Legal IT in the 21st century

By Richard Hugo-Hamman

So you know how to use the internet and a smartphone, but what are you doing to ensure you are best utilising 21st century technology in your firm?

What clients are looking for today are lawyers who are responsive and have all the information about their case available all the time. The idea that one should need to wait to get back to the office for information is anachronistic. Your competitors will crush you and your firm will face steady inevitable decline if you ignore this.

The success of every law firm has always been dependent on the quality of service provided by their lawyers. And that service, outside of legal skills, is largely dependent on the quality of the information that modern technology can deliver.

Traditionally lawyers were lazy about this. They delegated IT decision making to back office IT and accounting staff using the excuse that they were not 'tech savvy". But times have changed. Every lawyer knows how to use a browser. Every lawyer knows how to use a smartphone. Power has shifted to the service provider, the front office, you, the lawyer, to make these buying decisions.

Most people use smartphones constantly. They expect their lawyer to be able to do the same.

If you run a law firm you don't need a consultant or an IT department to tell you this. You know it.

To choose the right solution for you, it is important to do the research yourself. All systems are not the same but it is the functionality and the content which is far more important than the technology and only you as a lawyer are qualified to assess how a particular product will help you work better.

To achieve a minimum standard for 21st century practice lawyers need:

• Mobility – work from anywhere – even when travelling on a plane.

• Productivity tools – with pressure on charge rates efficiency is essential.

• To provide great client service – competition is fierce and loyalty no longer exists.

• Convenience – it needs to be easy so that your mental focus is on the matter at hand not poor technology.

• Lower cost – the cost of complex servers and expensive IT departments cannot be justified by small law firms; cloud software simplifies your technology, makes your data safer, and is considerably cheaper.

With so much law being practiced out of the office the issue of making accurate attendance and time keeping records has become a major problem for many lawyers who often have to rely on memory to make these records when they get back to the office. This is inaccurate, risky and costly.

Your smartphone should enable you to access all your case information, record time that instantly synchronises with your system anywhere in the world, make file comments, read and compose emails. This aligns the way in which you work with your client's expectations and importantly makes sure that you charge accurately for what you do no matter where you do it because you have accurate time stamped records of all attendances. And this is all done easily on a smartphone without any training needed!

Another benefit is that bad weather does not need to damage productivity any longer – you and your staff can work from wherever you and they are and not waste hundreds of hours a year sitting in bad weather traffic.

When your case management, time recording and legal accounting are all in one elegant solution (not cobbled together from multiple suppliers) record keeping and compliance become a natural consequence of your work. It is cheaper too.

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