

New Products & Reviews

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MICROLAWYER

\$59.95

Progressive Peripherals, 464 Kalamath Street,
Denver CO 80204, 303-825-4144

A lawyer is a craftsman of words. Every lawyer develops his own collection of favorite ways of crafting words to accomplish specific tasks. These are called form books.

MicroLawyer for the Amiga is a form book on a disk. It is *not* a program: it is a 300K collection of ASCII text files with blank spaces, which the user can load into his wordprocessor and tailor to his needs. The value of *MicroLawyer* is its 200 page spiral-bound manual, which contains all the forms and instructions for filling in the blanks, and the enclosed disk making these forms wordprocessor-ready.

Forms are written in a language known among lawyers as "boilerplate", and among non-lawyers as "legalese". Boilerplate gets used and reused, but never reinvented, because it is known to work. In this sense, *MicroLawyer* is on a firm footing - it gives you working language that ostensibly lets you do what lawyers do. However, the skill and judgement of knowing which forms and what language are appropriate for your transaction take training and experience to develop. Although the forms are fine, the dangers from misuse are great. And if you think you will save on your legal bills by presenting your attorney with a form from *MicroLawyer* already modified by you "for his comment", think again. The attorney will most likely take one of HIS office forms and fill it in with the information from your document. If, however, you are a sophisticated businessman, already used to using boilerplate forms, and have the wherewithal to read these forms carefully for content and sense, *MicroLawyer* will be of great use to you.

Lots of people enter into legal relations and do not reduce these to formal writings. These later turn into "your word against mine" contests in small claims court. To the extent that *MicroLawyer* and programs like it convince people to formalize their legal relations so that disputes can be resolved quickly and cheaply, they are good. To the extent people use them without really reading and understanding them, they are dangerous. If you have enough common sense and can sense when you're getting in deep enough to really need an attorney, I can recommend *MicroLawyer* to you. If not, you may be playing with matches.



WILLMAKER

\$39.95

Nolo Press/Legisoft, 950 Parker Street,
Berkeley CA 94710, 415-549-1976

Nolo Press, the legal self-help publisher, has released *WillMaker* for the C64. This BASIC program on disk, which comes bound in a large and informative paperback book, prompts the user for information and collates it all into a will that it prints out. The user interface is fine, though very slow. You have plenty of opportunity to revise your will, and can go back and change it months later. You can only make one will per disk; to make a will for a different person, you must erase the existing will.

WillMaker is reasonably sophisticated, distinguishing among the laws of various states, but makes a number of assumptions that an attorney would normally discuss with his client. Whereas the attorney will ask, "Do you mean to disinherit your son to whom you have not made a specific gift?" *WillMaker* assumes you do and automatically leaves \$1.00 to children to whom you have not made a specific gift, thus effectively disinheriting them. *WillMaker* automatically adds a "no-contest" clause; this very automation alone is probably cause enough for the clause to be found invalid in the event of an actual will contest.

WillMaker fails to warn the user in sufficiently strong terms not to monkey with the final document it prints out. The arcane doctrine of dependent relative revocation comes into play the second a probate court sees non-signatory pen marks on a typed document. The instructions are often not worded strongly enough: requirements come across as recommendations. Part of the reason for attorneys is to impress upon the testator the formality and legal significance of what he is doing and to provide common sense input. *WillMaker* accomplishes neither.

WillMaker is good in that it focuses the user on what happens in a testamentary document. If the user is really concerned by what he learns he needs to take care of, he can consult an attorney. The manual also gives good advice about avoiding probate.

If you are thinking about drafting a will, but are not sure whether you really need to, this program will focus you on your concerns as a will writer. Just be sure that you approach your will with all the formality and trepidation it merits. Be careful and alert when using this helpful program.

- Jeremy D. Weinstein, attorney at law