

Technology

The Ultimate Law Office Checklist

A Solo & Small Firm Guide to Essential Practice Technology

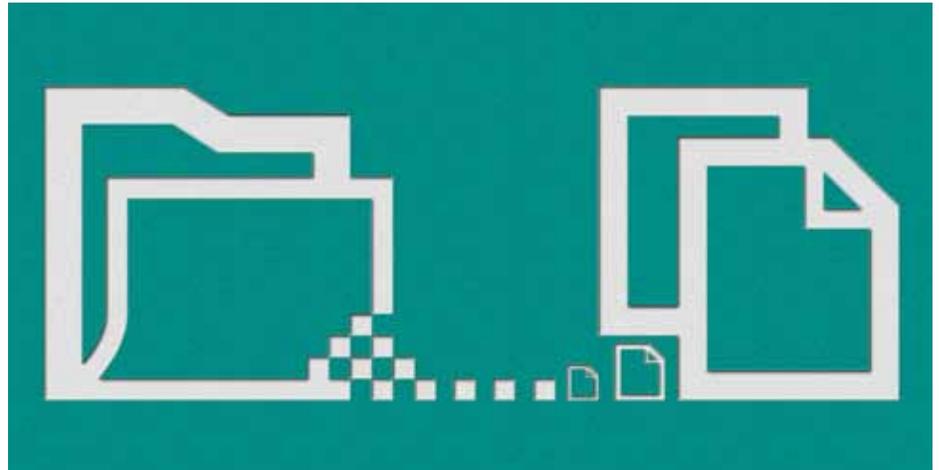
BY MOLLY BARKER GILLIGAN

Technology. Many of us take it for granted. But for many lawyers, especially those who practice in solo and small firms, knowing what technology they need, or where to get it, can become a major project. On the other hand, lawyers in larger and many mid-size firms rely on their IT staffs, who take care of everyone's technology needs, but often these IT professionals know a lot about servers and word processing products, for example, but don't know as much about which products improve, or make a real difference, for practicing attorneys.

Regardless of what size firm a lawyer practices in, it is important for him or her to know and use the technology essential for attorneys. As a practical matter, a well-planned investment in technology and training can pay great dividends. Fortunately, attorneys are well positioned to adopt technology that will streamline their practices. This article serves as a checklist of basic hardware and software required to operate a law firm.

TECHNOLOGY WILL SAVE YOU TIME, MONEY AND PAPER

The initial cost of a product should be balanced against the time-savings it provides. For example, if a software program saves you 15 minutes a day (a good case management system should save you far more time than that), and you bill at \$160 per hour, you're acquiring an additional \$40 per day



(\$200 per week) of billable time. That's more than \$10,000 per year of additional billable time. If your case management software costs \$1,000 per user, and you have two attorneys and two support staff, you'll save \$16,000 the first year you implement it, even more if you bill for your support staff.

In addition, because technology generally reduces the reliance on paper, it saves money on paper, toner, postage and all of the other costs associated with practicing the old-fashioned way. While the particulars of going "paperless" are beyond the scope of this article, the hardware and software discussed here, if properly implemented, will put you on the road to a paperless (or more accurately a "Less Paper") office.

Now let's look at the essentials for a law firm:

COMPUTERS AND MONITORS

While we all know that every office needs a computer, there is an advantage to having up-to-date hardware. That doesn't mean buying a computer every year, but having a plan to replace your hardware every four or five years, more often if you can afford it, will increase overall efficiency because newer computers work faster.

So, when buying a computer, make sure it has sufficient memory (called RAM) and lots of space to store your documents (called hard drive space). Many studies show that having as much RAM as possible improves efficiency because programs run faster and better when they're not competing for limited computer memory. Thus, beware of gearing your purchase of a computer to the minimum requirements for a piece of software.

In addition, don't skimp on monitors.

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The larger the monitor (or by using dual monitors), the more work you will get done with less scrolling. Dual monitors are inexpensive, and the alternative, a 27-inch monitor, is like watching TV, and only costs about \$250.

Finally, if you're in an office without an IT staff, consider purchasing next-business-day onsite support. This way if you have a problem, the service person will be there the next day, and it won't cost you anything. Otherwise, one service call may cost more than you paid for the computer.

