

Peering Into

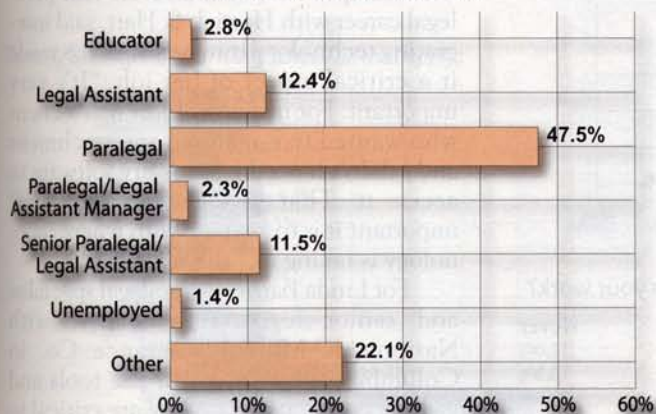
A close-up photograph of a human eye, looking directly at the viewer. The eye is the central focus, with its iris and pupil clearly visible. Overlaid on the image is a light blue grid pattern. Several semi-transparent icons of mobile phones are scattered across the image, including a flip phone on the left, a candy-bar phone in the center, and a slider phone on the right. The overall aesthetic is futuristic and technological.

the Future

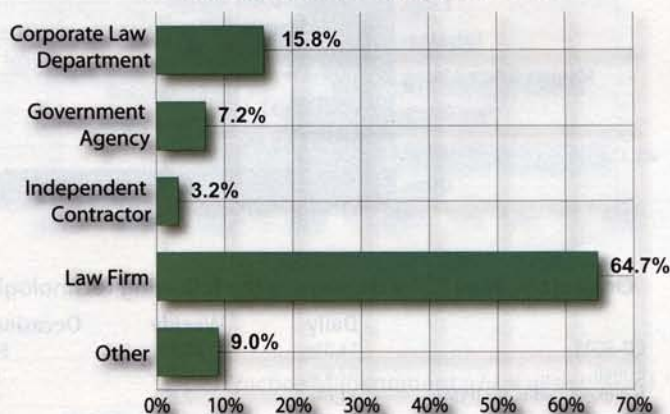
Consider all the gadgets and techno-toys you see pervading your home and workspaces and a distinct picture of the future seems clear. The future will offer countless personal and professional electronic resources designed with the intention of making life easier and more efficient: cell phones that do just about everything — even make phone calls; virtual office spaces that allow you to work remotely and avoid city traffic; mobile computing tools that allow you to essentially take your desk anywhere; Personal Digital Assistants connecting to the Internet and offering Global Positioning Systems as standard fare; affordable video conferencing; document management systems that successfully reduce the amount of paper you use — all limited only by our imaginations. And this future isn't 40 or 50 years off; it might actually be between three and eight years away. With an eye peering toward what the workplace of tomorrow will bring, the paralegals of today must prepare themselves for that not-too-distant future.



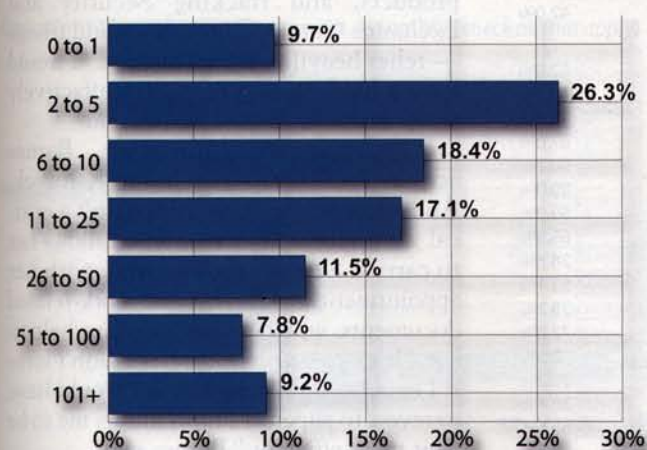
What is your official job title?



