

# A View from the Trenches What to Look for when Purchasing Case Management Software

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What to Look for when Purchasing  
Case Management Software**

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*Image from Above The Law website*

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**Practice Management Functions**

- › Monitor your case files
- › Central contact management
- › Coordinating your calendars
- › Delegating and tracking your tasks
- › Managing documents and email
- › Centralize firm's research
- › Timekeeping and Billing
- › Trust and General Accounting

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**Benefits of Implementing  
Practice Management Software**

- › Opportunity to streamline workflow
- › Improve collaboration within firm
- › Better handle on calendar and staff activities
- › Uniform methods for creating, saving and storing information
- › Better delivery of services to clients
- › Improve client communications
- › Attract better clients
- › Streamline timekeeping and billing
- › Better ability to do pro-active marketing

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# A View from the Trenches What to Look for when Purchasing Case Management Software

### Coordinate Your Contacts, Cases and Calendars

- ▶ Shared Contact List allows for emails and targeted marketing
- ▶ Shared Case info let you coordinate services to clients and monitor status
- ▶ Shared calendars lets you manage staff resources more effectively



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### Managing your Files uniformly and with less paper

- ▶ Track your files electronically
- ▶ Connect electronic files and emails to cases
- ▶ Save electronic files and emails to cases
- ▶ Create and manage forms better
- ▶ Set up merges or use templates for "standard" documents



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### Software Options: Practice Management Programs Server Based

- ▶ GENERAL
  - ▶ Time Matters 
  - ▶ Practice Master 
  - ▶ PCLaw
- ▶ FOR SPECIFIC PRACTICES
  - ▶ Needles (Plaintiff's PI) 
  - ▶ CoCounselor (Workers Comp) 

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## A View from the Trenches What to Look for when Purchasing Case Management Software

**Software Options:  
Practice Management Programs  
Cloud Based**

- ▶ LEAP
- ▶ Clio
- ▶ My Case
- ▶ CosmoLex
- ▶ ZolaSuite
- ▶ CenterBase
- ▶ Rocket Matter



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**Cloud or Server Based**

- ▶ How up to date is your server?
- ▶ Are your workstations current?
- ▶ Do you prefer workstation or laptop?
- ▶ Where do you do most of your work?
- ▶ How reliable is your internet in those places?
- ▶ Conversion and retraining
  
- ▶ Product Specific Considerations
  - Interface
  - Functions
  - Your Practice Areas
  - Your Clients

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**Paying for Practice Management Software and Implementation**

- ▶ A single lawyer who
  - bills at \$250 per hour and
  - has a minimum billing increment of .1 hour, and
  - misses recording one billable phone call or
  - one billable e-mail per day or spends unbillable time looking for documents, emails or physical files
- ▶ Loses at least \$20,000 per year

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### Comparing Costs Practice Management Only (no billing or accounting)

- ▶ Compare costs over 3 years
  - Cloud products priced per month
  - Server based priced per year
- Average cloud price \$65/ user/ month = \$780/ yr
- Average server price \$985
- 3 year costs single user
  - Cloud \$2340      Server \$1775
- 3 year costs 5 users
  - Cloud \$11,700      Server \$5815

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### Why Not Use Outlook or Google ?



- ▶ No "matter" component
- ▶ Requires discipline to use consistently
- ▶ Need Exchange Server to share information
- ▶ Not designed for shared resources
- ▶ Can link or sync Outlook or Google records to most practice management systems

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### Use More of Your Practice Management Program

- ▶ Replace pink phone slips with electronic phone messages
- ▶ Manage and create documents and emails
- ▶ Replace "Memos to File" with case notes
- ▶ Use built-in automation tools  
(e.g. Time Matters triggers, court rules)

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# A View from the Trenches What to Look for when Purchasing Case Management Software

## Considerations in Getting Started

- ▶ Automating your practice is a process
- ▶ Can help solve specific problems
- ▶ Tackle “most broken” functions first
- ▶ Document steps
- ▶ Test, measure, refine and test again
- ▶ Add more functions

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## **A View from the Trenches What to Look for when Purchasing Case Management Software**

### **What to look for when purchasing case management software – the Small Firm Perspective by Jaci M. Vigilante**

As a small firm owner who “grew up” as a lawyer in the 80’s, the move to case management software and a paperless office, was a colossal leap of faith. As someone who attended law school in the 80’s, I was one of the first generations of lawyers who received Lexis and Westlaw training in law school so technology was not an unknown. We have come a long way from the time that only support staff had computers on their desks. However, case management software was an entire new concept for me, since we had only previously worked off of a local server with calendaring software. As I considered the idea of case management software, I was faced with the considerations:

Content

Support

Multiplatform capabilities

Costs

Growth

Security

Here are the things that a small or solo firm should consider

#### **Content**

Some case management software is practice specific – which means it is designed specifically for use in personal injury practices, or in trust and estate practices, for example. Other software supports general practice law firms and offers case management that is not specific to any particular area of practice. A small firm must assess its needs to determine which kind of software works best. Consider the case management software your new partner and your new office manager – what skills and attributes do you want those people to bring to the table – those characteristics and skills are what you should be looking for in the software. I had the experience of hiring a skilled secretary who came to us from a criminal practice firm – unfortunately, despite her skills, her background did not lend itself to civil litigation. In some cases, a general practice firm needs software which cuts across the board and should look at software which can be customized across various practice areas. For most small firms, customization is important, because it allows the software to grow with the practice. The areas of customization that are important are billing, document templates, tasks and workflows, and calendaring.

One of the other things we looked for was the ability to communicate with our clients securely and conveniently through our case management software, thus eliminating the need to separately email and correspond with clients. Small firms who are interested in features which allow client access to their files should look for software which permits client login to limited items which are shared with them. This permits the firm to keep track of items shared with the client and eliminated the old “I never got that letter” routine.

#### **Support**

Every system requires some training and getting used to and requires regular maintenance. So you need to know what kind of maintenance and support your system provides. Keep in mind that when you purchase the system you are buying into the company, so you want to know what services are included in technical support and which are not. You also need to know whether and to what level training is included, now and in the future as you may hire new employees.

#### **Multiplatform Capabilities**

It is very important in today’s world where most online content is accessed through mobile devices to have content accessible from multiple locations and on multiple platforms. As a small firm, you should consider that staff, attorneys and even clients will be accessing the case management software through cloud hosting options, which optimize the program on a variety of platforms. It is also important to

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consider what other programs your firm uses (such as Quickbooks, Outlook, Microsoft) and make sure you have a program that integrates well with those programs. In reviewing the options available, look into the manner in which the software syncs with other programs you use, and whether any upgrades will be necessary to ensure smooth compatibility.

### **Cost**

The monetary cost is one consideration, but before we get to that a small firm must first consider the costs of making the wrong choice. In order to understand how a practice management software works for your firm, you must test drive it. Once client information is loaded into any such system, there is a manpower investment as well as an intellectual investment. If it is the wrong fit for your firm, the cost is high because the client information will need to be removed and the search for the right software will continue. The most cost effective approach is to participate in the free trial most packages offer. I suggest starting the free trial with a dummy client (fake case, fake SOL, fake information and documents) and have your staff and yourself try the different bells and whistles to see if the system works for your needs. If not, there is no concern about deleting the information and whether it remains somewhere in the cloud.

When we looked at case management software we were confronted with a variety of options that included (a) purchase with a one-time fee plus annual maintenance and update fees (b) monthly or annual subscription per program or per user or (c) a hybrid of both. We chose a program that is cloud based and we pay per user, with graduated rates for lawyers v. staff. Of course, the purchase of case management software is an investment into the firm and its future, so costs should not be the primary factor. Also, one should look at the monthly subscriptions costs and compare it to the one-time purchase costs. Often the monthly subscription is more costly over time, because the one time purchase is a single outlay of money with smaller annual upgrade fees.

### **Growth**

Small and solo firms sometimes shrink or grow in terms of staff and attorneys. If that is the case for your firm, you may want to consider cloud based software where you pay per seat, and can add or reduce the number of seats at any time. That way you will not be stuck paying for four users, when your firm is down to two. Such a system also allows you to add seats as you need them. This setup also allows you to change passwords or to turn off access the case management software as an administrator by simply terminating someone in the system. This gives an added measure of security.

### **Security**

In today's world of hacking and cybersecurity, you must take measures to secure the confidential, personal and private information in your files. The days of a locked filing cabinet are over. Case management software will replace the filing cabinet, and as a result, you will need to make sure that there is a "lock" on the new cyber filing cabinet. Whether you are using a cloud based software or a server based software, you should confirm that the site is secure.

A good place to compare many different software product is :  
<http://www.capterra.com/law-practice-management-software/>