

HOW TO FIND THE BEST DEALS ON LEGAL TECHNOLOGY

STRATEGY FOR GETTING THE BEST DEALS

The following is a progression you can use to identify what to buy and then ensure you're getting the best deal on it.

IDENTIFY THE PLAYERS

Many times you'll know the product category you want (like a scanner), but not which model is considered the best. Therefore, you first need to find out who the significant manufacturers are. Google makes this fairly easy. For example, if you Google "document scanner", you'll see a list of brands (HP, Visioneer, Fujitsu, NeatDesk, Canon & Xerox) and a few models, photos, and prices. Make a note of the manufacturers you find.

USE MANUFACTURER WEBSITES AS A STARTING POINT

Since you typically have an idea of what you're willing to spend, visit the manufacturer web sites in order to determine which of the products is in your price range and has the feature set you're looking for. Note that the prices you see on a manufacturer's web site are usually the worst-case scenario. You don't necessarily want to buy something directly from the manufacturer, but the manufacturer's website usually helps to determine the general 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 help you determine which model is the best. There are several magazine websites I recommend visiting for tech reviews. All of the following are free except Consumer Reports: Law Technology Today (<https://www.lawtechnologytoday.org>), Laptop Magazine (www.laptopmag.com), PC World (pcworld.com), Consumer Reports (consumerreports.org - \$26/year but worth it), Popular Science (popsci.com), Popular Mechanics (popularmechanics.com), and Wired (wired.com). A few other great web sites for reviews include reviews.CNET.com, Engadget.com, PCMag.com, Epinions.com and ConsumerSearch.com. Amazon.com also posts valuable customer reviews for products they sell. Another great resource is Become.com. Just enter the product you are considering, click the Research button and you'll be presented with a list of reviews of that product.

USE A GOOGLE TRICK FOR SEARCHING A PARTICULAR SITE

Sometimes I search for a product on a site using the site's own search function and come up blank even when I know they previously published something about that product. This is when a Google trick comes in handy. Let's say you're trying to find a review of the Fujitsu ScanSnap iX1600 (scanner) on PCMag.com. Simply Google "scansnap iX1600 site:www.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.

USE THE PRODUCT PART NUMBER TO FIND THE BEST PRICES

Once you've decided which product to buy, locate the manufacturer's part number from either the manufacturer's web site or any vendor that sells the product. The part number will help you avoid confusion because many times there will be multiple versions of a product with slightly different part numbers. For example, Fujitsu makes five versions of the ScanSnap iX1500 scanner with different part numbers (due to different included software bundles and whether the scanner works with Windows or Mac). 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 (my favorite)
- Become.com
- DealGenius.com
- PriceGrabber.com
- Shopper.com

- Shopping.Yahoo.com
- Shopzilla.com

CANADIAN PRICE COMPARISON SERVICES:

- PriceBot.ca
- ShopTolt.ca

ALWAYS CONSIDER SHIPPING COSTS

If you go to a site like Shopping.Google.com, enter a part number, and click the search button, you'll be presented with many options. If you click the "Compare Prices" button below that, you'll see an option to enter your zip code just above the price list. Make sure you do this because the site will then calculate shipping and a total price on the item you are researching from each vendor. Many vendors with low product prices will also have unreasonably high shipping costs so you need to take that into consideration when choosing a vendor. After you've entered your zip code, make sure you click the link that will show you all online stores because initially it will only show you a few.

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. Some of the rating services include BizRate.com, Google Checkout Reviews, Epinions.com, and ResellerRatings.com. In any event, you want to 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 you are considering, do a little more research. First, make sure their web site lists an address and phone number. I avoid vendors who do not disclose basic contact information prominently. Second, it's worth checking to see if there are any negative reviews of the vendor on the web. For example, if you are considering buying something from MicroCenter.com, you could Google "reviews www.microcenter.com" (omit quotation marks). You could also check www.ResellerRatings.com, BizRate (http://www.bizrate.com/ratings_guide/guide/) or www.ComplaintsBoard.com for further vendor reviews.

IT IS ESSENTIAL THAT YOU READ RETURN POLICIES

If a vendor doesn't make their return policy readily available, I view that as a huge red flag. It is very important that you read return policies and check for restocking fees. For example, NewEgg.com is a well-respected vendor, but returns must be made within 30 days and they charge a 15% restocking fee on just about everything. By contrast, amazon.com allows returns within 30 days but has no restocking fee. Therefore, if my choice is between those two vendors and the amazon.com price is higher but close to NewEgg, I'm going with amazon.com every time. In fact, there have been many times when I paid a little more for something at amazon.com because I know from personal experience 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 possibly won't have again for weeks. If a web site doesn't have a stock indicator for the product I'm considering, I simply won't buy it from them even if it's cheaper. It's not worth saving a few dollars only to wait 3 weeks for your product to show up.