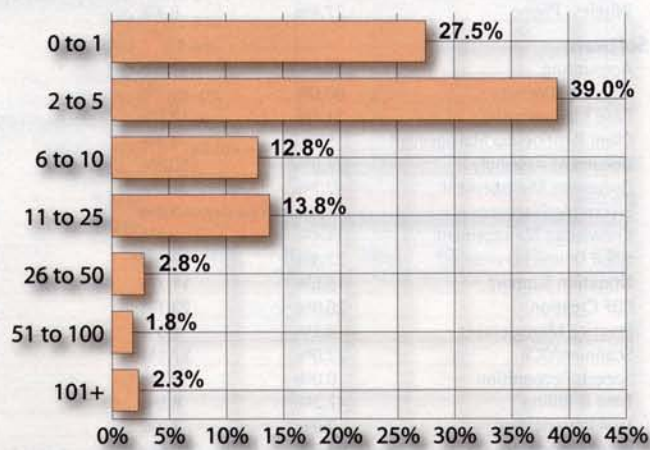
In what environment do you work?



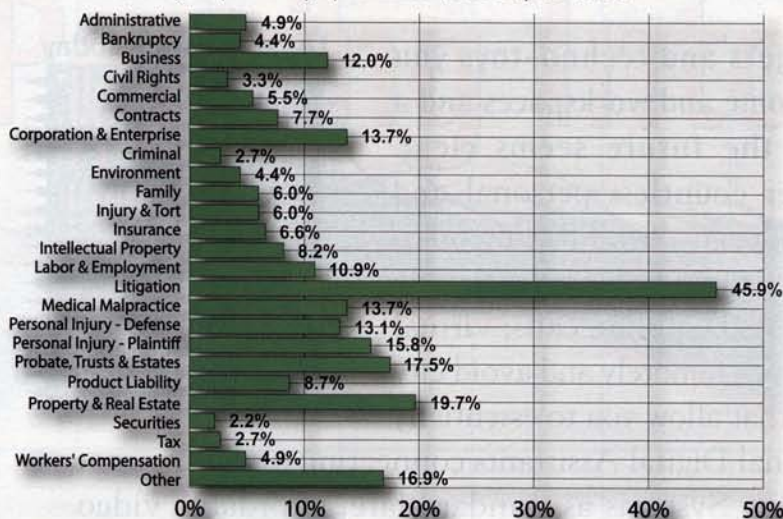
How many attorneys are in your firm or department?



How many paralegals are in your firm or department?



If you work in a law firm setting, in what area(s) of law do you primarily specialize? (select up to three)



If you work in a corporate legal department, in what area(s) of law do you primarily specialize? (select up to three)



On average, how often do you use the following technologies in your work?

	Daily	Weekly	Occasionally	Never
CD-ROM	14.3%	20.5%	54.3%	11.0%
E-mail	97.8%	0.4%	0.9%	0.9%
Handheld Computer (PDA)	11.6%	2.8%	6.0%	79.5%
Internet	95.1%	4.4%	0.4%	0.0%
Laptop Computer	12.8%	7.8%	28.9%	50.5%
Multimedia Equipment	7.0%	5.6%	54.4%	33.0%
Scanner	20.8%	27.6%	36.7%	14.9%
Video Conferencing	0.5%	2.8%	35.3%	61.5%
Wireless Phone	27.4%	6.4%	24.2%	42.0%
Software				
Accounting	24.5%	8.0%	14.6%	52.8%
Calendar/Docket	60.6%	9.7%	12.5%	17.1%
Case Management	31.6%	11.5%	18.7%	38.3%
Client Relationship Management	15.0%	5.8%	12.1%	67.0%
Document Assembly	27.8%	10.5%	11.0%	50.7%
Document Management	42.7%	7.0%	10.8%	39.0%
Electronic Discovery	8.6%	9.0%	23.3%	59.0%
Knowledge Management	14.4%	5.4%	14.4%	65.8%
Legal Online Service	22.3%	19.5%	29.3%	28.8%
Litigation Support	15.5%	11.7%	19.7%	53.1%
PDF Creation	26.9%	23.1%	20.8%	29.2%
Practice Management	9.2%	4.9%	12.1%	73.8%
Scanning/OCR	22.9%	27.1%	29.4%	20.6%
Speech Recognition	0.0%	0.5%	4.3%	95.2%
Time & Billing	47.2%	6.5%	6.9%	39.4%
Trial Presentation	2.9%	7.2%	34.4%	55.5%
Word Processing	92.7%	5.5%	1.4%	0.5%

Tomorrow's Everyday Tools Today

As LAT's 4th Annual Technology Survey results indicate, the legal assistant workforce is keeping pace with technological advancements by better incorporating today's standard electronic workplace tools into their daily lives. Daily Internet use by paralegals rose noticeably in 2004 jumping a little more than 7 percent from LAT's 2003 findings in the same category. In fact, in every category of mainstream technology tools, including video conferencing, e-mail, Personal Digital Assistants and wireless phones among others, paralegals' daily use of such technologies increased significantly.