SCANNER, COPIER, FAX MACHINE AND PRINTER

These are all essential products for every law office. Your options, however, are enormous. If you are committed to using less paper, a desktop scanner is essential. These scanners have a small footprint that will make your scanned documents searchable, integrate with case management software, and allow you to easily capture (save) every document that comes across your desk.

Because you will be scanning documents, you won't have to make as many copies. Instead, you can print copies, and it is less expensive to print copies from a printer than to copy on a network copier.

An actual fax machine is no longer necessary. In fact, many services make faxing as easy as sending or receiving an email with an attachment. This eliminates the need for an additional phone line, and the problem of the fax running out of paper.

Finally, paper is a reality in the practice of law. To that end, a good printer is essential. A color laser printer with a high volume cartridge is less expensive to maintain, and faster than an inkjet printer.

BACK-UPS

Quite simply, if you aren't backing up your computers and servers regularly (at

least daily!), you are gambling against the odds, because hard drives fail and users accidentally delete or write over important files. Today, it is considered best practices to have *automated* onsite *and* offsite backups. That way, you're protected if your building burns down, or if you lose your Internet connection.

THE CLOUD

It is impossible to discuss lawyers' technology needs without discussing the cloud. Generally speaking, using the cloud means your data is stored somewhere other than on the computers you control in your building. AOL, Gmail, Yahoo!, or Hotmail email are in the cloud, as is any website to which you log in and upload data.

The cloud is essential, if only for email. In today's electronic world, if you aren't using email, or are using a non-business email program (such as AOL or Yahoo!), you are wasting a lot of time. It not only looks more professional to have a hosted domain (the cloud again) permitting you to choose your domain, e.g., @xyzlaw.com, it also makes it easier to use a program such as Microsoft Outlook that is designed to handle the demands of a business. Plus, you save time and money by communicating with clients electronically.

Beyond email programs, there are services that permit you to upload data and store it in the cloud. Programs like Dropbox, SugarSync, and Skydrive give you a certain amount of free storage and will sync across various computers. This has the benefit of permitting you to access the data from anywhere with an internet connection, and protecting your data from any disaster that occurs at your office, however, it also means that someone else has control of your data, and, in some cases, can access that data. This raises issues of confidentiality and duties of care that various bar



What's Missing With Tile

If you're one of those people who constantly loses/misplaces keys, Tile (thetileapp.com) might be just the thing for you. Tiles are postage-stamp sized waterproof squares of plastic that attach to your stuff (keys, remote control, cat) and work with an iOS app to help you locate the missing item.

Tiles are \$19 each or four for about \$50 and have double-sided tape as well as a small cutout for hooking onto a key ring. When you are within a range of 50 to 150 feet of the missing item, a tiny speaker inside each tile emits a beep letting you know you're getting closer. For now, Tile only works with iOS 4S devices (iPhone, iPad) and up thanks to Apple's Bluetooth connectivity.

Tiles last a full year with no need to recharge or replace batteries. The manufacturer will let you know when it's time for new Tiles and will even send you a mailer so you can recycle the old ones. ■

Get the Web on Your Wrist

Samsung's Galaxy Gear watch lets users take photos, track workouts and use an assortment of apps with the Android-powered wearable device.



The watch synchs with Android phones, so users can answer messages and make phone calls. It has 4 gigabytes of memory and 512 megabytes of RAM. When Samsung introduced Galaxy Gear in September, it didn't mention cost or release date. It will, however, be available in lime green, oatmeal beige, wild orange, mocha gray, jet black and rose gold. ■

associations have opined on, and it is worthwhile to spend some time becoming familiar with jurisdiction-specific guidelines. In practice, it is unwise to use the free version of any cloud storage provider to store sensitive data, i.e., client data.

Beyond email and storage, there are legal industry specific software products that operate entirely in the cloud. You do not have to maintain the software on your computer or server; you merely log in via an Internet connection and access your data. Providers generally price this as a subscription service. This model of using the infrastructure and application of a particular provider is called Software as a Service or SaaS. Although there are recurring fees, the SaaS model works well for many practitioners because it reduces IT needs.

