

TechnoReview: SmartDraw Legal Solution

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TechnoScore: 4.8 (Rated by 4 Users)

1 = Lowest Possible Score; 5 = Highest Possible Score

www.smartdrawlegal.com

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

Today, we're officially launching TechnoReview - our first new newsletter since 2002! It has taken about five months to get TechnoReview off the ground. It's certainly our most ambitious newsletter to date. I welcome your feedback, good or bad. Please respond [publicly](#) or [privately](#), and point your friends to our [signup page](#). Enjoy! - Neil J. Squillante, Publisher

INTRODUCTION

SmartDraw.com's SmartDraw Legal Solution enables legal professionals without any design expertise to create professional-looking graphics to persuade clients, judges, juries and even opposing counsel. The SmartDraw Legal Solution includes more than 1,000 templates and 50,000 images for accident reconstructions, crime scenes, maps, medical diagrams, Gantt charts, organizational charts, timelines, and more.

Though just a year old, the SmartDraw Legal Solution has the feel of more mature software thanks to the fact that it was built atop SmartDraw, a business graphics program launched in 1994 and now at version 7. According to the company, more than half of the Fortune 500 use SmartDraw.

Pricing for the SmartDraw Legal Solution starts at \$449 with discounts and volume licensing available. You can also find it bundled with other legal software from time to time. It comes with a 30-day money back guarantee.

For this TechnoReview, we interviewed four SmartDraw Legal Solution users who rated it and discussed its use in their practice as well as its pros and cons. What did they think? Read on to find out.

USING THE SMARTDRAW LEGAL SOLUTION TO PROVE MISAPPROPRIATION

In a recent wrongful termination case, Bruce Olson's client asserted that its former employee had engaged in misappropriation of corporate property. To prove this assertion, Olson had to explain the context of some footage captured by his client's surveillance cameras.

Olson, a civil litigation lawyer with Davis & Kuelthau in Green Bay, Wisconsin, felt that if the judge could see a clear layout of the building, and better understand the security camera placement and lines of sight, he would agree that a misappropriation had occurred on the premises.

"Short of putting everybody on a bus and taking them out to the company and walking them through," Olson said, "you had to be able to demonstrate this using some kind of graphic."

Using the SmartDraw Legal Solution, Olson recreated the scene of the alleged misappropriation. In the past, Olson said that he would have had to hire a draftsman at great expense to produce a trial graphic. This time, he opened a SmartDraw Legal Solution template on his computer, clicked and dragged with his mouse, and produced an illustration of the office space in question.

Olson likes the SmartDraw Legal Solution so much he joined SmartDraw.com's Advisory Board (an unpaid position). Among his duties, he advises SmartDraw.com on how to improve future versions of its legal solution.

At the top of his wish list is the ability to create a blank document without being forced to use the available standard templates. Some templates have blank drawings available and some do not. "Sometimes my projects don't fit into the available categories," said Olson. "Selecting from the templates should be an optional not a mandatory way to start. This should be changed in future releases."

Olson also ran into some difficulty when trying to import a client's AutoCAD files. Because the SmartDraw Legal Solution doesn't currently support the latest AutoCAD file format, his client had to convert the files to an older format. Olson would like to see a smart import filter in the next version that would provide information when trying to import an incompatible file format.

That said, Olson praises SmartDraw.com's in-house tech support for helping him figure out the problem. He considers the SmartDraw Legal Solution's free tech support one of its biggest benefits. The fact that it's free suggests that the company is not overwhelmed with support calls. We wish more software companies would provide free support as an incentive to develop intuitive products that rarely require support.

VISUALIZING A REVOCABLE TRUST

Have you ever tried to explain to a client how a revocable trust works in conjunction with a pour-over will? In less than 100 words? Jason Havens prefers charts, and so do his clients.

Havens focuses on estate and charitable gift planning in the Florida panhandle. He has become so good at chart-making with the SmartDraw Legal Solution that SmartDraw.com now includes some of his charts in the software and invited him to serve as an Advisory Board member. His charts feature snappy pictures of homes, dollar bills, and families next to connected boxes labeled according to type - a trust, estate, or charity. After looking at one for a minute, a revocable trust doesn't seem so complicated after all.

"The SmartDraw Legal Solution allows me to do what I want to do and show the client in an easy way. That's where the rubber hits the road for lawyers," Havens said.