Many paralegals said they find the increased dominance of technology in their work lives both exciting and somewhat intimidating. "I see it [technology] as exciting because it can make your life so much easier and efficient. I also see it as a little daunting because it's a whole new learning process as well," said Nicole Pierce, a legal assistant in Eau Claire, Wis.

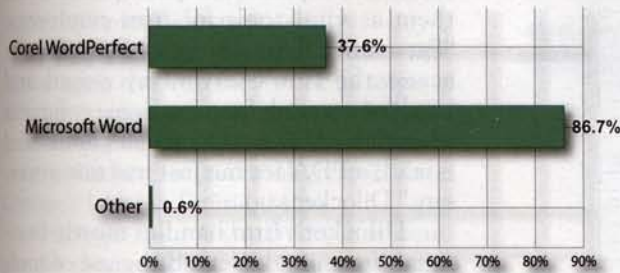
Considering herself about average in her understanding of technology, Pierce, who has spent her entire seven-year paralegal career with Herrick & Hart, said integrating technology into her work has made it a critical aspect of her job. "It's very important. For instance, I just had a client who wanted to e-mail me an attachment and I didn't have the necessary software to access it. That just demonstrates how important it is to keep up with where technology is taking us," she said.

For Linda Barnes, a paralegal specialist and senior registration analyst with Nationwide Mutual Insurance Co. in Columbus, Ohio, many of the tools and gadgets on the market today are critical to her work. She noted that her job — which includes researching the background of mutual funds underlying her company's products, and tracking Security and Exchange Commission rulings and filings — relies heavily on the Internet. "I would have a hard time doing my job effectively without the Internet," Barnes said.

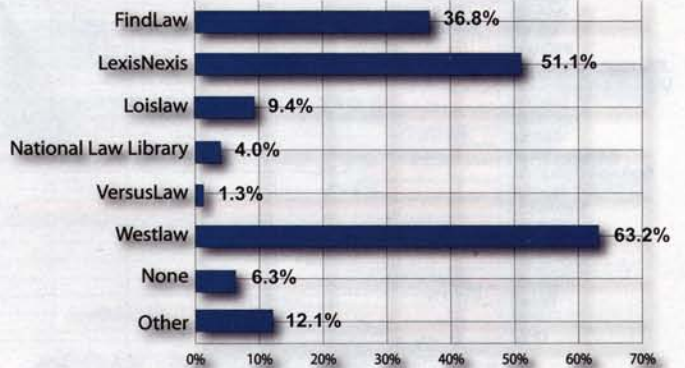
On her own initiative, Barnes acquired a PDA to help her in her work. And while she said the device isn't a critical work tool, the convenience allows her to carry it everywhere and work with her appointments, to-do lists and work-related documents, which is a tremendous help to her. "It's a convenient tool. If I didn't have it I could still do my job, but I would have to revert to paper. It simply allows me to be a bit more efficient," Barnes said.

Applications and Software Usage

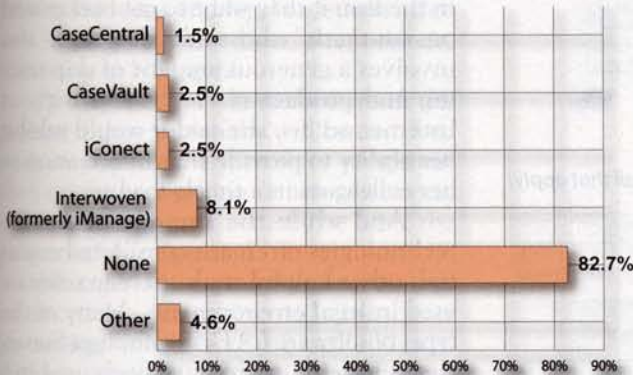
Word Processing (check all that apply)