NOTE THE CONDITION

If using Shopping.Google.com to search prices, make sure to note the "Condition" column. This will tell you if the product you're looking at is refurbished, used, or new. I would recommend avoiding refurbished or used products; and the lowest price is frequently for a used or refurbished product.

SKIP THE EXTENDED WARRANTY

Unless you are buying a desktop or laptop computer, 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.

CREATE AN ACCOUNT UPON CHECKOUT

Depending upon the vendor you've chosen, you will likely be presented with the opportunity to "create an account". I recommend doing this because it makes it easier to track your orders and return an item if necessary. If given an option, I prefer not to allow the vendor to store my credit card information although I do not see a problem with them storing my name and address since it makes it a lot faster to check out the next time I buy something.

ALWAYS CHECK FOR DISCOUNT CODES

During the checkout process, you may see a box asking you to enter a Coupon Code or Discount Code if you have one. If you do not have one, go to RetailMeNot.com or CouponCabin.com and search for vendor coupons on those sites. I easily saved over \$100 last year by using discount codes I found on those sites. It never hurts to look.

GET A SEPARATE EMAIL ADDRESS FOR BUYING ITEMS ONLINE

Finally, if you do a lot of on-line shopping, I recommend signing up for a free web-based email address that you use solely for purposes of buying things (Gmail, Yahoo, Hotmail, etc.). The email address you use for online purchases will tend to receive lots of special offers and other SPAM you don't want showing up in your main inbox every day.

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 web-site for a list of consultants. Not only will you typically get expert help, but many of them re-sell 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 3,000 subscribers. Best of all, you don't have to be an ABA member in order to join and it's free. Go to <http://mail.abanet.org/scripts/wa.exe?SUBED1=solosez&A=1> to join. 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.

TECHNOLAWYER

See www.technolawyer.com - great email service discussing nothing but legal technology news.

GET A PRICE ONLINE, THEN CALL AND ASK FOR A DISCOUNT

If you're going to buy from an online vendor, go to their web site and get the pricing on what you want to buy. Now call them and ask if the sales rep you talk to will beat the price you got on their web site. If they refuse, then ask for free shipping, ask them to throw in some software or upgrade the software you want (i.e., Microsoft Office basic to Microsoft Office small business edition). If you don't ask, you don't get. Most sales reps have some leeway in pricing and since their compensation is typically based upon sales, they'll have an incentive to get you a price that will inspire you to buy from them rather than the web page.

LOOK FOR PREVIOUS VERSIONS OF SOFTWARE OR HARDWARE

For example WordPerfect 2020 is the current version, but you can get a great deal on X9 and lower. Is there a big difference between the two? No. WordPerfect Office X6 Standard Edition is \$57.02 while X7 is \$250 .

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.com for that same part number reveals that a generic adapter certified to work with a Latitude costs only \$9.69.

EBAY IS A GREAT SOURCE

If you're looking for software, read eBay's instructions on How To Buy Legal Software On An Auction Site . Then see what you can find. There are great deals to be had. For hardware, there are tremendous discounts if you're willing to take the minor risk of buying via auction or direct from an eBay seller.

LOOK FOR DOWNLOAD SOFTWARE

Many software companies offer slight discounts if you'll buy a download only version of their software. In other words, you don't get a DVD and a manual. You just get a downloadable file which installs the software. Of course, you can burn that file to a DVD afterwards so you'll easily be able to re-install it later if necessary.

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

Installation, integration and training can be a significant portion of your overall budget. Keep in mind that there is no reason to limit your search for computer/tech help to your local geographic market. Thanks to things like managed services and tech support software which allows a vendor to take over any computer in your office and fix things without being on-site. The installation and training typically occurs at your office (IT folks with a national practice have no problem visiting your office), but after-care can easily be done remotely. Here's how this can save you money:

FIND AN EXPERT

Your local IT person might be able to read manuals and partially figure out how to install a case management or legal accounting 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 set up correctly. If you look outside your geographic market, you will unquestionably be able to find an expert in that particular program which will take far less time to handle the installation and will do it right. Having to clean up a mess created by someone who tried to handle an installation they didn't understand is always more expensive than having it done right in the first place by someone who may cost a little more.

LESS EXPENSIVE

The market rate for IT help in major metropolitan areas is always 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. For example, we have many clients in L.A., Pasadena and San Diego and it's not just because we're good at what we do. It's also because even including travel expenses, we're often less expensive than IT companies located in those areas.

HIGHER QUALITY HELP

Let me illustrate this with an example. A lawyer from a small town had a file server and was trying to get his new Android smart phone to synchronize wirelessly 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 were able to determine that it wasn't working because his local IT people had failed to install a major service pack on his Windows server. After his local folks got the service pack 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 server and computers.