Before he started using the SmartDraw Legal Solution, Havens used PowerPoint, but found it too difficult to move objects around and change fonts. For this reason he's especially fond of the SmartDraw Legal Solution's ability to snap objects to a page. He also finds the export function useful when he wants to insert diagrams into Excel, PowerPoint, Visio, or Word documents, or save them as PDF files.

SmartDraw.com has not incorporated all of Havens' submissions into the program. As a result, Havens is lobbying SmartDraw.com to host a community on its Web site for users to upload and share their templates. This way "even if SmartDraw decides not to incorporate someone's template, another user can still find another template that would be useful," he said.

He also has a few quibbles with the program itself. "I sometimes find it difficult to detach objects from an organizational tree," he said. "For example, if we want to move a trust from one part of the plan to another, it's not always easy to do that because the objects are 'snapped' to the workspace. The snapping effect is definitely an advantage, but it can make reconfiguration and changes a bit more difficult at times."

Havens sometimes finds it "challenging" to resize his organizational trees. "SmartDraw does an excellent job of maintaining spatial ratios and relationships among connected objects. However, there are times when we want to manipulate the space within an organizational tree, for example, to show that two trusts are very separate and allow space for text boxes to explain them a bit. Occasionally we run into problems grabbing a line or part of the tree to accomplish this."

As for his wish list, Havens relies so heavily on the SmartDraw Legal Solution, he would like it to share data with case management, document assembly, and other legal-specific programs - perhaps via an API. "That way, I could auto-generate a particular flowchart created with the SmartDraw Legal Solution that includes client-specific information."

FROM BLUEPRINTS AND TRUSTS TO PATENT APPLICATIONS

Al Harrison of Harrison Law Office worked as a computer system designer and software analyst for 15 years before he turned to computer law and intellectual property. As a former engineer, he said that he has "a profound appreciation for good quality software and hardware."

When Harrison files a patent application for computer hardware or software, he creates hierarchical system flow diagrams. "That can get pretty complicated," Harrison said.

Recently, he created a chart for a patent application that used assorted shapes to illustrate different entity relationships - a concept nearly impossible to glean from a narrative description. Harrison needed a diagram. He turned to the SmartDraw Legal Solution.

Harrison uses a lot of lines in his diagrams. As a result, he points to the SmartDraw Legal Solution's drag and drop arrows and lines in the "Connector Bar" as one of his favorite features. He also praises the SmartDraw Legal Solution's "treasure trove of templates" and the 50,000 elements (symbols, images, and other graphics) from which to choose when he builds charts.

"If you make a judicious choice of a proper template it saves you a lot of work and comes out looking like a professional drawing," he said.

Harrison also likes the SmartDraw Legal Solution's integrated tutorials. Whenever you click on a new screen, a tutorial becomes available that explains your options and guides you through a series of screens to the function that you need.

When asked what the SmartDraw Legal Solution could improve, Harrison joked "It does such a good job that you sometimes get the false impression that it can do everything, like illustrate a clandestine security system or fanciful external landscaping." He's currently using one of the office plan templates to design his new office.

Notwithstanding his praise, Harrison does see room for improvement, especially with regard to its file management capabilities. For example, he would like the ability to open several files simultaneously. Equally important, Harrison thinks the SmartDraw Legal Solution should "remember folders and subfolders from which files are retrieved and to which files are saved" to prevent saving files in the wrong location. Finally, Harrison would like the ability to create a "sub-template" from existing templates because he sometimes needs only a portion of a template for his patent illustrations.

LARGE FIRMS LIKE IT TOO

The SmartDraw Legal Solution has also attracted the attention of larger firms. Beverly C. Seche, the Assistant IT manager at New Jersey-based Stark & Stark, oversees 250 users. She has already bought 20 licenses of the SmartDraw Legal Solution, including 10 last week for a group of paralegals clamoring for their own copy.

CONCLUSION

Every once in a while, a product comes along that creates a new category in the legal market. The SmartDraw Legal Solution is such a product - the only illustration software designed from the ground up for lawyers. Given its success, competitors will likely surface, but for the time being, if you need to translate legalese into charts and diagrams, the SmartDraw Legal Solution merits a serious look given its loyal and growing user base. www.smartdrawlegal.com

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