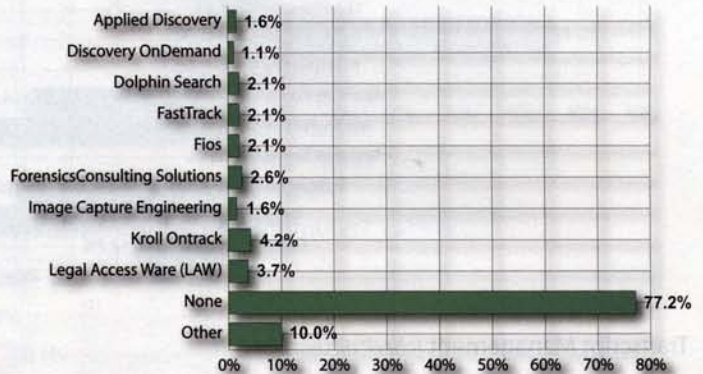
Online Legal Research Service (check all that apply)



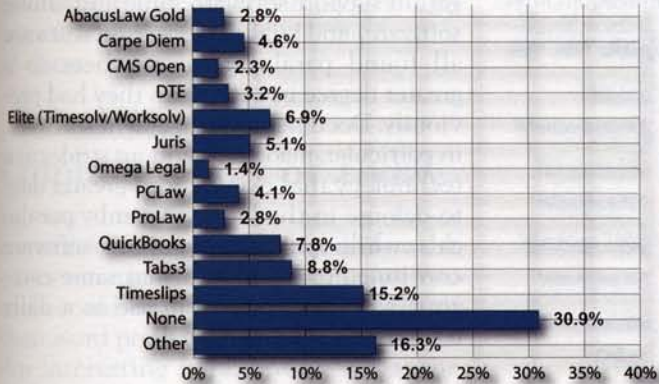
ASP and Web-based Repositories (check all that apply)



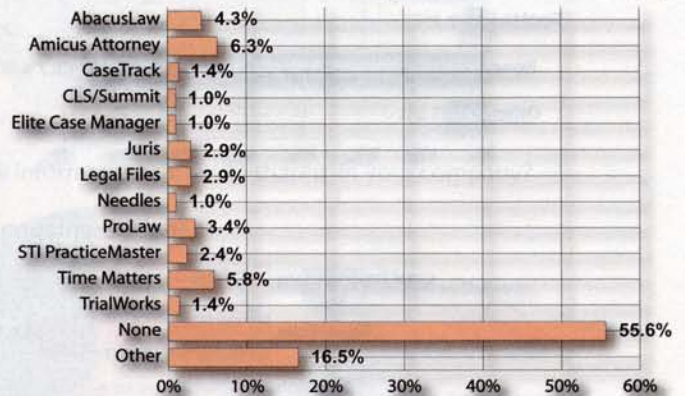
Electronic Discovery (check all that apply)



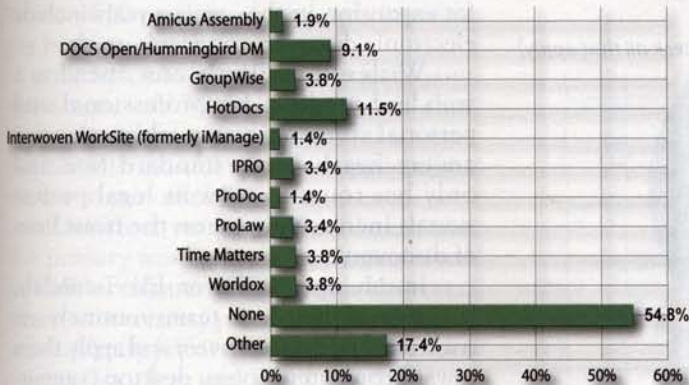
Time & Billing/Accounting (check all that apply)



Case/Practice Management (check all that apply)



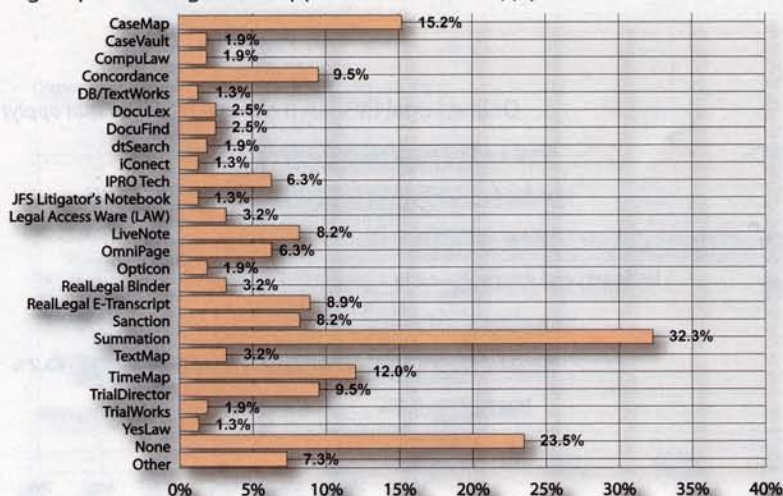
Document Management/Document Assembly (check all that apply)



