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Review: CompuLaw Vision

By Norman R. Van Treeck

CompuLaw Vision

www.complaw.com

TechnoScore: 4.2

1 = Lowest Possible Score; 5 = Highest Possible Score

INTRODUCTION

The 2006 Random House Unabridged Dictionary defines “oops” as a term “used to express mild dismay, chagrin, surprise, etc., as at one’s own mistake, a clumsy act, or social blunder.”

This definition will hardly bring any comfort to lawyers who miss a deadline or court date. In fact, this definition doesn’t even begin to cover that sinking, bottomless, black hole in your stomach, blood rushing from your head feeling that will quickly spread over you once you realize that you’ve blown a date. Actually, just thinking about it gives me the willies. Perhaps the terms nightmare or disaster fit better — or better yet: malpractice.

None of this, however, has to happen. The proper use of a calendaring and docketing system like CompuLaw should prevent the utterance of any of the words above.

ABOUT COMPULAW VISION

CompuLaw Vision provides both document control and calendaring software in one integrated package for all size firms. Normally, I would like to quote a price for the product I am reviewing, but in this case the amount of flexibility and specialization provided by CompuLaw for its products makes it impossible. However, you can request a quote for your particular needs from the Web site.

The price for CompuLaw Vision depends on the type of rule sets (purchased separately) that you need for your practice and the back office application that you want to use. Local storage is licensed on a “per timekeeper” basis. SQL server storage is licensed on a “per server” basis for each server that has a copy of the software installed.

Also, all the CompuLaw rule sets that you purchase require annual subscriptions, which must be factored into your budgetary decisions. This feature is nice because when the rules of the court are updated, CompuLaw updates the databases and applies the new rules to all your matters. Additionally, if an attorney or a client wants to know exactly how the dates were calculated, CompuLaw Vision will provide a report detailing the specifics and referencing the rule used to calculate the time.

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CompuLaw claims that its databases are “the most comprehensive, accurate and reliable rules and that they are monitored more closely,

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updated more frequently and utilized more effectively than any other rules-based system on any platform. I cannot verify the veracity of this claim, but our experience has shown that when a rule change comes into effect, it is applied to our cases.

Additionally, CompuLaw offers Deadlines On Demand, a Web-based calendaring system similar to Vision for solos, small offices, or offices that only need these types of services occasionally. Deadlines On Demand prices range from \$5 to \$99 per research result. According to the CompuLaw Web site, the average cost is usually \$29 but can vary depending on the type of research and the jurisdiction.

Both Vision and Deadlines On Demand enable you to view your calendars through a Web browser when you are away from your office. Deadlines On Demand is a Web-based application. Vision, on the other hand, requires that you have your server and firewall settings appropriately configured to access it on the Web.

COMPULAW VISION IN USE

I'm a patent attorney at Sheldon Mak Rose & Anderson in Pasadena, California. Our firm handles both prosecution and litigation related to patents, trademarks, trade secrets, copyright, entertainment, and all forms of intellectual property.

CompuLaw Vision is used both to provide litigation support and prosecution support. Weekly printed calendars, generated by CompuLaw Vision, are distributed to each attorney in the office every Monday morning detailing all upcoming deadlines and short summaries of items due for the current week through the next month. You can tailor these calendars to fit other preferences (i.e. only one week or a whole year, etc.).

I can point to three three features of the current version of CompuLaw Vision as outstanding and helpful:

- Tech support
- Rules
- Jurisdiction Selection Expert

On that note, the three areas that need the most improvement are the very same:

- Tech support
- Rules
- Jurisdiction Selection Expert

TECH SUPPORT

Technical support has been very helpful and generally there is a very short wait to speak to customer support on the phone. If you have your system and firewalls set up correctly, the tech support can assist you directly.

On the down side, the tech people tend to speak "geek". Speaking fluent "geek" myself, I have been called upon several times to interpret what tech support has said. The support personnel at CompuLaw need to realize that for the most part they don't speak to IT people in the firm, but docketing clerks, secretaries, administrative assistants, and even lawyers who may not speak "geek" at all. I'm not sure the customer support personnel realize how intimidating it can be for the person on the other end of the phone.

The CompuLaw customer support that we have received has been far superior to many other vendors.

For example, say someone just erased the current month's calendar — probably not a major issue to fix for technical support at CompuLaw working with a properly installed and backed up system. However, the person at the firm may be experiencing a slight bit of anxiety (see Oops supra). A little less exasperation from tech support and a gentler approach would help calm the caller and make the restoration process easier and faster.

Having said that, I still think that the CompuLaw customer support that we have received has been far superior to many other vendors (are you

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listening Verizon, Dell, Sprint, HP, etc.?). We have always received prompt attention that has never failed to fix, adjust, or mend whatever problem we have experienced in our office.

RULES

For litigation, when the proper key code, documents, and dates are matched up in the database, the application of the rules is simplistic and thorough. The head of our docketing department, who has used the system for almost 10 years, told me that when she is sure that all the correct data and documents have been entered, she's 100 percent confident in the output from CompuLaw Vision once the rules have been applied.

The rules, however, can be too verbose for more experienced attorneys. For example, entering a trial date automatically generates 39 separate calendar events, and the source or reference for each of those events. Also, it isn't easy to turn off basic reminders, like: "you can't serve discovery until after the initial meeting of counsel," which appears in every litigation case. Although this may be very helpful for newer attorneys, more experienced attorneys may consider this reminder unnecessary and would prefer shorter, more direct reminders.

