# Does Practice Management Software Make Your Firm More Flexible?

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As law firms prepare to turn the corner and head back to normalcy, flexibility is playing a major role in the execution of their plans. Return-to-office announcements from the nation's largest law firms range from a 100% workforce return to continued remote working arrangements, but they all include a higher level of flexibility than traditionally seen within the legal community.

Over the last decade, remote working arrangements became quite commonplace within corporate America. A growing number of companies began offering their workers the opportunity to work from home, recognizing the financial savings and employee satisfaction that resulted from these arrangements. Even federal and state government agencies made significant strides towards remote work in recent years. Yet, even as these changes took hold, many members of the legal community routinely resisted the widespread move to remote work preferring a more traditional view of the legal practice.

While recent changes are partially driven by the pandemic, they also stem from evolving attitudes about what law firm offices should look like. An increasing number of law firm leaders and administrators have recognized the value in accommodating at least some level of flexibility within the workplace. They found that productivity actually increased instead of the decline that they anticipated. For years, law firm leaders centered their objections to remote work on declined productivity assumptions, but for some, seeing it in practice debunked that theory.

In addition, a growing number of law firm employees feel more comfortable voicing their preferences for flexible working conditions. With negative views that clouded remote working arrangements, many firm members felt it best not to make these requests, even though they wanted these options. Now that real-world experiences have changed leadership attitudes, attorneys and support staff feel empowered to request and advocate for greater flexibility.

Lastly, many law firms have enjoyed the overhead savings that resulted from reduced in-office use. Leaders are increasingly questioning whether, and to what extent, physical office space will be necessary for their firms to sustain going forward.

In a recently published email sent to employees by one of the Am Law 100 ranking law firms, a co-managing partner stated, "A key takeaway from the survey we conducted last year is that you want flexibility in where you work. We are working on the parameters and protocols for our return, including developing a flexible work policy that will address the expected number of days in the office per week and many other details. We are planning for our attorneys to be able to

work some days in the office and some days remotely on average each week. Where roles and responsibilities permit for our staff, we are also developing flexibility arrangements."

This sentiment echoes across the legal industry, indicating a major shift from traditional law firm standards. The following are direct quotes from return-to-office policies being put forth by some of the largest law firms in the country:

- Remote work from home is still on the table at the firm, but in-person interaction will be highlighted
- The firm will be taking a flexible approach to working from our offices, and does not expect the five-day, in-office workweek to return; lawyers are encouraged to be in the office at least three days per week
- The ultimate goal of having as many offices as possible return to normal occupancy levels, with appropriate flexibility, and office as the primary workspace
- A hybrid work model that will include at least three days of in-office work, but remote work flexibility will be part of our work routine going forward
- The firm will not require its attorneys to return to the office in 2021

From the minimization of in-person interaction to the continuation of 100% remote work, these variations exemplify the different perspectives and interests of law firm leaders. The traditional law office environment will continue to look very different over the coming months.

## Law Firm Administrators Need Practice Management Tools in A Flexible Work Environment

Law firm administrators will most certainly bear the lion's share of responsibility as firms implement these flexible work arrangements. To do this in an effective manner, they need technologies that support firm members, promote consistency in the face of transformation, and ensure the uninterrupted continuance of client services.

Practice management software offers law firms the resources and capabilities they need to continue operating at a high level in spite of various phases of office returns. As many firms moved to remote work arrangements in 2020, cloud computing and storage were integral tools for the continuation of business through these transitions. These same technologies will also drive firms into their new normal in the months and years to come.

Here are some ways that legal practice management will help law firm administrators meet the needs of a flexible work environment:

- Greater Accessibility – Cloud-based legal practice management allows firm members to access necessary files and data from wherever they choose to work. This is extremely important for arrangements where firm members will work from the office on some days of the week and remotely on others.

Many of these cloud-based technologies include document storage, which minimizes the need to transport physical files back and forth between work locations. It also makes remote collaboration seamless, which is especially useful with firm members working staggered in-office schedules.

- Matter Management – Some legal practice management platforms include matter management

tools to organize and streamline the countless details related to a single matter. These resources help law firm administrators and members maintain client information, case documents, call logs, task lists, and notes in one structured system.

With custom, real-time dashboards, firm administrators and members can quickly view a variety of case details. From matter ledgers with complete billing histories to matter budgets with customizable budget alerts, these tools help law firms stay on top of client matter details even in the midst of transitioning back to the office.

- [Calendaring](#) – Even under the most ideal circumstances, calendar errors can cause serious problems for law firms. With these pending flexibilities, administrators need to implement calendaring systems that keep the entire firm organized and on track to handle matters in a timely manner.

With court rule and deadline management tools, firm members no longer have to rely on the manual calculation of court rules and deadlines. Court date calendaring systems calculate litigation, transaction, or administrative deadlines and automatically add them to the firm calendar. This promotes greater organization, planning, and accountability throughout the entire firm.

## The Takeaway

As law firms announce their respective return-to-office strategies, flexibility appears to be a common theme. To best handle these transitions, law firm administrators and members need a comprehensive practice management system that promotes consistency while minimizing potential roadblocks.