# Greatest Hits: My Favorite Software and Web Sites

By Joshua Stein
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**S**erious computer users usually have their own list of software and Web site "greatest hits" that they use constantly. Lawyer Joshua Stein, one of our earliest subscribers, started using computers for all his written work in 1982. Who better to ask to share his list of greatest hits. Joshua covers just about every topic, including email, document management, VoIP, fax-to-email, backup software, desktop publishing, online printing, conference calls, legal research, social bookmarking, and more.

## INTRODUCTION

Of the many thousands of software packages and Web sites out in cyberland, I've found a little over a dozen that really make a difference for me. They help me use computers better, get more accomplished, and organize my life and my work.

In this article, I'll describe those tools and explain why I think they're so good. This list reflects only my own personal experiences and preferences. It is unscientific, arbitrary, capricious, and subjective.

Each item here reflects my own extensive personal experiences and my own endless search for better ways to use my computer. I've found everything here reasonably easy to use. It all meets my high standards for how software or a Web site should work. And when I have occasionally needed technical support, I have found it decent or better.

Every service listed here is either free or delivers good value for the money. I received no compensation from any vendor, and have no financial interest in any vendor. My list excludes anything so widely used that it has become part of our modern computer culture and vocabulary.

As background, I practice commercial real estate law with a large firm, and also write about commercial real estate law, legal practice, and the use of computers in legal practice. I began using computers on my desk about ten years before the rest of the legal profession. I have had less success staying ahead of the curve in the last ten years, though. To the extent that I have done that, the software packages and Web sites described here have helped.

## EMAIL

I have used Nelson Email Organizer (NEO) software for more than six years to help me control the email deluge.

NEO organizes my incoming and outgoing email, enabling me to find any email message instantly by the name of the correspondent, any word(s) in the email message, and in other ways as well.

I don't create folders or sort my email after the fact. The software just finds what I need — all in a more satisfactory way than the search capabilities that Microsoft added to Outlook 2007. If I had to choose one software package that most improves the daily quality of my cyberlife, I'd choose Nelson Email Organizer.

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## DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

NetDocuments offers a sophisticated yet user-friendly online document management system, with many features available in big firm document management packages. The system works well with industry-standard software, and handles versions well.

Anyone looking for an online document management system should also consider Microsoft's SharePoint service, which could become the backbone for all online document storage. But I found that Sharepoint required too much configuration and technical tweaking, whereas I could use NetDocuments out of the box.

**VOIP AND FAX-TO-EMAIL**
I have looked into many vendors of voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) telephone service, and have had accounts with several. I prefer Toktumi, which offers a powerful package of features, great call quality, and online support.

Toktumi also offers one of the least expensive fax-to-email services available at $4.95/month. As another option, OneSuite costs just $1.00/month.

**PDF**
Everyone uses PDF files to distribute and display information. But if that were all Adobe Acrobat could do, I would not include it here. Adobe Acrobat can do much more than the few routine tasks for which it has become ubiquitous. It offers a huge range of capabilities that, in effect, add up to "electronic paper."

Anyone who has Adobe Acrobat software — not just Adobe Reader software — can edit PDF documents, mark them up, insert links within the document or to the Internet, and have the document interact with the reader in

useful ways. A user can store collections of related information in PDF files. Those and many other capabilities make Acrobat one of the best tools in my computer shed.

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**BACKUP SOFTWARE**
Because I store all my personal files and financial records on my computer, I must back it up regularly. I do that using software available from GoodSync, giving me great control over the backup process in exchange for a somewhat limited feature set.

I have also used software from Handy Backup.

For a while, I used online backup services. During that time, I once lost all my data. I found that restoration from my online backup took too long. And I hesitate to use a backup system where I can't hold the physical backup in my hand, and, if I want, actually see and open any backed-up files. But, if I had to use an online backup service, I would choose Carbonite.

**ONLINE PRINTING**
For high quality but reasonably

priced printing, I use PsPrint, which I found after a thorough search for online printers.

This service always offers special discounts on some of its products, so a strategic purchaser will wait for the right discount.

The PsPrint service offers more flexibility than some other online printers (e.g., VistaPrint, which I previously used quite happily). This flexibility means the user must — and can — set up their page design and typography themselves with desktop publishing software. One needs to store the DTP output in PDF version 4 format, which seems bizarre at first.

