

Case Management

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Editor's Note

This publication marks the first of what we hope will be many white papers that focus on the needs of a LawNet "Peer Group" – we're pleased to offer our corporate and government legal departments some advice and information that is pertinent to them, although the concepts covered by our authors will no doubt be beneficial to anyone in the legal profession. We gratefully acknowledge the experience, expertise and professionalism of our authors, and we trust you will find valuable information herein.

Randi Mayes
Editor

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Case Management:

Maturing the Next Generation Law Firm

by Dena Rafte
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Case management conjures up some interesting thoughts. Is it an organizational tool, a management spy vehicle, or yet another standard of law office operations? Needless to say, it is different things to different people.

In my mind, case management software is basically an organizational tool that allows firms to establish standards for the collection of administrative information surrounding a case. In its simplest form, it is a firmwide Rolodex file. On more advanced levels it can be used for firmwide docketing systems, standardized form generation, detailed discussion threads, extensive relationship cross-referencing, and potential conflict of interest searches. Clearly, we would prefer this application to seamlessly interface with all of our major existing software: accounting / time and billing, document management, record management, e-mail, and conflicts. Sounds pretty simple -- doesn't it? Well, it's not!

Case management, in terms of the application, is not difficult. Getting people to use it . . . now that is the challenge. The use of these products will require a change in the way we work. In other words, a cultural shift must occur.

Think back to 1990-prior to the acceptance of document management applications as an operational standard in many law offices. Documents, generally typed by secretaries, were shared on a very limited basis. The creation and saving of the documents were, in most cases, done according to the "firm standard naming convention." This worked fairly well until the firm started dealing with employee turnover, and users began to want documents remotely or after hours. Furthermore, as individuals primarily responsible for the content of the document wanted to be able to change the document online, the need for easy accessibility to those documents (that is, for enforced standards) increased. The early installations of document management products (circa 1990) were painful, at best. But document management products have completely changed the way we work.

Case management in 2001 is in much the same place as document management was in 1991. It represents a new way of storing and accessing information for the benefit of the group rather than the individual.

Without document management: "I cannot get the client document that I need at 7 P.M. because my secretary is not here, and I don't know how she stored it."

Similarly, without case management: "I really need a good gastroenterologist as an expert witness. . . . I know someone up here used one. . . . I guess I will have to ask around."

Bottom line -- information needs to be accessible across the firm rather than on an individual-only basis. To accomplish this goal, we need to build an acceptable framework through the maturation of a process.

Let us consider a contact. This person has a name, address, e-mail address, and other information. The information may reside in various personal contact lists in the firm, a word processing document or a spreadsheet. The same information has probably been entered multiple times depending on the software application involved, or the staff members that this contact interacts with. Furthermore, this contact may be involved on multiple individual calendars, and on merge lists. Given all this data entry, we are still hard-pressed to produce casewise information. Clearly, we have plenty of redundant data.

The contact example demonstrates standard operations in many law firms today . . . duplication, duplication, duplication. We have an ad hoc (everyone does it their own way) process set up to support the individual and not the firm. The data cannot be shared because it is not in an accessible format that can be easily interfaced.

Conversely, if a database existed that would allow multiple parties to enter and edit information, we might have the ability to mature the process. We could potentially create a standard that assures every time you open a case, you could enter all of the associated parties to the case and their relationships into certain data entry screens. From there, file labels may be printed and the contact information could be tagged as "firm" or "firm and a specific individual." In this way, we could download our individual contact lists to our Palm device. Without additional input on the part of the individ-

ual, the accounting system, document management system, and the like, our files would be updated as required. (Policies would need to be established for how a case is to be opened and exactly where, when and how conflict checks are done.) Needless to say, I can paint the process on and on.

Clearly, standardization is allowing us to mature the process and thus push it off our "desks." The impact is huge. One-time entry and multiple points of interface and accessibility results in minimization of errors and improved overall performance. We now have a repeatable documentation process aimed at the support of the firm, as opposed to an ad hoc process that can only support the individual. Over time and with determination, the process can be further refined to support the client (collaborative mechanisms) and finally the practice (risk management issues) as a whole.

