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Is Your Law Firm Effectively Maximizing Its Current Legal Technology?

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It has been a challenging couple of years for the legal industry, requiring law firms to make unprecedented administrative shifts.

For many firms, business interruptions resulted in financial challenges that left leaders hesitant to invest in additional technologies. Far too many uncertainties remain and leaders recognize a need to be cautious with spending decisions.

Even with this reluctance, you can leverage legal technologies to your advantage by taking a critical look at your current usage and assessing what will be needed in the foreseeable future.

Every firm, regardless of size, can maximize its current technologies, but it takes strategy and analysis to make that happen. With evaluation, training, identification, and planning, you can get the most out of your current systems.

Evaluation

The first step for maximizing your current law firm technology is an evaluation of existing systems and how they are benefitting your firm.

Many firms implement technologies with a "set-it-and-forget-it" mentality without an ongoing evaluation of utilization, but important questions need to be asked on a regular basis, such as:

- *Are all features being utilized?*

Technologies like legal practice management and legal billing software offer users a variety of features related to various aspects of law firm management. They also routinely introduce new features as innovations develop. One legal practice management software may include more than 20 features relating to everything from timekeeping to document management. With so many options, it's quite possible that many law firms only use a portion of what these platforms have to offer.

You should review each of your current technologies and their individual features. That information should then be compared with your firm's needs to ensure that each technology is being utilized to its fullest potential. Upon doing so, administrators may ultimately find no use for additional technologies.

- *Are staff members adequately utilizing technologies?*

Another boundary to maximizing current legal technologies is a lack of usage among law firm personnel. There can be any number of reasons behind these discrepancies, including a lack of proper training, discomfort with new technologies, or an unwillingness to change traditional processes. Whatever the cause, firms can maximize current technologies by identifying usage obstacles and addressing them.

- *Which technologies can be eliminated?*

A technology analysis may reveal that some platforms are no longer vital to a law firm's success. For instance, a recently implemented software may offer a feature that law firms once relied upon another platform to provide, making the older software no longer necessary.

Analysis may also reveal that a firm is still paying for technology acquired years ago even though it is no longer being utilized by firm members. This may occur because payments are automated or the firm administrator may routinely approve payment with no knowledge that staff members have stopped using the system.

Under both of these circumstances, firms may be able to find substantial financial savings by leveraging the most useful software and ending subscriptions for unnecessary platforms.

Training

Inadequate training creates another impediment to maximizing legal technologies. Employees cannot effectively use technologies if they do not understand how to navigate them. Law firms need systems to evaluate the employee skill base for each of its technologies. When deficiencies are identified, a training strategy should be implemented that addresses the need in a way that empowers employees to leverage technologies.

One of the first determinations that a firm administrator should make is from what source the training will commence. That includes who will conduct the training, the time commitment, and how much money will be allocated. The most cost-effective and timely resources for employee training are often found with the technology provider, where employee training programs may be included within the subscription packages. This is a useful resource for training staff members on a specific technology platform.

Training takes time and, especially in a law firm setting, time is a precious commodity. Administrators need to determine how much time will be set aside for necessary training, as well as how it will be managed among employees. Firms must be cognizant of their members' already-full plates and develop a training schedule that does not overwhelm employees. Details such as training techniques and rollout methods should also be considered under the training umbrella.

The final consideration for the training piece is the cost of the training. Firms must recognize this expenditure as a necessary expense for maximizing current technologies. It is an investment in the firm's growth that pays off with greater efficiency and increased productivity.

Identification

Part of assessing current technologies is identifying trouble spots that may be getting in the way of

full maximization. The problem may lie in employee training, but the following impediments may also be at play:

- **Employee technology resistance** – Particularly within a traditional law firm setting, some firm employees may resist the usage of technology when performing firm tasks. They prefer to use methods they are more accustomed to and may even feel intimidated by technology. To address this obstacle, law firms need to implement guidelines for tech usage and strategies for overcoming this resistance. Less traditional approaches like peer-to-peer training and usage incentives can motivate employees to utilize current technologies.
- **Inadequate platforms** – Law firm administrators may find that the firm's more recent technology acquisitions do not synergize with legacy systems that are also in place. These compatibility issues can actually get in the way of efficiency instead of supporting it, especially if some firm members are using the newer platform while other firm members prefer the legacy system. Legal technology is a marathon, not a sprint. As new innovations are developed, firms may find that systems relied upon for generations can no longer meet current legal tech needs. Part of maximizing current technologies is recognizing when a current platform prevents greater efficiency instead of supporting it.
- **Fear of technology** – Administrators also experience a general law firm culture that resists technology out of fears or beliefs. Some firm leaders worry that innovations like automation may replace the need for actual attorneys. They fail to recognize how legal technologies can enhance the practice of law. Instead, they see it as a threat to the profession.

Firm administrators should acknowledge these concerns and find ways to address them. Messaging is key when dealing with this type of pushback. Leaders need to understand the benefits of legal technology and how it can better position the firm for financial success.

Planning for Future Needs

After completing a detailed assessment of current technologies, you will have a more accurate view of your firm's needs moving forward. You may determine that weaknesses identified during the analysis are best handled through new technologies, or law firm forecasting may demonstrate a future need that will require a different tech specialty.

Armed with the information gathered from evaluation, training, and identification, you can thoughtfully plan and make decisions about moving forward while also maximizing the firm's current technical resources.

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