

Outsourcing Your Legal Document Transcription

Working Smarter in Today's Economy (Part 1)

By Richard Jackson

Overhead costs pose a serious challenge to attorneys in virtually every law practice as they strive to increase revenue and stay competitive. Everything from office space to administrative salaries impact profitability at a time when margins are strained by limited numbers of clients who themselves are seeking to economize. Document production is one of the most expensive, yet most important, administrative functions in both large and small firms.

Offsite, outsourced document transcription affords an immediate and effective alternative solution to the hours of daily documentation required to support a thriving practice. Using an outsourced transcription service to type correspondence, briefs, pleadings, deposition summaries, and other documents frees substantial amounts of time, reduces backlog, lowers overhead, and enables attorneys and staff to be more productive and profitable. And important changes have taken place in the transcription field, making it advantageous to assess how the right transcription solution can benefit every type of law practice.

Law Practice Solutions is a regular feature brought to you by the Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC) of the State Bar of Michigan, featuring articles on practice management for lawyers and their staff. For more resources offered by the PMRC, visit our website at <http://www.michbar.org/pmrc/content.cfm> or call our Help-line at (800) 341-9715 to speak with JoAnn Hathaway or Diane Ebersole, Practice Management Advisors.

What is Outsourced Transcription Today?

Outsourced transcription is an external service that accepts dictated or otherwise recorded material and types it to your specifications. Transcription is not voice or speech recognition, which uses computer software to convert a user's speech into typed text.

Some firms have experience with transcription services using outdated processes—recording dictation onto cassette tapes, delivering those tapes to a typist, and awaiting return of the completed documents. But by choosing the right provider, it is possible to have instant access to your transcription service from the office, home, or while traveling. Attorneys and staff can use any telephone to dictate directly into the provider's system, dictate and upload work using their smartphone or specialized smartphone apps designed just for that purpose, or upload dictation from their desktops, laptops, handheld recorders, or mobile devices. Users can dictate free-form text for pleadings, briefs, correspondence, e-mail content, and many other documents, and have them completed in a fraction of the time it would take to type them in-house. By using templates, users can dictate the content of any standardized document, greatly

reducing the amount of time it typically takes to complete the work. The transcription provider returns completed documents via e-mail or secure pickup from a website. Depending on the provider you choose, your documents can be returned within three hours or less.

Benefits of Outsourced Transcription

Generates Immediate Reductions in Overhead

Using a pay-as-you-go outsourced transcription service, provided they have enough typists to provide consistently fast turnaround, can decrease overhead immediately by reducing the need for in-house administrative personnel. There is no effort or expense required to purchase, develop, integrate, or test new hardware or software, and the attorneys and staff in your practice can start using it quickly with minimal or no training. Look for a provider with no contract, no usage minimums, and no startup costs and you may be able to start saving right away.

Produces Substantial Time Savings

A transcription service allows your attorneys and in-house staff to dedicate more

Important changes have taken place in the transcription field, making it advantageous to assess how the right transcription solution can benefit every type of law practice.

time to critical functions and the specialized work they are hired to perform.

Enables More Work in a Compressed Timeframe

An outsourced transcription service with a large typist base can help you process more work in a shorter amount of time. For example, in preparing for trial you may have several associates working simultaneously on different documents. This can cause backups and delays in your existing administrative pool, possibly requiring you to retain after-hours administrative help. Using a transcription company enables you to send multiple documents for transcription at any time and have those documents produced simultaneously. This capability applies to individual work as well as team scenarios. For example, if an attorney is preparing a lengthy pleading, he or she can dictate a portion of the pleading and send it for transcription. The provider will begin typing the document while the attorney dictates the next portion of the pleading. Continuing in this way, the attorney will have very little lag time between finishing the dictation and receiving the completed transcription.

