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How to Know If Your Legal Software Is Too Complex?

developers · Wednesday, December 21st, 2022

The pandemic taught us that tech not only helps us do our jobs better, but it also helps us become stronger advocates for our clients. Attorneys shifted to attending court hearings and holding negotiations on online platforms, including Zoom and Microsoft Teams, and began using cloud-based solutions to streamline access to information and to promote real-time collaboration.

As the demand for legal software continues to increase, so too will the number of questions about what would make legal tech too complex. In this article, we'll discuss what can make software too complicated, how to identify the difference between essential and accidental complexity, and, most importantly, how to avoid software that might not fit your law firm's needs.

Why is software sometimes too complex?

The right legal software uses advanced technology to improve law firms' efficiency and help them optimize their day-to-day legal practice. It should also provide a user-friendly, intuitive experience.

However, this is not always the case. Sometimes software is more complicated than it needs to be. Let's review some reasons why.

1. Overengineered and limited flexibility

In software development, there's no single right way to do things. However, there are many complex ways to do things that might otherwise be simple. If your software is designed to solve problems you don't have — especially if the extra bells and whistles on software don't get to the heart of the problems that your law firm does have — it can make legal work more complicated. Sometimes these complexities make software harder to use and limit personalization that allows software to match users' needs.

If your legal software doesn't take into account usability or has a ton of features that aren't relevant to its purpose, then it might be overengineered. And if your team is complaining about your software, requiring extra hours to understand how to use the platform(s), or taking too long to do basic tasks, it's a sign that you might need a simpler legal software solution.

The key isn't for your legal software to be everything to everyone. It's for your software to solve the problems that you actually need to solve.

2. Multiple platforms and multiple devices

A lot of legal software platforms tackle a single problem. There's nothing inherently wrong with that.

But when a law firm has to use 10 pieces of software, each of which serves a singular function, to accomplish something that it could accomplish with a single cloud-based platform, it makes it harder for lawyers to get work done. That's especially true if data is stored in multiple places without any integrations. When this happens, users have to access different platforms to find the information they need.

What's even worse is when law firms choose tools that don't talk to each other, especially if those tools aren't easy to use remotely. With more lawyers engaging in mobile work, platforms need to work together and be accessible from any device.

Multiple systems also create additional data security risks. Every software platform that you add to a law firm's technology ecosystem adds a new layer of complexity that your law firm's IT team will need to manage to protect your [client information](#) from unauthorized access and comply with state data protection laws and regulations (e.g., New York's [SHIELD law](#)). Plus, your IT team will have to ensure it implements every software update for every platform, especially if these systems aren't built on a [secure cloud infrastructure](#) that automatically deploys the latest security updates.

What is the difference between essential vs. too complex?

Often, the problems that arise in practice are complex and require creative thinking. The same is true, of course, for software engineering. The key is keeping an eye on accidental complexity.

“Essential” complexity refers to the tools that are required to do the job the software is designed to do. Without them, the software or platform would lack necessary elements or be unreliable. “Accidental” complexity is what can happen when people are trying to “force” software to work, when taking a hodgepodge approach, or when adopting new technologies or tools without appropriate planning. Accidental or unintentional complexity can hurt the user experience by making the tech harder to use or more difficult to understand. For your law firm, this might mean difficulty using certain integrations, confusion about where to save certain files, or even a user interface that isn't intuitive.

How can I avoid software that might be too complex? How can I flag this early?

Your law firm should thoroughly research the capabilities of any software provider and how that aligns with your expectations. This means looking into the provider and any integration partners to see how long they've been in business, [what their customer support looks like](#), and how they will handle your law firm's data. Important questions to ask include how your documents and data might be accessed, saved, and backed up. Confirm that the answers are compatible with the workflows your law firm has or ensure that your staff and timekeepers are ready and willing to learn.

Learning about the functionality of the software itself is also key. Do you prefer built-in features or integrations? How about a blended approach? [We recommend a comprehensive software platform that allows for add-ons and customization to suit your law firm's individual needs.](#) Depending on

your law firm's practice areas, you may need some tools more than others. Ensure that the software you select provides customizable tools and functionalities tailored to your firm's needs and wants. Knowing your top priorities for the software is important to avoid software that is too complex for what you need. If your law firm is focused on revamping your billing and collections process, make sure that you like and can use the software you select. The same goes for your firm's intake practice or document management. What's most important in your software is whatever is most important to your firm.

Last, we recommend [scheduling a demo](#) or taking advantage of a free trial of the software that your law firm is considering. Functionality and the user experience vary drastically between software, so it's essential to test it out. Your goal is to make sure that those using the software most often enjoy using it. If they don't, you won't see any return on your investment, and your software will quickly become obsolete.

If you keep your firm's priorities and needs top of mind, you won't choose software that's too complex for your users.

How can my law firm get started with the right legal software?

Lacking reliable software or using software that is too complex can have a ripple effect throughout a matter's lifecycle — and on your law firm's bottom line. The profitability and productivity of your timekeepers and the entire firm may suffer. That's why it's important to start putting the proper systems and software in place to handle matters effectively and efficiently.

Centerbase's comprehensive platform consisting of financial, timekeeping, document, and practice management tools puts everything you need to know about every matter at your fingertips. And what's better is that you'll be able to stop worrying about details that you're forgetting or those sticky notes cluttering your desk with reminders of the tasks you need to complete.

In short, we can help your law firm reach its full potential with software that is customized to your firm's needs. Sign up for a [free demo](#) of our legal practice management software and learn more about how our platform can help you streamline your law firm's operations.

This entry was posted on Wednesday, December 21st, 2022 at 12:00 am and is filed under [Cloud Technology](#), [General](#)

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