

## HOW TO FIND THE BEST DEALS ON LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

### STRATEGY FOR GETTING THE BEST DEALS

Follow these steps to identify what to buy and ensure you're getting the best deal.

#### IDENTIFY THE PLAYERS

Many times, you'll know the product category you want (like a scanner), but not which model to choose. Therefore, you first need to determine the significant manufacturers. Google makes this easy. For example, if you Google "document scanner", you'll see a list of brands (Brother, Canon, Epson, Fujitsu, HP, NeatDesk, Ricoh, & Xerox) as well as a few models, photos, and prices. Note the manufacturers you find.

#### USE MANUFACTURER WEBSITES AS A STARTING POINT

Since you typically know what you're willing to spend, visit the manufacturer web sites to determine which products in your price range have the features you desire. Note that the prices on manufacturer websites are MSRP, and thus usually the worst-case scenario. You don't necessarily want to buy something directly from the manufacturer, but the manufacturer's website usually helps determine the price range, and they always provide comprehensive information about product functionality.

#### READ WHAT THE CRITICS ARE SAYING

After you've narrowed down your search to a couple of models from different manufacturers, your next task is to find reviews to determine which model fits your needs. There are many websites worth reading for tech reviews. All of the following are free except Consumer Reports: [CNET](#), [Engadget](#), [Laptop Magazine](#), [PC Mag](#), [PC World](#), [Popular Mechanics](#), [Popular Science](#), and [Wired](#). And, depending on the product category, [Consumer Reports](#) can be a great resource. It requires a \$26/year subscription, but covers products far beyond legal tech.

Additionally, [Amazon](#) is also a good source of "hands-on" reviews.

#### USE A GOOGLE TRICK FOR SEARCHING A PARTICULAR SITE

Sometimes finding the correct information on a manufacturer's website fails even if the site offers a search function. This is when a Google trick comes in handy. Let's say you're trying to find a review of the Ricoh ScanSnap iX1600 (scanner) on PCMag.com. Simply Google "scansnap iX1600 site:[pcmag.com](#)" (omit quotation marks), and your first hit is their review. For whatever reason, Google often searches a site better than the site searches itself. The same trick also works with other search engines such as DuckDuckGo and Bing.

#### USE THE PRODUCT PART NUMBER TO FIND THE BEST PRICES

Once you've decided on a product, locate the manufacturer's part number. That number will help you avoid confusion because many times there will be multiple versions of a product with slightly different part numbers, sometimes altered on a per-retailer basis. For example, Ricoh makes five versions of the ScanSnap iX1600 scanner with different part numbers (due to different included software bundles and hardware colors). There are many sites that offer price comparisons among vendors. If you plug your part number into any of these sites, they'll return a list of vendors and pricing. Consider the following:

#### US PRICE COMPARISON SERVICES

- [Shopping.Google.com](#)
- [DealGenius.com](#)
- [PriceGrabber.com](#)
- [Shopping.Yahoo.com](#)

### ALWAYS CONSIDER SHIPPING COSTS

If you visit a site like [Shopping.Google.com](http://Shopping.Google.com), enter a part number, and click the search button, you'll be presented with many options. If you click the filter button and select "Free Shipping," you will see only those suppliers that charge no shipping fee. Many vendors with low product prices will also have unreasonably high shipping costs. Take that into consideration when choosing a vendor.

### PAY ATTENTION TO VENDOR RATINGS

There are a variety of services that allow consumers to review vendors; and most of the price comparison services display vendor ratings along with prices. Two examples of rating services are Google Checkout Reviews and [Reseller Ratings](#). Avoid vendors with less than 4 out of 5 stars or vendors with no ratings or only a few (indicating that they are very new).

### DUE DILIGENCE WITH UNFAMILIAR VENDORS

If you've never heard of the vendor, do more research. First, make sure their web site lists an address and phone number. Avoid vendors who fail to disclose basic contact information prominently. Second, check to see if there are any negative reviews of the vendor on the web. For example, if you are considering buying something from [Micro Center](#), you could Google "reviews [www.microcenter.com](http://www.microcenter.com)" (omit quotation marks). You could also check [Reseller Ratings](#) or [Complaint Boards](#) for further vendor reviews.

### READ RETURN POLICIES

If a vendor doesn't make their return policy readily available, view that as a huge red flag. Check return policies for restocking fees. For example, some vendors charge a 15% or greater restocking fee on just about everything. By contrast, [Amazon](#) allows returns within 30 days but has no restocking fee. Therefore, if my choice is between those two vendors, even if Amazon's price is slightly higher, consider the cost difference as an insurance policy ensuring an easy return, if necessary. In fact, often it makes sense to pay a little more for something at [Amazon](#) because you that they are incredibly easy to work with on returns.

