems Associated with Embracing New Technologies by Practice Setting, 2003

Problem Mix	Practice Setting									
	Private Practice	%	House Counsel	%	Gov	%	All Others	%	All	%
No time to research/implement	345	26.0	44	30.3	65	25.7	45	24.7	499	26.2
Lack of training/in-house knowledge	292	22.0	33	22.8	66	26.1	40	22.0	431	22.6
Lack of time and training	179	13.5	24	16.6	32	12.6	25	13.7	260	13.6
Resistance from senior lawyers/staff	102	7.7	10	6.9	21	8.3	16	8.8	149	7.8
Lack of knowledgeable vendors	96	7.2	6	4.1	8	3.2	11	6.0	121	6.3
Lack of management interest	48	3.6	10	6.9	27	10.7	7	3.8	92	4.8
Lack of time and knowledgeable vendors	67	5.0	5	3.4	6	2.4	9	4.9	87	4.6
Lack of training/knowledgeable vendors	63	4.7	2	1.4	5	2.0	8	4.4	78	4.1
Lack of time and resistance	51	3.8	5	3.4	4	1.6	8	4.4	68	3.6
Lack of time, training, and knowledgeable vendors	55	4.1	2	1.4	4	1.6	7	3.8	68	3.6
Lack of time and management disinterest	24	1.8	4	2.8	15	5.9	4	2.2	47	2.5
All factors	6	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.1	8	0.4
Totals	1328	100.0	145	100.0	253	100.0	182	100.0	1908	100.0

Notes to Exhibit 10:

There is double counting of responses as various combinations are included on the exhibits. The count is higher for practice class as "others" generally do not denote firm size.

When considering the practice settings of survey respondents, management disinterest appears within the governmental and judiciary settings as budget freezes and other purchasing constraints are common. Refer to Exhibit 10.

Computers entered law offices as a secretarial tool. As software moved beyond word processing applications, adaptive lawyers saw the possibilities to make themselves more productive and their practices more efficient. The 2003 Economic Survey provides a reference point from which future surveys will be

able to measure trends and growth in computer usage over a range of applications.

The 2003 survey—not surprisingly—shows that the younger the lawyer, the more apt the lawyer is to adapt technology as a tool to better practice law. The survey also shows that most attorneys use computers for practical applications. They are interested in nuts and bolts uses: get the work out, do research, communication, tell me where to be at what time, and send out the bills. “Bells and whistles” such as slide shows, scanning, and dictating directly to

the computer have not yet penetrated the broader market.

While sole practitioners may have the ability to adopt new uses more quickly, the survey shows that they lack the time to train in new applications. Large firms may need more time to deal with internal issues related to change—but they have the resources to teach and adapt new applications more quickly.

Most analysts agree that the adaptation of technology in law offices represents one of the most revolutionary and challenging innovations in the practice of law. Predictably, changes that “go to the heart” of how attorneys accomplish their work will not come easily or quickly. But, over time, technology has already proven that its adoption is pervasive and its pace will only increase. ♦

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