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Why Criminal Defense Law Firms Need a Comprehensive Law Practice Management

developers · Tuesday, July 20th, 2021

Describing a criminal defense legal practice as busy is a serious understatement. On a daily basis, these firms handle countless criminal matters, many with some pretty high stakes. When dealing with something as serious as a person's freedom, criminal law firms need systems in place that help them provide stellar legal representation. That includes maintaining client files in an organized manner, staying ahead of critical deadlines, and invoicing with the highest level of efficiency.

This blog will take a dive into the features criminal defense practices need and why they're important.

Calendar Management

It is not uncommon for a busy criminal defense practice to simultaneously handle hundreds of criminal matters, all in varying stages of completion. This equates to a calendar full of preliminary hearings, discovery due dates, court appearances, and filing deadlines. Keeping up with a calendar this full can be virtually impossible without the right tools in place. Further complicating matters, even a single missed deadline can have detrimental consequences for the client, as well as the law firm.

Legal practice management software can ease the burden of managing multiple criminal law attorney calendars through the integration of [intuitive calendaring tools](#). Individual attorneys can easily keep track of their own deadlines and appearances, while the criminal law firm administrator can keep an eye on the entire team's upcoming schedule. Here are some calendaring features that particularly benefit criminal law practices:

- Calendar view options that let firm members easily choose between personal, team, or firm-wide calendars.
- Seamless calendar syncing between the legal practice management software and integrated platforms like [Office 365](#).
- The ability to set deadlines and event reminders.
- Convenient sorting options allow firms to group events and tasks by client, matter, status, or responsible firm member.
- Statute of limitations deadline tracking and reminders.

Streamlined Intake

The urgency of a criminal law matter often requires a speedy commencement of representation. New clients typically come in feeling as though they have the weight of the world on their shoulders, and they expect [immediate assistance](#). They may need a speedy bail motion filed or they may already have a court appearance scheduled for the following day.

These constant and urgent demands mean that criminal defense law firms need the ability to onboard new clients quickly without the delays that can come from inefficient processes. When it comes to criminal matters, clients don't have a moment to lose and neither do their attorneys.

With legal practice management software that streamlines the intake process, law firms can quickly get clients onboarded so that the important work of representation can begin. For instance, automated conflict checks can be extremely useful within a busy criminal defense practice. This tool help firms efficiently scan all of their matters for potential conflicts of interest so attorneys quickly know whether they are able to take on a case.

[Website intake integration](#) is another useful tool for expediting the intake process. With this resource, firms can collect necessary client data directly from an intake form that was completed through the website. This saves firm members the time of recollecting information that the client has already provided.

Once the intake process is complete, representation can begin. Criminal attorneys can get their clients up to speed on the game plan by providing them with access to everything they need to know. By using a legal practice management system that includes client portal features, firms can quickly make new clients aware of upcoming court dates, discovery needs, and billing details.

Client Communication

As previously stated, criminal clients are often in the midst of extremely stressful situations and they need the assurance of knowing that their attorneys are diligently working on their behalf. The best way to accomplish that goal is through consistent client communications. Criminal defense law firms need tools that help them achieve a client-centered experience.

Client portals are useful tools for providing clients with the information they need. Firm members can quickly upload regular information and clients can independently access their account any time of day or night. This not only promotes client communications, but it also maximizes efficiency. Instead of calling into the firm with their questions, clients can simply log in to get most of the information they commonly need.

Other practice management software features that help with client communications [include mobile texting tools](#) and conversation tracking resources that track communications directly into a matter for easy reference when needed. With an automated time capture feature, criminal defense law firms can also easily track time spent on communications to promote accurate billing.

Firm Collaboration

When handling complex criminal matters, law firms often distribute individual tasks among several members of the firm. This type of divide and conquer strategy needs legal practice management software that lends itself to team collaborations with such innovative tools as:

- [Chatting features](#) that allow for easy and trackable communications between team members.
- Automated case flow tools that automatically assign matter tasks.
- Team calendaring to keep all members up to date on matter deadlines.
- Remote access capabilities so that team members can securely access necessary case files and documents when working remotely or within a different office location from other team members.
- A workflow system that automatically updates documents and data so that the entire team has the most accurate and up-to-date versions.
- A central location to store all notes related to a matter.

Document Management

A criminal defense attorney who shows up to court with a disorganized and messy case file is an attorney who loses the confidence of their client. Disheveled case files make it difficult to locate necessary information, especially under the pressure of a crowded courtroom. This is why it is imperative that criminal defense law firms maintain their files in an organized manner and document management tools help get that done.

[Document management](#) systems save criminal defense law firms countless hours by streamlining the competitive tasks of document creation and filing, along with searching for relevant information. They also allow firms to share documents with clients and collect documents from clients through a secure platform. Firms that already utilize a document management system like NetDocuments can benefit from a law practice management system that offers complete NetDocuments integration.

Preparing the best criminal defense for clients requires appropriate management and organization of matter files. Document management features help criminal defense law firms digitize volumes upon volumes of documentation for improved workflow, organization, and legal industry compliance.

The Takeaway

Law practice management software gives criminal defense firms the tools they need to navigate a case from intake to payment using a centralized hub. Comprehensive case management, combined with integrated billing and accounting tools, keeps law firms on top of their numerous responsibilities. By automating many of the repetitive tasks that come with running a criminal defense practice, law firms can maximize productivity and remove the roadblocks that can hinder them from delivering on their promises of top-notch representation.

This entry was posted on Tuesday, July 20th, 2021 at 12:00 am and is filed under [General](#), [Practice Management](#)

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