### STOCK INDICATORS ARE IMPORTANT

Always look for a stock indicator on the vendor's website because you don't want to order something they don't have and may not have again for weeks. If a web site doesn't have a stock indicator for the product, take a pass, even if it's cheaper. It's not worth saving a few dollars only to wait 3 weeks for product to show up.

### SKIP ANY NON-MANUFACTURER EXTENDED WARRANTY

Unless you are buying a computer, smartphone, or iPad, it's not worth buying the extended warranties which are typically offered at checkout. Of course, if you have a propensity for dropping or losing things, maybe you should consider one anyway. Otherwise, extended warranties generally represent a big profit center for vendors because they're hardly ever used and sometimes contain exclusions for things like accidental breakage.

The exception to the "no extended warranty" advice is when buying an expensive piece of technology and the manufacturer itself both sells and supports the warranty. For example, you could purchase an iPad covered by AppleCare+, which offers three years of coverage, as opposed to the standard one, and includes accidental damage. In addition to Apple, computer makers like Dell, HP, and Lenovo offer similar "direct from the manufacturer" warranties, usually available as "upsell" items at the time of purchase.

### CREATE AN ACCOUNT UPON CHECKOUT

Depending upon the vendor you've chosen, you will likely be asked to "create an account". Doing so makes it easier to track your orders and return an item if necessary. If given an option, don't allow the vendor to store your credit card information. The more places you store credit card information, the greater the risk that a data breach harms you.

## CONTACT THE MANUFACTURER FOR RECOMMENDED CONSULTANTS

Most legal-tech manufacturers rely heavily (if not exclusively) upon a network of outside consulting firms for product installation, customization and training. You can always check the manufacturer website for a list of consultants. Not only will you typically get expert help, but many of them resell the products at a discount.

## LEGAL-SPECIFIC EMAIL LISTS OR LIST SERVS

These are emailed discussion lists on just about every topic under the sun. Most state bar associations have them available. Regardless of whether your state bar offers them, consider the grand-daddy of legal email lists - the American Bar Association's [Solosez](#). It's for lawyers who are practicing alone or in a small firm setting and it has thousands of subscribers. Best of all, you don't have to be an ABA member to join and it's free. If you're considering buying something, post it there. You're bound to get lots of commentary on whether the product is good or not and what kind of pricing others have found.

For Mac-using attorneys, check out the [Macs in Law Office \(MILO\)](#) Google group.

## TECHNOLAWYER

See [TechnoLawyer](#) - great email service discussing nothing but legal technology news.

## LOOK FOR NON-MANUFACTURER PARTS

For example, an AC adapter (90W) for a Dell Latitude notebook computer is \$70 (Dell part number C120H). A quick search on [Amazon](#) for that same part number reveals that a generic adapter certified to work with a Latitude costs only \$9.69.

## DO NOT LIMIT YOUR SEARCH FOR COMPUTER OR TECH HELP TO YOUR LOCAL AREA

Installation, integration, and training can consume a significant portion of your overall budget. You need not limit your search for computer and tech help to your local geographic market. Thanks to things like managed services, infrastructure-as-a-service providers, and tech support software, a vendor can connect to and take over any computer in your office and fix things without being on-site. The installation and training typically occur at your office (IT folks with a national practice have no problem visiting your office), but after-care can easily be done remotely.

This approach saves money for several reasons.

## FIND AN EXPERT

Your local IT person might be able to read manuals or help articles and partially figure out how to install or repair a product or program. However, unless it's something they regularly do, it's extraordinarily likely that they'll make a mess of it and the program won't be configured correctly. If you look outside your geographic market, you will unquestionably be able to find an expert in that program or service which will take far less time to handle the setup and will do it right. Having to clean up a mess created by an amateur is always more expensive than having it done right the first time by someone who may cost a little more.

## LESS EXPENSIVE

The market rate for IT help in major metropolitan areas is naturally higher. Therefore, you can often save yourself money by working with an IT company located in a smaller market because their rates are going to be commensurate with that smaller market.

## HIGHER QUALITY HELP

Let's illustrate this point with an example. A lawyer from a small town was trying to get his new Android smartphone to synchronize with Outlook. His local IT folks couldn't get it to work, and he was so frustrated that he was about to take the phone back and give up. He called us as a last-ditch effort to get it working and because we have lots of experience getting all types of smartphones to sync with Outlook. We determined that it wasn't working because his local IT people had failed to install a major update on his system. After his local folks got the update installed,

the sync began working. So, the benefits were that he only paid for an answer, his local people were able to execute the solution, and he now knows to keep on top of his IT folks, so they are installing necessary updates on his devices.