

Text Expanders

By Diane Ebersole

Many practice management authorities agree that the practice of law and the management of law offices are undergoing change at a faster pace than ever before. Many experts agree that change in the way law is practiced and managed is inevitable. Indeed, some pundits have projected that a failure to change the way you practice or manage your practice will result in the ultimate failure of the firm. Richard Susskind, author of *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services*, recommends that as firms plan for ongoing success, lawyers consider “what elements of their current workload could be undertaken differently—more quickly, cheaply, efficiently, or to a higher quality—using alternative methods of working.”¹

David Pogue, who wrote the technology column for *The New York Times* for 13 years before moving to a similar position with Yahoo, has written about almost every aspect of technology including social media, e-books, smartphones, the Web, tablets, and more. In addition to his columns, he has worked on NOVA specials for PBS, contributed to “CBS Sunday Morning,” written *Missing Manual* books, written for *Scientific*

American, regularly posted to his own blogs, and was the keynote speaker at the 2013 ABA TECHSHOW in Chicago. He is a very busy man!

During the question-and-answer segment of his TECHSHOW presentation, Pogue was asked, “How do you do it all?” He said the tool he finds most helpful in mastering his incredibly busy workload is an application for his Mac called TextExpander.

If a text expander tool (application) works for David Pogue, it could presumably also help busy attorneys increase their efficiency level by working “more quickly, cheaply, efficiently or to a higher quality—using alternative methods of working.”

What exactly is a text expander? Think of it like auto-correct in your word processor, which works in every application in which text can be input. Instead of being limited to one application, the function is installed in the computer’s operating system so functionality is accessible from every text application. It works in the operating system, word processor, e-mail, PowerPoint or Key-Note, web-based SaaS applications, search engines, Evernote, Excel or Numbers, blogs, web page apps, Adobe Acrobat, and more. If you can click the cursor into the application and enter text, the text expander application will help you enter frequently used phrases, snippets, paragraphs, or even pages of text with a few keystrokes and a tap of the space bar. Some text expanders also allow you to easily record macros that automate multi-click activities and attach them to a keystroke.

There are several options to choose from when shopping for a text expander application for Windows, and each app provides somewhat different capabilities. Some applications allow for creation of shortcuts or “hot keys” to perform complex tasks such

as opening files, sending template-based e-mails, and other multiple-step activities in addition to inserting text. The choices are more limited for Mac operating systems, but the three options described below are worth exploring before making a decision. Mac developers have been working to integrate text expander functionality into the operating system, but if optimizing efficiency is your goal, you may still want to purchase an add-on application.

The following list of software applications is not all-inclusive, but a starting point for exploring text expander software applications. I have used PhraseExpress on my Windows computer and TextExpander on my Mac, and both applications exceed my expectations for functionality. That doesn’t mean they are the perfect solution for your environment, so as Smokey Robinson and the Miracles sang back in 1960, “you gotta shop around!”

Start shopping for Windows XP/7/8 with the following three applications:

- **ActiveWords** Cost: Free/\$50 Plus <http://www.activewords.com/>

ActiveWords allows you to create keyboard shortcuts to insert plain and rich text, signatures, and graphics in MS Word and also open websites, document files, and folders with a few keystrokes. Its Windows toolbar lets you speed up many of the multi-click activities you frequently use. ActiveWords Plus provides unlimited ActiveWords, multi-computer licensing, and a library of pre-built ActiveWords resources.

- **AutoHotKey** Cost: Free/Open Source <http://www.autohotkey.com/>

AutoHotKey lets you automate almost any series of keystrokes and mouse clicks by

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helping you create macros and attaching them to hot keys. This includes expanding text abbreviations and functions like muting volume, opening templates, and more.

- **PhraseExpress** Cost: \$50 Standard/\$140 Pro
<http://www.phraseexpress.com/>

PhraseExpress makes it easy to create and organize a library of activities including phrase insertion, auto text, spelling corrections across all Windows apps, and much more. There is a free version for noncommercial use. The \$50 version is powerful and the \$140 Pro version verges on document-assembly-like power.

Start shopping for text expander applications for Macs using OS X 10.7 or 10.8 by reviewing the following apps:

- **TextExpander** Cost: \$35/\$5
<http://smilesoftware.com/TextExpander/features.html>

Insert almost anything, including formatted text, signatures, boilerplate paragraphs, graphics, and variable data, using quick keystrokes from your snippet library. Customize auto-correct functionality using snippet triggers and more.

- **TypeIt4Me** Cost: \$20
<http://www.ettoresoftware.com/products/typeit4me/>

Determine your custom-defined words, phrases, and clauses and enter them by keystroke or choosing from a quickly accessible menu. Billing itself as the original text expander for Macs, TypeIt4Me might be just right for your needs.

- **Typinator** Cost: \$40
<http://www.ergonis.com/products/typinator/>

Typinator bills itself as “the fastest text expander in town.” It is a product from *ergonis*, an Australian company. Typinator provides some additional options for using a text expander while working in fields.

Finally, if you are not ready to add a text expander application to your system, explore some of the options already in Office Suite, WordPerfect, Pages, and the Mac

operating systems. Word’s auto-correct can be modified and expanded with custom entries. Word has also developed Quick Parts, allowing you to create a library of text resources that can be inserted into your documents using keystrokes or the menu. Corel’s WordPerfect has Quick Correct, allowing you to create custom entries. The Mac operating system lets you create your own menu-driven shortcuts, and text shortcuts can be created directly in Pages.

Whether you buy text expander software or simply use what you already have more effectively, eliminating repetitive actions could be the first step to working “more quickly, cheaply, efficiently, or to a higher quality—using alternative methods”! ■



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to empower attorneys and their staffs with the technology tools and training to maximize the efficiency of their firms while developing sound legal business practices.

ENDNOTE

1. Susskind, *The End of Lawyers? Rethinking the Nature of Legal Services* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).