

LEGAL MANAGEMENT

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATORS

Tech Tools for Smarter Document Creation

TIPS FROM AN ALA BUSINESS PARTNER

Creating a legal document can be one of the most time-consuming duties assistants and attorneys must tackle during any given day. However, the need to create legal pleadings, agreements, letters, memos and many more documents remains a critical part of the legal process. Fortunately, the ways in which documents can be created have evolved, so this often-tedious task can be completed much more efficiently. By combining the latest smartphone apps, cloud-based technology, and workflow and speech recognition software, firms can transform the document creation process. A few simple changes can lead to lower overhead, greater efficiency, increased billable hours and cost savings.



SMARTPHONE APPS

Taking advantage of new smartphone apps is one of the quickest ways to ease the document creation process. Most attorneys and staff probably already have the hardware — according to recent research by the International Legal Technology Association, 94 percent of attorneys have smartphones and 37 percent have tablet devices. Smartphone apps allow attorneys to record notes as soon as they leave a meeting or while waiting at an airport. With some apps, assistants can immediately receive the files and other information from the attorneys. This means they can start work right away — there is no need to wait for the attorney to return to the office and dump a pile of tapes off or dock a dictation device. Additionally, this helps the attorneys remain more efficient by turning what was once unproductive downtime into billable hours.

CLOUD-BASED TECHNOLOGY

The cloud can also help with document creation. This can be particularly true for smaller firms that typically lack the robust infrastructure and IT staff of large firms. Documents can be easily shared through the cloud, allowing staff to

collaborate on files and improve workflow. Of course, firms need to be sure that their chosen cloud provider offers the data security features required to protect client information.

WORKFLOW SOFTWARE

Workflow software can also be deployed to create documents more efficiently and keep attorneys and staff from getting overwhelmed. Consider how busy attorneys and their teams are in the days leading up to a trial. Some of the new software tools can indicate which staff may have more

availability to step in and help. Or, when assistants are out sick or on vacation, these tools can help to redirect work or expedite a file that must be dealt with immediately.

DIGITAL DICTATION AND SPEECH-RECOGNITION TOOLS

One of the greatest efficiency enhancers in recent years involves the substantial improvements in digital dictation and speech-recognition software. With the right technology, assistants often can improve efficiency between 50 and 75 percent. Many products are extraordinarily accurate, and they are improving all the time. Unlike with old-fashioned dictation tapes, assistants can split up transcription work when it exists as an electronic file. Multiple transcribers can work together on different sections of a single file, which they can't do when one person must transcribe from a tape.

New technology and processes can relieve staff and attorneys from much of the drudgery of document creation, allowing them to spend more time on strategic work. Instituting change within a law firm can be daunting, so it's helpful to remember that the core ideas behind document creation will remain the same. Equally important, the workflow for the attorney changes very little. The changes will occur through improving tools and efficiencies and driving change behind the scenes.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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