Makes Individual Attorneys More Productive

How many times does an attorney leave a client interview to rush to the next meeting or court appearance, then to the next, only to end up late at night trying to decipher notes written hours earlier? With a transcription service, that attorney could have instead:

- Left the client meeting
- Called the provider's telephone dictation line from the car while the meeting was still fresh in his or her mind
- Recorded the points from the meeting while referring to handwritten notes
- Received the typewritten notes from the transcription provider via e-mail upon returning to the office

Transcription supports mobility, flexible scheduling, and work-from-home scenarios that are increasingly common.

Many similar scenarios can increase the productivity and timeliness of attorneys' individual work. Transcription also supports mobility, flexible scheduling, and work-from-home scenarios that are increasingly common.

Outsourced Transcription in a Legal Context

Outsourced transcription has many applications in a law-office setting:

1. Typing documents that would otherwise be produced by in-house administrative staff.

Using outsourced transcription enables your office to reduce the number of administrative employees and the associated office space, benefits, human resources overhead, taxes, and other expenses. It also enables your practice to refocus remaining administrative staff on more value-added functions. Examples include:

- Correspondence
- Legal briefs
- Legal pleadings
- In-house memoranda
- Deposition summaries
- Witness interviews

2. Typing attorney notes, summaries, and correspondence that would otherwise be produced by associates and partners.

Attorneys spend hours writing and answering e-mails and providing review comments to associates and paralegals. Since standard dictation is more than twice as fast as typical typing speed, attorneys can use transcription to quickly send the required information for transcription, freeing themselves and other internal staff to do more important tasks. Using outsourced transcription enables your key staff to focus on and bill for the more critical functions of the firm

and generally achieve greater productivity and profitability. Examples include:

- E-mail
- Notes and comments from document reviews
- Meeting transcription
- Instructions and notes to colleagues or subordinates
- Time and billing records
- Post-meeting or post-hearing notes
- Work-from-home or after-hours work
- Trial preparation
- Notes and ideas while away from the office

3. Serving as on-demand supplemental typing services.

Using a 24-hour, on-demand transcription service eliminates the need to retain expensive after-hours help you may or may not end up using. Examples include:

- Temporary help during expected or unexpected spikes in work, such as a large case or trial preparation
- Unplanned absence of regular staff
- Substitute help for scheduled absences such as vacation, maternity leaves, family medical leave, and more

How Much Does It Cost?

Transcription services are generally priced by the hour of recorded dictation, number of typed pages, or number of typed words. Typical fees range from \$4.50 to \$7 per page (about 300 words per page). Prices can be much higher depending on how individual companies use the service, so it is critical to understand the pricing structure when evaluating any potential provider. Common factors that influence pricing include:

- Turnaround times. Some providers offer tiered pricing depending on how soon you need your documents returned.

- Use of off-shore typists. Providers who use less expensive off-shore labor can sometimes offer lower rates.
- Multiple speakers on a dictation versus a single speaker. Rates to transcribe multiple speakers are usually higher.
- Minimum usage or minimum charge requirements. In some cases, providers charge a standard amount for each invoice over and above the charges for the actual transcription. In other cases, there is a recurring monthly charge or an overall minimum usage charge.
- Software licenses or usage fees. Providers may offer software to record and upload dictations using a computer. When evaluating providers, ask if there is a charge to purchase or use the software.
- Quality of audio. Some providers vary their rates based on the quality of the recorded dictation.

This month's column is the first of a two-part series focusing on outsourcing legal document transcription with an emphasis on how it can reduce overhead, save time, and allow attorneys to be more productive. Stay tuned for the second part in next month's Law Practice Solutions column when I'll cover what you should look for when choosing your transcription provider. ■

A version of this article appeared at www.speakwrite.com.



Richard Jackson is president and CEO of SpeakWrite, a 24/7 transcription company with trained legal typists. SpeakWrite's product suite includes Voice to Document, human-powered transcription services that deliver audio-to-document around the clock; SpeakWrite Mobile, for the generation and delivery of dictation and images via smartphone; and SpeakWrite WorkFlow, a digital dictation management tool to increase productivity and simplify management of teams and projects. Find more information at www.speakwrite.com.