



# Everyone Needs a VPN: *Which One & Why?*

*By Trey Peacock, Winning Cases Based On Science & Data For Over 25 Years  
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As the ever-expanding digital sphere encompasses more of our work and personal lives, the struggle to maintain data security and personal privacy has grown more difficult. Tech industry giants, with the notable exception of Apple, appear to be doubling down on the monetization of user data in exchange for free use of apps and services. While this trade off may be welcomed by some, others who deal regularly and heavily with sensitive data and information prefer to prevent their web activity and browsing data from being easily collected and sold by internet service providers, large telecom companies, and tech giants.

Enter...the VPN. A VPN, or virtual private network, creates a secure, encrypted connection between a user's device and another network located elsewhere. Think of it as an encrypted opaque tunnel where others cannot see what you are doing, saying, or sending. With a VPN, users don't have to fear that their online activity will be viewable by others, whether well-intentioned or nefarious. VPNs allow users to protect from the sticky fingers of data collectors and internet sleuths, their business and personal data, their communications, and online activity.

For lawyers in particular, a VPN can be invaluable during high-stress and high-performance events like trial or mediation, and while traveling. When away from the office or when dealing with particularly sensitive documents or information, a VPN can help a frenzied lawyer securely connect to the firm's servers without compromising the security. Whether in a courtroom, an airport, or another firm's office, you should always use a VPN. Airport and other public wifi networks are particularly vulnerable to digital eavesdropping and other types of snooping activity. Regardless of your specific needs, a VPN functions as an extremely helpful, trustworthy, and easy-to-use tool that can improve your personal network and data security.

### **Top 3 VPN Recommendations**

In this article, I'll discuss three of the best VPN services for users, exploring each with a focus on security, speed, price, and specific features. Savvy readers of my column will note I am not promoting the VPN tool that is part of Dashlane, my recommended password manager. While Dashlane's VPN can suffice in a pinch, its speed lags behind competitors and it lacks customization. As such, I have been using and recommend a separate VPN system to all professional users. Be forewarned, however; VPNs are hardly a one-stop-shop for internet security. Though helpful and at times vital, VPNs are best used in tandem with other data-securing practices and tools covered in previous articles: multi-factor authentication on your important accounts, password randomization or use of a password manager, and careful monitoring of your accounts and data to ensure no breach goes unnoticed. Taking control of your online presence is never easy, but with a powerful VPN in hand, and the right information at your fingertips, you will be well on your way.

### **Customization Pick: NordVPN**

First up: NordVPN. The upshot here is **customization**. Arguably the most prominent of the VPN services in this article, NordVPN serves up a bevy of reliable features along with reasonable pricing on long-term contracts and has a great amount of flexibility built into its platform. Though its connectivity speeds are not quite as fast as ExpressVPN's, and its pricing is not as competitive as Surfshark's, NordVPN allows a huge amount of specificity in terms of routing your internet traffic. Offering an eye-catching 5,200+ nodes across 90 different countries, NordVPN gives users the ability to effortlessly "geoshift," i.e., seamlessly hand-pick the destination to which their internet traffic bounces. Not only does this add a barrier against data-collection, it also prevents would-be sleuths from locating you based on the server or "node" your device pings when you use the internet. Additionally, NordVPN's plan allows users to connect up to 6 devices simultaneously, meaning you can use the same plan for multiple devices including laptops, desktop computers, tablets, mobile devices and phones, internet-connected TVs, Amazon Firesticks or Roku TVs. NordVPN also offers an aptly named "Double VPN" feature, which encrypts and reroutes your traffic not once, but twice for double the network security and anonymity. Though its single month pricing may appear steep at \$11.95 per month, NordVPN offers more reasonable long-term pricing in one and two-year terms which bring the average per month cost down to about \$3.30.

### **Budget Pick: Surfshark**

Next up: Surfshark, my **budget pick** for those who prioritize value over power. Surfshark's interface is noticeably more spartan than its two counterparts discussed in this article. It offers little of the customization native to NordVPN, and its speeds falter in comparison to the zippier ExpressVPN. However, its pricing could not be more reasonable, its features work just as promised, and it will be more than sufficient for the casual user whose VPN needs don't extend far past a simple location change, or "geoshift" and video streaming. For those on a tight budget, who don't need the bells and whistles of a higher-tier service, or who just don't want to bother with the learning curve of the other apps, Surfshark is for you. The lower speeds and fewer features likely will go unnoticed. Surfshark allows an unlimited number of devices to be connected to the same account, meaning that for the same low price, you can bounce your data across the globe from as many devices as you like. At the two-year pricing tier, Surfshark's VPN services weigh in at about 2 bucks and change per month. With this service, you can secure your data, gain better access to localized content, and safeguard your location for less than the price of a latte.

### **Professional-Grade Pick: ExpressVPN**

Finally: ExpressVPN, my **professional-grade pick**. ExpressVPN, like its two peer services, fulfills the core competencies of a VPN service but also differentiates itself in two ways: unbeatable network speeds and unparalleled customer service. The lightning-fast connectivity speeds of ExpressVPN are its biggest and best-selling point for professional users looking to use a VPN not only for safeguarding data, but also for large-scale browsing activity and data transfers. If your VPN usage entails the sending and receiving of large files and documents, downloading files from far-flung servers, or remotely accessing a system without undue latency, ExpressVPN has your name written all over it. Since I assume many of the readers of these articles are lawyers who fall into this category, ExpressVPN is my pick for the best VPN service available today. While it only allows 5 simultaneous connected devices per user (one less than NordVPN and a whole lot less than Surfshark), I believe users will find the tradeoff of fewer devices well worth it in exchange for the rapid speeds received in return. ExpressVPN offers 3,000 possible nodes across 94 countries, again a number bested in quantity by NordVPN, but certainly not lacking in quality. Their platform is a breeze to set up on any device and can easily be integrated across platforms in a moment. The newly developed Lightway feature adds an even higher level of speed to the already zippy service, allowing users to channel traffic through ExpressVPN's proprietary connection technology. This service, featuring intense third-party security monitoring and consistently high speeds is a must-have for heavy users who despise the few moments of delay that come with other lesser services. At \$12.95 per month for single-month contracts, ExpressVPN is the most expensive option of the services reviewed here. Though it offers discounts down to \$6.67 per month on year-long contracts, its pricing remains steep—perhaps too steep for some. But, the point remains, this service is best suited to the professional user whose heavy traffic and network needs outweigh the slightly higher cost of this service. I would wager that the extra few dollars per month will ultimately pay off in the time and effort saved by choosing ExpressVPN's service over those of its competitors.

### **Conclusion**

Hopefully after reading this guide, most users will come away with a clear idea of their own internet browsing needs and will be able to easily select one of the above services as a good fit. However, if that is not the case, fret not. The laundry list of features that each of these services offers can be exhausting and overwhelming, especially to someone unaccustomed to dealing with VPNs in the first place. If you find yourself fitting into that mold, my advice is simple: pick any one of them. While different in distinct ways, all three of these VPN services provide top-quality products that offer users the ability to direct internet traffic securely to a chosen node. All of them are safe and reliable. Any one of these services would be better than nothing when it comes to safeguarding your work and personal data. So, pick one now, today, or as soon as possible, and thank me later. You can always change your mind after a few months and switch to a different service if the one you choose doesn't suit you. Not making a choice means you risk compromised data, and you can't change your mind about that once it happens.

## About the Author

*Trey Peacock, a partner at [Susman Godfrey](#), has been winning cases based on science and data for over 25 years. He has also chaired the firm's IT committee for over two decades. [Learn more about Trey here.](#)*