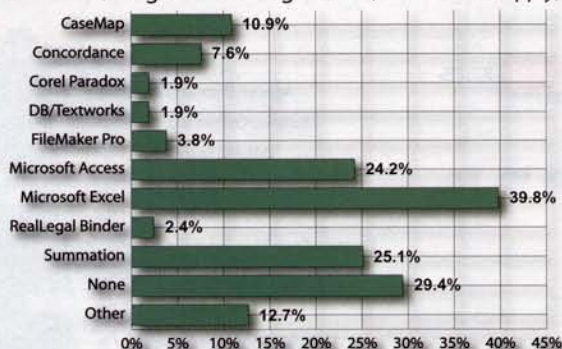
* Vendors receiving less than 1 percent response are not listed separately.

Litigation Support

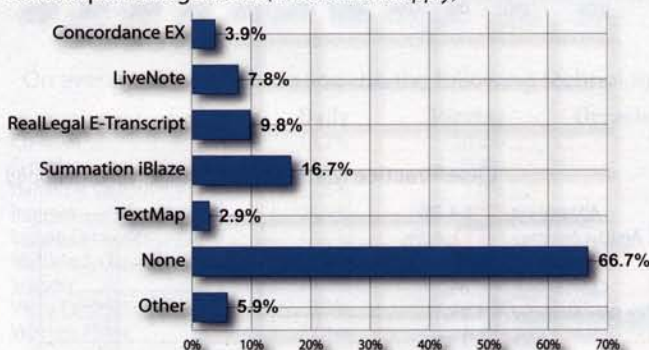
Legal-specific Litigation Support (check all that apply)



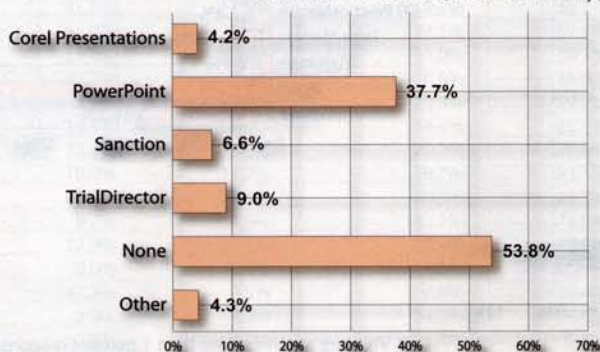
Database/Litigation Management (check all that apply)



Transcript Management (check all that apply)



Trial Presentation (check all that apply)



Kimm Dilocker, a legal assistant with Fitzgerald, Schorr, Barmettler & Brennan in Omaha, Neb., said her firm introduced PDAs at one point, but quickly abandoned them as vital tools for firm employees. "Personally, I live close to work. I can access the firm's server, my e-mail and much of my work from my home computer when I need to. And with cell phones and e-mail, a PDA for me just was not necessary," Dilocker said.

Dilocker's firm handles mostly business clients, and she said the use of tools such as the Internet and e-mail are critical to her job performance.

"I support all of the specialty divisions in the firm if they want to get background on contacts," she said. Her work also involves a generous amount of skip tracing and product research, and without Internet access, she said it would inhibit her ability to provide that information to her colleagues in a timely manner.

And while the Internet and other technologies often are considered essential, other helpful tools include software used in legal environments. Many of the types of software LAT's Technology Survey tracks were found to have been used in a greater capacity in 2004 than in 2003.

Resources such as accounting software, knowledge management tools, litigation support software, time and billing software, and trial presentation software all found paralegals using them to a greater degree in 2004 than they had previously. Document management software, in particular, made tremendous strides as a technology that experienced greater day-to-day use in the legal market by paralegals, while speech recognition software continued to decline in that same category, with no noticeable use as a daily legal resource for paralegals.

