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Barron Henley Talks about Saving Money on Technology You Buy

*Posted by Alison Lukan in Uncategorized
Thursday, 5 May 2011 17:29
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I am obsessive about researching purchases and getting the best deal. The Internet is my drug of choice for satisfying this obsession; and the following are a few of my favorite tips you can use when investigating and buying technology for your law office.

Narrowing Down the Choices: 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 players are and Google makes this fairly easy. For example, if you google "desktop scanner", you'll see a list of brands (HP, Visioneer, Fujitsu, Canon & Xerox) and a few models, photos and prices. 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. I'm not recommending that you buy s006Fmething directly from the manufacturer; but it makes sense to use the manufacturer's website to determine the general price range and product functionality.

Finding Reviews: 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 News (www.lawtechnews.com), 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.

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 S1500 (scanner) on PCMag.com. Simply google "scansnap s1500 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.

Getting the Best Price: 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. This will help you when researching the lowest cost vendor. There are many sites that offer price comparisons among vendors. My favorite is Google.com/Products, but other good ones include Shopper.com, Shopzilla.com, Become.com, PriceGrabber.com, StreetPrices.com and Shopping.Yahoo.com. For purposes of illustration, I'm going to use the aforementioned ScanSnap S1500 scanner (part number PA03586-B005) and Google.com/Products. At that site, enter the part number, click the search button and you'll be presented with many options. The first hit shows the scanner and a price of \$407 from 115 stores. Click the Compare Prices button below that. If you've never used this site before, 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. This is very important because 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, click the link on the left side that says "View all 114 online stores" (initially, it will only show you 5). Now click on the Total Price column heading which will sort the list by price (lowest to highest, including shipping costs). Also note the column titled "Condition" because that will tell you if the product you're looking at is refurbished, used or new. I would recommend avoiding refurbished or used products. Also note the "Seller Rating" column because you want to avoid vendors which are not rated, only have a few ratings or who are frequently rated poorly. In this example, the first vendor with a high number of good ratings (8,378) is CostCentral.com. Just click on the CostCentral link and it will take you directly to their web site and the scanner you're researching. In this case, CostCentral is offering the scanner for \$407.80 with free shipping *and* their site tells me that they have 4,296 of them in stock. Always look for a stock indicator because you don't want to order something they don't have now and possibly won't have again for weeks. If a web site doesn't have a stock indicator with the product I'm considering, I simply won't buy it from them even if it's cheaper. It's not worth saving \$5 in exchange for waiting 3 weeks for your product to show up.

Checking Out: 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. 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).