Additionally, the local rule sets, on occasion, have conflicted with other rules. For example, certain rule sets will state "last day to take an action i. / .", but then CompuLaw Vision generally issues in the edict that you will have to check with the judge's office to determine that particular judges preferences.

For example, a CompuLaw Vision report can contain:

{Local Rules 51-1, 51-5} Re jury trial: Last court day to file and serve proposed jury instructions.
*** Objections to be filed and served on or before the first day of trial, unless court permits oral objections.

and

{Judge's Requirement 14} ***Note re jury trial:

Judge XXX may set different deadline for proposed jury instructions.

Considering that you have purchased the local rules, you would hope that the local rules would be as consistent as the other rules.

JURISDICTION SELECTION EXPERT

Probably the most improved feature of CompuLaw Vision is the Jurisdiction Selection Expert selection wizard.

This one feature has increased the productivity and usability of CompuLaw Vision for our docketing department. It enables you to select the document type from a series of drop-down lists.

Most every document that comes to the docketing department can be matched up quickly using the wizard and input into the system. There are, however, certain documents that don't appear on the list which can cause a great amount of frustration and worry for docketing personnel.

For example, a deposition subpoena for a third party witness is not listed in the available documents in the wizard. So what can you do? Enter the document as a deposition date? But then, the only related dates that appear are the last date of service and notice of deposition.

For litigation, when the proper key code, documents, and dates are matched up in the database, the application of the rules is simplistic and thorough.

Clearly, this isn't right. What happens if, under the local rules, you are able to object to the subpoena? Although the dates are entered, are ALL the dates entered. In this case, the system will not tell you. Because the documents and attendant rules are not listed, there is no way that the end user can feel confident that there will be no "oops."

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WISH LIST

Naturally, every end-user has a specific wish list of items they'd love to see included in the next version of any software. So, this is a list of features that we would request:

- More user-friendly upgrades.
- More document types to select from (i.e. third party depositions etc.).
- Attorney specific reminder settings that can be created to reduce the number of reminders sent to a specific attorney (currently, reminder settings can only be globally changed for everyone for each case).
- Integration or importation from other applications.
- A report generation wizard or graphical user interface for creating your own report.

Probably the most improved feature of CompuLaw Vision is the Jurisdiction Selection Expert selection wizard.

The last item, reporting, is a major pet peeve of mine. The report wizard provided in CompuLaw Vision is not very streamlined. Actually, it's downright antiquated. The user needs to know the database fields contained in CompuLaw Vision and how they are linked together.

Why must we add "@newline". Even if you knew all the database fields you then have to type each field into a text box, and unless you put "@newline" between the particular fields correctly, everything will print out on a single line. Of course there is no preview of what your report will look like until after you try it. It is like I am back in 1980 programming in Dbase.

Note to CompuLaw, how about a graphical form with some populated checkboxes, drop down

list boxes, etc. with print preview, or integration with a report maker like Crystal Reports or anything else that would be considered state-of-the-art?

CONCLUSION

Overall, CompuLaw Vision can be an invaluable tool to any attorney or firm that needs to maintain calendars for multiple cases occurring simultaneously. The larger number of cases that you need to keep track of, the more valuable the tools become.

I know that many smaller and solo firms use day planners, Outlook, or other personal information management software, even word processors, to keep track of their client matters and due dates. Although this may be very comfortable, you still run the risk of an "oops" if there is a rule change that you are not aware of or some other change that slips through the cracks.

With technology like CompuLaw Vision and Deadlines On Demand available, it would seem prudent to use tools specifically designed to assist you in your profession.

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COMPULAW'S RESPONSE

We invited CompuLaw to respond to this TechnoFeature. Executive Vice President Lois E. Kalmick responded as follows:

Thank you for your overwhelmingly positive review of our CompuLaw Vision software. We have always appreciated your firm's business.

Just a few comments for clarification:

1. You may not be aware of the many customization features available with our Vision software. You can control what deadlines different parties see and can modify and shorten the rules descriptions (and the updates won't over-write them). Vision is very flexible, offering multiple options for displaying individual calendars as well. Please feel free to contact us directly so we can

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help you use the customization options to better suit your firm's unique preferences.

2. Please note that EVERY event that triggers related events pursuant to a written rule is included in CompuLaw's court rules databases. Users can even add their own customized rules. Please let us know if there is anything else you would like included to the rules sets that you think may be helpful.

3. In regard to reporting options, the vast majority of our customers view their deadlines through one of the following: CompuLaw's Vision Web Portal, Microsoft Outlook, Novell GroupWise, Lotus Notes, or through email reporting. Those that select to print their reports have a variety of options to utilize as well. Please review the CompuLaw Vision Web Portal for additional graphical reporting options that may better suit your needs.

4. We appreciate your feedback on our tech support department. We do strive to understand the level of technology knowledge each user has, and address them accordingly. We have shared your input with our support staff for consideration.

Thank you again for taking the time to share our product with the legal community. Your comments and suggestions are helpful and always welcome.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Norman R. Van Treeck is a registered patent attorney at [Sheldon Mak Rose & Anderson](#) in Pasadena, California, representing clients ranging from startup ventures to Fortune 500 corporations in all aspects of intellectual property. He works closely with sole inventors and in-house counsel to develop effective intellectual property strategies to meet each client's needs and expectations. He uses his expertise in computer science and electronics experience to service high-tech intellectual property clientele and advises clients on protecting their Internet and technology-related businesses.

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