Digging for Data

Areas of technology some claim are primed for expansion in the coming years include electronic discovery services.

With e-mail firmly ensconced as a standard medium for professional and personal communication, electronic discovery has become standard fare and only has room to grow as legal professionals increasingly are on the front lines of discovery.

In an age of Enron-like scandals, lawyers and their legal teams routinely use traditional rules of discovery and apply them toward computer servers, desktop computers and laptops. However, considering the

impact of cell phone text messaging, PDA usage and other electronic resources these days, this expanding area of technology-based communication provides even more opportunity for e-discovery.

"For paralegals, electronic discovery is changing the way they work in terms of how they search, sort, gather, view and produce documents," said Kristin Nimsger, vice president of technology for Kroll Ontrack in Eden Prairie, Minn.

Nimsger said e-discovery has completely changed the face of the legal landscape. The majority of cases and other legal matters involving document discovery now incorporate some form of electronic discovery, and legal assistants often are heavily involved in the process, according to Nimsger.

"It depends on where they are in the process if they personally will be involved with any specific e-discovery programs; they might be working in an e-discovery environment but not actually be using the programs," Nimsger said.

Nimsger also noted that technology advancements have presented a number of interesting issues before the legal industry. "Smart phones, iPods, BlackBerrys, portable storage devices — there are so many new technologies out there that potentially offer relevant and discoverable information that could pertain to a legal matter. It's definitely a whole new frontier of electronic discovery."

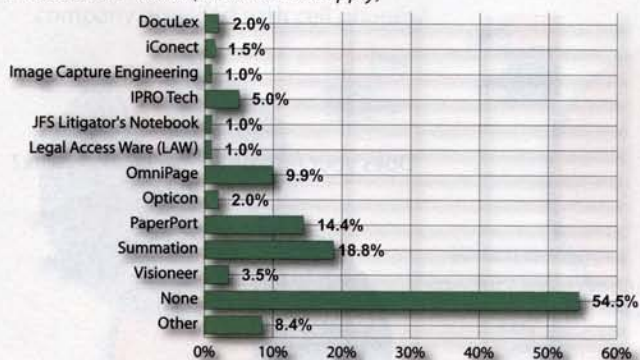
Common Tools of Today

In any market, there are tools or resources commonplace in a daily work environment. In the legal arena, no two tools could be more common or critical than word processing and legal research. An interesting note, however, was the decline of paralegals using Corel WordPerfect in 2004 (6.7 percent), and the increase in legal assistants using Microsoft Word (6.4 percent), following a year of 10 percent-plus growth in usage for both products.

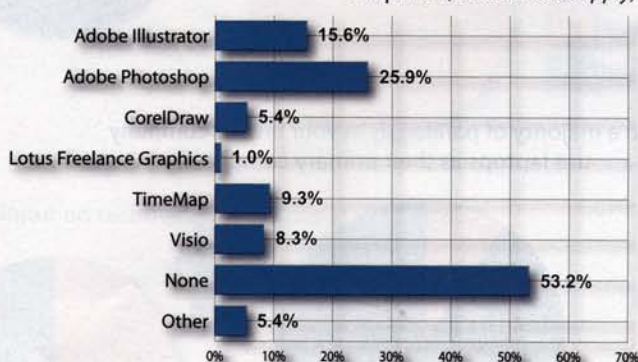
Barnes, who used WordPerfect many years ago, said Word is a program that "provides a better ease of use and is compatible with most of the other applications we use in our office."

Until four years ago, WordPerfect was the primary word processing program used by Odin, Feldman & Pittleman. However, when conversion problems became the norm, Cindy Jeffries, a paralegal with the Fairfax, Va., firm said Word was the obvious choice. "Everyone else uses it — other

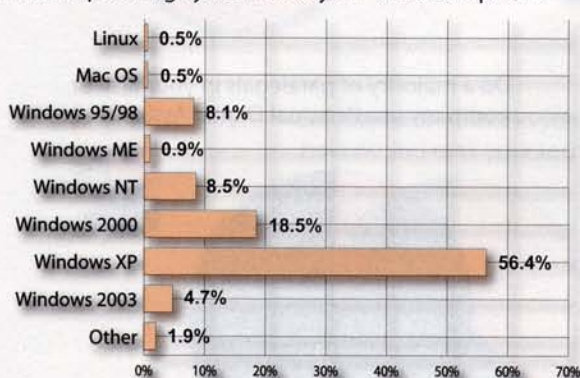
Production Tools (check all that apply)