Although it is not necessarily a cloud-based technology, the ability to access your office computer remotely is an essential for many practitioners. There are online services such as GoToMyPC or LogMeIn that make this easy to accomplish.

CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE/TIME AND BILLING SOFTWARE

This is as essential as it gets. Lawyers need to know what is happening in their cases and to bill clients for services. While these activities can be accomplished on paper or using spreadsheets, software designed to handle the specific demands of a law office can increase efficiency and ultimately your bottom line. Often, lawyers don't realize that case (or matter) management software and time and billing software are really two distinct products.

Case management software is really your dashboard. It keeps track of clients, deadlines, contacts, to-dos, documents,

and a boatload of other information in one place. It is your virtual filing cabinet. It is the place you go to find out what is happening in any given case.

Time and billing software are relatively self-explanatory – this program tracks how much time you have devoted to each client, and is the software you use to get out the bills, so you can get paid. This software eliminates the need to have handwritten time records and enables you to record your time contemporaneously, rather than trying to figure out how much time you spent on a matter hours or days later, when studies show again and again that you will underestimate your efforts.

There are many products on the market in both categories (case management and time and billing), and they range dramatically in price and capability. It is critical to do some homework before you buy them, because these products are among the most important you will have in your office, and you don't want to have to buy them more than once. Fortunately, there are many products to fit the needs of virtually every office and every budget.

PRODUCTIVITY SOFTWARE

Word, Adobe Acrobat Professional and Outlook are my three essential software programs. Rather than purchasing stand-alone versions of Word and Outlook, the Microsoft Office Suite or the Corel WordPerfect Suite often make more sense and provide spreadsheet, database and presentation software along with word processing and email.

At least one license of Adobe Acrobat Professional is a must-have. Although there are products such as Nuance and Nitro PDF, Adobe Acrobat Professional remains the frontrunner. Using Acrobat (not the free version) will help you dramatically, allowing you to create, edit, annotate, highlight, cut, paste, Bates number and redact information in any PDF document. And those features only skim the surface of the power of Adobe; it is an essential investment to purchase the software and get some training if you truly want to go paperless.

PRACTICE SPECIFIC SOFTWARE

Name the practice area, and there is software to help make your work easier. If you handle estates, there is software that makes it far easier to prepare estate tax and other documents (just consider, does anyone prepare income tax returns manually anymore?). Similarly, workers' compensation attorneys can buy inexpensive software to automate the preparation of the various petitions and other forms that must be filed. Regardless of where your practice takes you, there is generally software that will allow you to do the job faster – and better.

As discussed above, there are many ways to improve your practice's technological capabilities. Most of these options are reasonably priced, can be implemented quickly, and with a relatively moderate amount of training. You can also phase in the use of various products. If you are not using these solutions, you are missing an opportunity to do more with the most precious resource we have, our time. ■

Molly Barker Gilligan (mgilligan@techlawyergy.com) is a legal workflow consultant with Integrated Technology Services, LLC and a practicing attorney with the Law Offices of Daniel J. Siegel, LLC.

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Samsung Galaxy S4



Nokia Lumia 1020

LOOKING FOR A GREAT CAMERA BUT DON'T WANT TO LUG AROUND AN EXTRA DEVICE? The Samsung Galaxy S4 and Nokia Lumia 1020 are more like cameras that happen to be able to make phone calls. And get email. And run mobile apps. You get the picture. Both pack in the megapixels that produce astounding photographs.

FEATURES	SAMSUNG GALAXY S4	NOKIA LUMIA 1020
MEGAPIXELS	13	41
OPERATING SYSTEM	ANDROID 4.2	WINDOWS PHONE 8
WEIGHT	4.49 OUNCES	5.51 OUNCES
DIMENSIONS	5.38" X 2.75" X 0.31"	5.13" X 2.81" X 0.41"
PROCESSOR	1.9 GHZ QUAD CORE	1.5 GHZ DUAL CORE
DISPLAY SIZE	5.0-INCH DIAGONAL	4.5-INCH DIAGONAL
LENS TYPE	4X ZOOM	3X ZOOM
CARRIERS	AT&T, SPRINT, TMOBILE, VERIZON	AT&T
PRICE	\$199 (16GB MODEL)	\$299