**DESKTOP PUBLISHING**
When I realized I needed desktop publishing software to set up print jobs for PsPrint, I wandered around at Amazon.com until I came upon Serif Software's PagePlus X4 DTP software, which was attractively priced and mostly well reviewed.

I ordered and installed the software and found it easy to use and powerful. It did everything I wanted, and much more.

Whenever I couldn't figure out intuitively how to accomplish something in PagePlus X4, I looked in the paper manual that came in the box. I found the manual to be well organized, well written (by someone whose first language is English, though of the British variety), and well indexed. The manual was a treat

compared to what most other software offers. I later ordered another Serif product and found it met the same standard.

### WEB HOSTING
I use 1&1 to manage a portfolio of domain names and host my Web site.

It also offers free Webmail and a range of other Web-related services. The Web site is easy to navigate, with good help menus and user support.

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**Whenever I start to wonder about some new development that has started to appear, TechnoLawyer often has an intelligent discussion about that topic long before anyone else does.**

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### CONFERENCE CALLS
Many online vendors offer free conference calling services, but they make their services unattractive by announcing to each call participant that the conference host uses a free conference calling service.

Rondee improves on that model a bit by just identifying the name of the vendor, although of course anyone can figure out online that Rondee offers free conference calls.

Still, the Rondee announcements are shorter than most, the call quality is good, and the calls are truly free, although any participant has to place a call to a remote U.S. area code to join the call.

### LEGAL RESEARCH
Whenever I need to find a statute and don't want to visit the law library, I go to the Cornell Law School Web site, which offers easy access to state and federal statutes, though not case law.

### SOCIAL BOOKMARKING
LinkaGoGo may have a silly name, but it delivers a serious benefit by helping me organize all the Web sites I use, and making that organization available whenever I browse the Web from any computer, not just the one I usually use.

### ONLINE STORAGE
Any computer user can connect to JungleDisk and create an online hard drive, accessible through any computer anywhere if one has the right security credentials.

The service is easy to install and easy to use. It uses excess server capacity at Amazon.com and Rackspace.

### ONLINE SHOPPING
Pricegrabber and Google Product Search offer comparison shopping for just about anything one can buy online. Either represents a great starting point for any online shopping expedition.

### SHORT URL GENERATORS
If you find something online and send someone a link to whatever you found, that link may be quite long. The recipient, especially if technologically impaired, may have trouble opening your link. To solve that problem, TinyURL converts any long Web address into a tiny one, which even the most unsophisticated user should have no problem accessing.

### ONLINE BOOKS
Commentators have spilled much ink and many pixels over Google's ambitious plan to scan millions of books and make them available online. Setting aside the legal issues and controversy, Google's project has already accomplished a lot. Google Books offers access to the results — a great starting point for anyone who wants to dip into any book, whether in or out of copyright.

As an example of a book still in copyright, Google Books includes a scanned image of my entire book on ground leases, which you can find by typing the words "Stein Ground Leases" into the search box. You can read the entire book online, but you can't save it or print it. I tried reading it on the screen, and found it just isn't a very good technique for reading any book. Thus, although I have some trepidation about having my entire book available online, I suspect that anyone truly interested in it will want the "real" book rather than the online version. I have no idea how Google Books will play out.

### MUSIC
Anyone who enjoys listening to music will appreciate Pandora.

This Web site learns what music you like, and then plays more music with similar characteristics. Once you have properly trained Pandora, it plays a stream of one song after another that you will virtually always enjoy.

If you let it play for more than three hours without providing any feedback about the playlist, it may stop, but you can easily start it again. If you sign up for the "premium" edition, Pandora may wait longer before stopping. Similar services include Rhapsody and MOG.

**PUBLICATIONS**
My final "greatest hit" of the Internet is TechnoLawyer, the email newsletter network in which this article resides.

I have subscribed to TechnoLawyer for more than five years. It is the first place I go when I have a question about technology in legal practice, and often my last stop as well because I find my answer. Whenever I start to wonder about some new development that has started to appear, TechnoLawyer often has an intelligent discussion about that topic long before anyone else does.

It also offers a wide range of other practical, accessible, and well-written information that helps me better use computers, including the *BlawgWorld* newsletter containing a collection of links to dozens of other good articles all over the Internet.

**CONCLUSION**
With help from TechnoLawyer and other sites and services listed here, I've eliminated many frustrations of using computers, and found some great ways to get my work done faster and better.

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