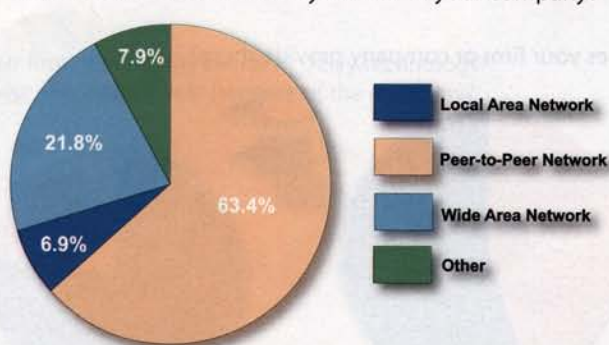
Graphics (check all that apply)



Which operating system is on your work computer?

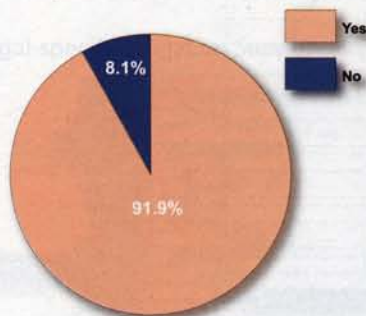


How is information currently shared in your company?

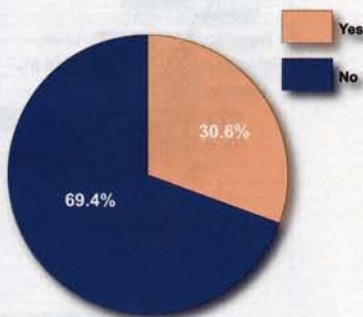


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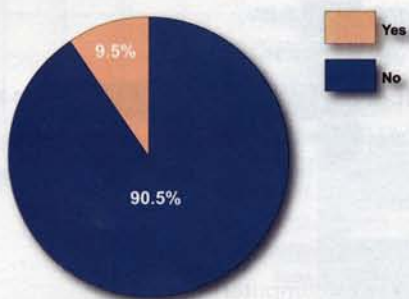
Is your workplace networked?



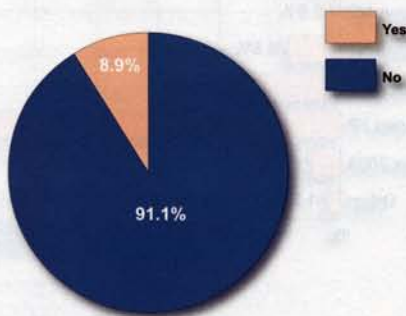
Does your firm use a wireless network?



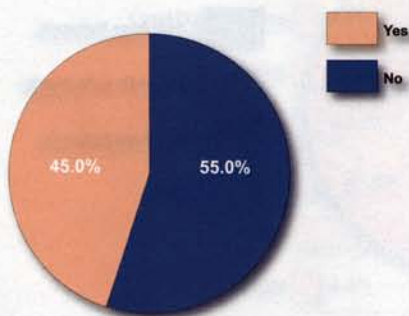
Do a majority of paralegals in your firm or company use laptops as their primary computer?



Do a majority of paralegals in your firm or company use Personal Digital Assistants?



If yes, does your firm or company provide them?



firms, the private sector, clients. It was a natural progression for us to move to Word," she said.

Dilocker said her employer made the switch to Word four years ago when the firm upgraded to Windows XP. "I was a WordPerfect person myself, but since Word came with the Windows upgrade, our firm decided to convert," she said.

Like Jeffries, Dilocker said other firms were using Word and there were occasional conversion issues that prompted the firm's decision. But she said she still misses certain aspects of WordPerfect. "I miss the true Reveal Codes feature. Word tries to show you this, but it's still not as sophisticated as WordPerfect ever was. Beyond that, they are very similar programs," Dilocker said.

While Word and WordPerfect loyalists in the legal community continue to argue the merits of their preferred products, the competition for users between legal research giants LexisNexis and Westlaw remains fierce. Westlaw realized 1.5 percent greater usage by paralegals in 2004, while LexisNexis' growth in the legal assistant market remained static.

