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How Document Production Technologies Can Save You Thousands

The legal market remains highly competitive, and firms are constantly searching for ways to continue to produce high-quality work while keeping a keen eye on the bottom line. Legal management professionals understand these challenges as well as anyone else at the firm.

One obvious way to improve service delivery is through adopting new technologies to create efficiencies across all areas of the firm, including the document production function. With document production technologies, firms can create, format, clean, store and retrieve files quickly and consistently. Yet many law firms are understandably reluctant to purchase and implement new technology that won't pay for itself quickly.

Fortunately, there are real numbers and real-life examples of how firms can achieve time and cost savings with document production technology. With this information, law firm managers can demonstrate the return on investment (ROI) for technology that will free up support staff and attorneys alike to improve work quality while saving hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars every year.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF LAW FIRM WORK

Law firms can send out hundreds of documents a day, and support staff devote a great deal of time to ensuring these documents are consistent, compliant and professional-looking. With document production tools and templates, administrators can ensure that everyone in the firm maintains internal quality standards and the firm's brand standards, whether the document is a short memo or a complicated contract.

There are several reasons why now is a particularly good time for law firms to consider document production technologies:

Changing ratios for lawyers and staff: The role of support staff has changed in recent years. Staff members are working for more attorneys, which means they need to do more work for different people who have different work styles and approaches.

Younger attorneys embracing technology: Younger attorneys are also taking on tasks that used to be the sole territory of legal support staff. For example, one younger attorney recently realized that she could format Microsoft Word documents as intuitively as her secretary could. By taking on this task, the lawyer could free the secretary to focus on other areas.

Increasing client expectations: Relationships with clients are also evolving. In the past, clients often believed that law firms were the ultimate experts in a variety of areas, including document production. That is no longer necessarily true. One firm recently discovered that the hard way, when a team working with a government agency failed to implement best practices for document production. The client expressed its disappointment several times. When the firm still failed to deliver the required level of quality, the client demanded a new team.

DEMONSTRATING THE ROI OF THE RIGHT TOOLS

Document production technology can help firms manage with all of these challenges. Along with anecdotal information, there is now quantitative data that will allow legal management professionals to demonstrate the ROI of these types of technologies.

Consider a recent study conducted by BigHand, which looked at the efficiencies gained by using several different types of technologies to augment basic Word functionality. One technology allows for a group of formatting tools that makes it easier to use Microsoft Word functionality like styles, numbering and tables of contents.

According to the survey — which included 175 responses over a six-week period — users reported that the tools saved them between one and four hours of document formatting time per day, compared to using native Microsoft Word. The average time savings amounted to 90 minutes a day, which equates to 376 hours, or 53 full working days, saved per user annually. That works out to an average cost savings of

$7,733.31 per single user, based on the average North American annual salary.

The survey also found impressive savings from the use of a document template management tool. The average respondent created 10 new documents per day. Without using technology, it took an average of 22 minutes to complete each document. With document template management technology, users could cut that time to only seven minutes — a 69 percent reduction. In total, the technology saved users an average of two and a half hours of document production time per day, which equates to 627 hours, or 89 full working days, of additional time per user every year. That is an average annual cost savings of $12,888.85 per single user.

These time and cost savings are averages — some firms have experienced a far more significant ROI. Legal management professionals play a key role in helping their firms adapt to the changing competitive environment. Technology can help administrators achieve real efficiencies and cost savings, which frees them to focus on other areas. And now, administrators can demonstrate significant ROI to make the case for adopting these technologies. ∎

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Judye Carter Releford has worked with the BigHand Create product (formerly known as iCreate) since 1997. Today she is an integral part of the BigHand team as Director of Client Development, where she enjoys participating in international business development efforts, contributing to industry thought leadership and delivering training via weekly webinars.

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