Affordable Technology for Small-Firm Productivity

By JoAnn L. Hathaway

S o, you've just passed the bar exam. What's next? Are you planning to start a solo or small firm and want to do it right? This article contains resources, tips, and information to help you be tech savvy and cost conscious as you develop an efficient and profitable law practice.

A common challenge faced by new lawyers or ones transitioning from large practices to smaller ones is figuring out which resources to use. With so many options on the market, vetting them can be daunting, and different types of practices (and practice areas) have different needs. There are also the challenges of keeping up with software upgrades, training, and making sure choices work for your process flow.

Training is instrumental for any resource. Without proper training, return on investment is minimal. Lawyers may think they chose the wrong resource because it isn't working properly or doing the job they had hoped (think software). Then they purchase yet another application or resource, further complicating their processes and increasing frustration.

Maximize your launch

Maximizing efficiency, minimizing downtime, and producing quality work are all goals lawyers strive to achieve. To that end, here are some worthwhile resources for any law practice.

Ruby Receptionists
https://www.callruby.com/

With specific services catering to legal professionals, Ruby's virtual receptionists help you win over clients, capture information, and save money. While you focus on growing your legal practice, they cover your phones.

SpeakWrite
https://speakwrite.com/

Law firms often experience swings in workload that are difficult and expensive to manage. Peak times can push resources and personnel over the limit, while slow periods mean that the cost of underutilized staff erodes profitability.

SpeakWrite can be the solution. With it, you have instant access to unlimited legal typist capacity. Its technology-driven platform manages transcription workflow efficiently; transcriptions are delivered in approximately three hours.

WORDRAKE
https://www.wordrake.com/

Wordiness and legalese are (or should be) a thing of the past. Enter WORDRAKE, professional editing and proofreading software. WORDRAKE tightens, tones, and clarifies your writing with the click of a button. The editor pores over your document, suggesting changes to unclutter and improve unclear phrasing. WORDRAKE gives first drafts the polish of second or third drafts.

Perfectlt
https://intelligentediting.com/

This software includes seven categories of powerful checks for businesses. It looks for consistency of abbreviations, capitalization, house styles, hyphens and dashes, bullets and lists, spelling and typos, numbers, and more.

THEFORMTOOL
https://www.theformtool.com/

This document assembly and automation software is easy to use, powerful, flexible, and affordable. You can create intelligent software in approximately 10 minutes.

Chrometa
https://www.chrometa.com/

Chrometa and similar timekeeping tools track your time as you work on your PC, Mac, or smart devices. No timers to start or stop; it's all done for you and synchronizes with many practice management and billing applications to create and send invoices. Find out where you're losing billable time with this application, which will quickly pay for itself. Plans for up to six users start as low as $19 per month.

SenditCertified
http://www.senditcertified.com/

This secure email solution provides a patented menu of cloud-based services that enable subscribers to send and receive secure email and attachments, store large files, and complete signature-required transactions securely. How many times have you hit the send button on an email and immediately wished you hadn't? SenditCertified provides immediate retrieval and deletion of emails; these features alone are enough to subscribe to this valuable resource.

Practice Management Software
https://tinyurl.com/yd3ru2zz

Practice management software is a technology powerhouse that no law firm should

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> Staying up to date about what's new in the market is a full-time job. There are resources to help you stay current, many of which are available through the State Bar of Michigan Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC).

be without. That said, many attorneys have only a vague understanding of practice management software and how instrumental it can be for managing their firms and clients.

Often referred to as "front-office software," practice management software is a matter-centric application—everything related to a particular matter emanates from the information entered into the system. Many attorneys house their matters in redrope folders with manila folders inside segregating documents and pleadings by type. Think of this software as a red rope in a computer; it provides digital access to all the information (and much more) in the blink of an eye.

While there are many practice management software applications, three popular options include Clio, MyCase, and Rocket Matter. The State Bar of Michigan has a membership benefit for each of these applications for discounted subscription rates. For details, visit <https://www.michbar.org/programs/home#pm>.

The mobile lawyer: Maximizing your mobile experience

The ability to work on the go is a must for lawyers who want to better serve their clients and be as profitable as possible. Maintaining an arsenal of mobile resources can help ensure mobile productivity that benefits the lawyer and his or her clients.

Power Strips

A good power strip is a necessity for every road warrior. A good choice is the Bestek Advantage (https://tinyurl.com/y3buyn6r), which includes two wide-spaced, surge-protected AC outlets and two USB ports,

and can charge four devices simultaneously. With its compact design, it easily fits into luggage and briefcases.

Portable Power

The mobile lawyer isn't always able to access an outlet. The Anker PowerCore 20100 (https://tinyurl.com/yyzv4sy6) is a high-speed, long-lasting portable charger that is good for seven phone charges and two iPad mini charges, and can accommodate dual-device charging.

Hotspot

Don't go on the road without a hotspot. The Verizon Jetpack 4GLTE Mobile Hotspot AC791L (https://tinyurl.com/y2vwp5rb) provides fast, secure Wi-Fi across town or around the world. This powerhouse is good for 24 hours, connects to 15 Wi-Fi enabled devices, and can also charge a smartphone.

Organizers

Eliminate the embarrassment and hassle of trying to untangle a mass of cords with the aid of a cable organizer. It also helps with organizing and identifying which cord is associated with which device. A popular, inexpensive choice is the SanHoo Universal Cable Organizer (https://tinyurl.com/y3koqjds).

Printers

There are several good mobile printers on the market, and if you ask which one is best, you'll most likely get as many different answers as people you ask. Individuals have different needs, so their opinions will vary. Determine your mobile printing needs before you make a purchase. Do you need speed and color printing? Do you need

to connect to wireless networks and mobile devices?

The Epson Workforce WF-100 (https://tinyurl.com/yat73z2m) is geared toward business professionals and provides for a variety of connection methods. It's a solid choice for mobile lawyers.

Scanners

If you purchase a printer with the ability to scan, you won't need a mobile scanner. If you find you need one, you can't go wrong with a Fujitsu ScanSnap iX100 (https://tinyurl.com/y2jp3e5y). It scans a color document in about five seconds and can scan wirelessly to iOS and Android mobile devices, PCs, and Macs. It corrects skews, removes blank pages, auto-detects previously accessed Wi-Fi networks, and more. You need to feed pages one at a time, but it's a mobile scanner that's hard to beat.

These are just a few handy items for mobile lawyers. Stocking your arsenal with these core resources will help ensure you are efficient, prepared, and able to assist clients wherever you are.

Keeping up to date: The Practice Management Resource Center

Staying up to date about what's new in the market is a full-time job. There are resources to help you stay current, many of which are available through the State Bar of Michigan Practice Management Resource Center (PMRC). The PMRC offers blogs, a practice-management helpline, newsletters, libraries, podcasts, webinars, videos, website resources, and more. Visit the PMRC website at www.michbar.org/pmrc/content for details on how it can help you meet your practice management needs. ∎

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