Competitor Loislaw, which markets itself as a low-cost alternative to the larger players in the market, continued a three-year trend of positive growth among paralegal users. In 2004, the research service realized a 3.8 percent rate of growth (the largest rate of year-to-year growth in that category) in legal assistant users compared to its showing in *LAT*'s 3rd Annual Technology Survey.

"We are the value player in the market," noted Michael Cronan, director of marketing for Loislaw. Cronan said he attributed the positive gains for Loislaw in *LAT*'s Technology Survey to a recent redesign of the company's Web site, reducing the number of steps involved in navigating the site, as well as adding functionality and content. "Our ease of use really sets us apart," Cronan added.

A Glimpse Toward Tomorrow

As paralegals increasingly move into positions that give them greater authority to make technology purchasing decisions for their employers (59.4 percent of survey respondents said they provide input in their firm's technology decisions — an increase of more than 5 percent compared to 2003), the need for training and knowledge also will increase.

Jeffries, who said she considers herself to have above-average technology understanding, advised paralegals to recognize the use of technology in the legal environment will continue to grow. "Paralegals who have concerns about technology should try small tasks first before trying to tackle complicated software or functions," she said.

For instance, Jeffries recommended first asking your employer's Information Technology department for help. If your firm or company doesn't have an IT department, there are a number of vendors who can teach you certain basic software programs online, either for free or for a fee. A simple Google search will provide you with countless companies offering such services. Also, if you need training in a particular product, try calling the vendor directly. Often, software vendors will provide various training services or advise

Paralegals increasingly are moving into positions that give them greater authority to make technology decisions.

you on how to proceed in learning how to use their products.

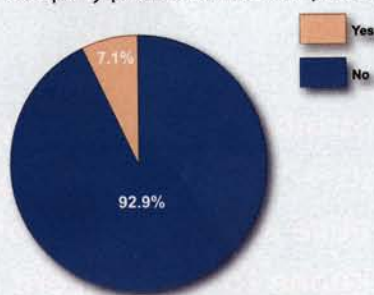
Techno-gadgets also are becoming commonplace on the legal landscape. From basic tools such as cell phones and PDAs to imaging equipment and wireless network devices, legal assistants increasingly are dealing with what some call "professional essentials" and others call "expensive toys." As firms try to reduce paper, increase efficiency and occasionally work on the road, laptops, digital cameras and a bevy of other techno-gadgets will continue to find willing end users in the legal environment.

"In big firms and in many metropolitan areas, I think gadgets are going to become increasingly necessary in the future legal market," Pierce said.

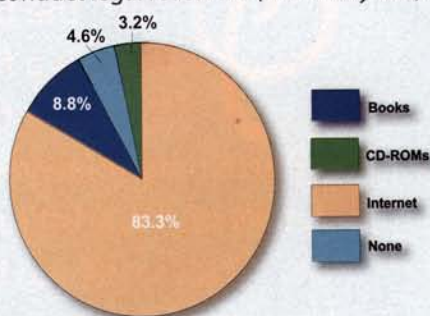
Methodology

LAT's 4th Annual Technology Survey was conducted by mailing a questionnaire to a random, computer-generated sample of 2,000 of the magazine's current subscribers. The resulting data is illustrated in the accompanying charts and includes a margin of error of plus or minus 6.7 percent. Final data was compiled from the 11.3 percent of respondents who completely filled out and returned the survey by the Jan. 21, 2005 deadline. ■

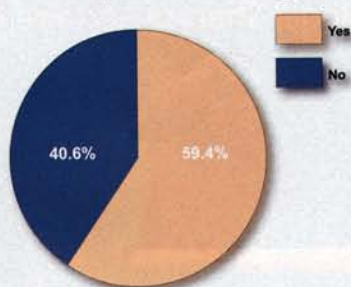
Are paralegals in your firm or company provided with cell phones?



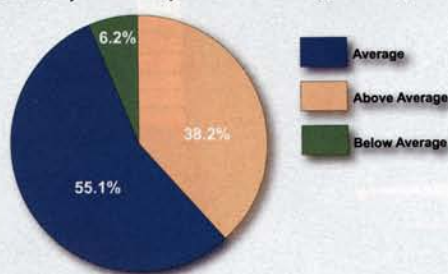
Which resource do you use most to conduct legal research? (select only one)



Do you provide input on technology decisions at your firm?



Compared to others in your firm or department, how do you rank your technological expertise?



Did your firm or company cancel or delay technology purchases in the past year because of the economy?

