Word vs. WordPerfect

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A few weeks ago the Word vs. WordPerfect issue came up again on the LStech listserv. The question of which word processing program best serves the legal aid community has been discussed regularly on the list. Although legal aid still has some strong WordPerfect adherents, it seems that most legal aid techies now favor Word (or even Open Office or Google). We thought we'd summarize the discussion (with a little bit of added information) by comparing the two programs and discussing some additional considerations.

Corel WordPerfect

Advantages:

- Formatting fixes: The reveal codes feature allows for quick formatting fixes for users comfortable with WordPerfect code conventions. This is especially helpful when collaborating with other users who may not be formatting documents

correctly.

- Specialization: The legal profession is the largest retained market share for WordPefect, and Corel caters to legal professionals with specific tools such as options for pleading numbering, redaction, and a pleading editor.
- Document formatting: Headers and footers are easy to manipulate, and page numbering is independent of footers. This can be especially useful for pleading papers.
- Format conversions: WordPerfect allows for easy conversion to other file types such as PDF. (Although the professional versions of Word 2007 and 2010 allow for easy PDF conversions as well.)

Disadvantages:

- Fewer users: Although WordPerfect retains many users in the legal community, the majority of law firms now use Word. WordPerfect use outside of the legal profession is rare.
- Support costs: WordPerfect adds to support and training overhead. IT staff will likely need to support WordPerfect along with Word and the rest of the Microsoft Office suite. Programs may also have to plan to train new staff who have not been using WordPerfect - or let them use Word instead. Additional support requires additional time and money.
- Technical bent: Reveal codes are clearly designed for users familiar with software coding, a concept with which many lawyers and staff may not be comfortable.
- File corruption risk: File conversion can be problematic. Converting regularly between WordPerfect files and other formats raises the chances of file corruption.
- Corel's business problems: Corel has struggled to compete with Microsoft (and now Google) and has been losing market share for well over a decade. As a result, technology commentators believe WordPerfect is on its last leg. ([Corel Saves Itself, WordPerfect, and CorelDraw from Brink](#), PC World, November 24, 2009)

Microsoft Word

Advantages:

- Inexpensive: Nonprofits can obtain Word for practically free through TechSoup. Although Corel apparently offers nonprofit pricing, the terms of the discount are less clear.
- Trainings are readily available: NTAP offers many low-cost Word trainings targeted to the legal aid community. Unfortunately, NTAP likely won't be offering the same sessions for WordPerfect.
- Familiarity: Most young lawyers and staff have grown up using Word and are most comfortable with that application. Some may come to legal aid with previous training on Styles and other advanced Word features.
- Better collaborative editing: Word features a track changes feature with visual cues that clearly display edits. In contrast, WordPerfect only allows users to compare differences between documents.
- Templates: Word offers extensive templates that deliver pre-formatted documents.
- Integration with other products: Word works effectively with other applications used in the legal aid community, including HotDocs and Windows Speech Recognition software. WordPerfect does feature robust integrate with Dragon Naturally Speaking though.
- File protection: Word offers ore options for protecting files. Authors can prevent users from altering any part of the document or the document's format

Disadvantages:

- Add-ins: Many legal-specific features require locating and installing Microsoft add-ins. For instance, Redaction is a Microsoft add-in rather than a built-in function.
- The "Ribbon": WordPerfect has a static menubar, while Word's menubar (the "ribbon") regularly changes depending on whether you are editing text, a picture, or a table. This can frustrate users.
- Automatic Formatting: Word comes with preset document formatting that many users may find cumbersome and annoying. A key skill in Word is figuring how to undo a lot of the standard Word configuration.

Different Approaches to Using Each Word-Processor

A post to the LSTech list in January emphasized that there are different approaches to using each word processor. Learning how to use the application you have correctly -- whether it is Word or WordPerfect -- makes you a significantly more

effective user: I'm here to tell you that 95% of [the problems users have with Microsoft Word] is in using the program the way that the developers intended. [Word and WordPerfect] are very different. Wordperfect was clearly designed by programmers; you program documents in it, using codes to format. It gives you a high level of control, once you've made the investment of learning the programming language (reveal codes). There is nothing easy about WordPerfect/DOS, but it is very flexible and powerful. Word is designed like a paint program, and anyone who approaches it in a "format as you go" fashion will suffer. The correct way to use Word is to type in all of your text, finalize the wording, and then format. If you add the numbering and headings while you're still making major revisions to the text, you'll have problems.The WordPerfect fans who hate Word the most are the ones who tried to use it the same way they used WordPerfect. If you can relearn word processing, it's really not all that bad.

Peter Campbell, IT Director at [Earthjustice](#)

Further Reading:

- [WordPerfect Universe](#) - an online community of WordPerfect users documenting known issues and providing support.
- [How Word Differs from WordPerfect](#) – an article offering advice for WordPerfect users trying to adapt to Word.
- [WordPerfect versus Word](#) – a worthwhile blog post providing a critical perspective on WordPerfect holdouts in the legal community.

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