If implemented properly, case management can be a very powerful tool for your firm in maturing its technology processes. As with any cultural change, this one can only be successful given a major commitment coming from top management within the firm. As a firmwide application whose benefits cannot be realized solely on an individual basis, case management is one of the tools to mature the next generation law firm.

Implementing a Practice Management System

by Gary S. Wong, CPA
ProLaw Software

Many law firms are now completing their latest technology buying cycle. Network infrastructure has been enhanced, with gigabit backbones and switched 100 megabit connections to the desktop. Users have been upgraded to powerful workstations on their desks running the latest and greatest operating systems.

What's next? For many firms, the next technology emphasis will be on comprehensive practice management systems. Practice management systems exist to assist the firm in providing legal services to its clients. Included within the broad definition of practice management systems are features encompassing what have historically been defined as both "front office" and "back office."

By traditional definition, the front office has encompassed tools designed for use by professional staff in producing legal work product. In contrast, the back office has encompassed tools designed for the administration and management of a law firm. In the not too distant past, the front and back offices of a law firm were usually viewed as discrete operations. In fact, the systems were usually separate and distinct entities that functioned independently and were not integrated with each other. Many firms, for example, adopted time and billing systems using an IBM minicomputer platform. Later, the firms began using a Wang system for word processing. Neither of these systems was compatible with the other and a virtual wall existed between the front and back office systems.

This approach has, for the most part, survived the migration to today's microcomputer-based local- and wide-area networks. Even though operating on the same physical network, too often the firm's various systems are not integrated with each other. Duplicate data are stored in separate databases for each system. Redundant data entry is required, as staff must manually update each database separately for new data. Even worse, after a short time the various databases get out of sync with each other due to oversights in the manual update process.

In today's technology environment, a better solution is to use one integrated product to meet the firm's practice management needs. Alternately, the firm may identify a core group of products that can be integrated to achieve similar results.

Features of a Practice Management System

What features are commonly available in today's practice management systems?

Front office features include the following:

Case management: Used in the collection, maintenance and retrieval of case-related information. In addition to simply recording case-related information, many progressive firms are using case management systems to reduce the paper-based files used to record the basic case-related data.

Document management: Helps the firm with the storage, identification and retrieval of documents, either created within the firm or imported into the system from external sources. Documents may be located through searching of basic demographic information, such as author, case or type of document, or through indexing and searching the actual contents of documents for matching terms.

Document assembly: Assists with the creation of documents based on templates. Advanced systems allow the templates to solicit user input to questions, thereby allowing for the creation of "artificial intelligence" systems to assist with routine tasks.

Litigation support: Used for the maintenance and retrieval of case-specific facts and evidence. Often used to index information contained within documents and depositions. Databases may be based on objectively coded documents or full-text indices of the documents.

Calendar and docketing: Used to maintain both the firm's central docket and specific case-related schedules. Advanced systems employ jurisdictional rules and regulations or user-created rules to automate the calendaring of related events, and may be integrated with the firm's groupware or e-mail systems.

Contact and relationship management: An electronic enhancement of the traditional desktop card file, contact management systems provide a central repository for the firm's contact information.

Relationship management, a natural extension, allows the firm to manage much more than contact names and addresses. Information such as a contact's relationship to various cases and to other contacts may be maintained in such systems. If a contact or relationship management system is integrated with other systems, such as document assembly, data stored in the contact management system may be used to populate fields in documents (such as addressee information).

Document imaging: Similar to document management, these systems help to maintain and index images (rather than simply the text) of various documents used by the firm. Often used by firms as a litigation support tool to manage large-scale document production in major litigation.

Back office features include the following:

Matter management: Used for maintaining the firm's internal information regarding a matter (as opposed to the actual case facts or other information), such as related contacts or matters, statistical data, and so on.

Time and billing: Collecting and managing fee and cost entries charged to clients, and subsequently producing physical or electronic documents billing the clients for services rendered.

Accounts payable: Managing disbursements for both firm expenses and client costs advanced. Optimally integrated with the time and billing system to eliminate manual entries to client ledgers when costs are advanced on the client's behalf.

General ledger: Managing the firm's financial records and producing financial statements. Optimally integrated with the time and billing system to minimize the number manual entries required.

Accounts receivable: Managing client billings, collections and the amounts due from clients. Optimally integrated with the time and billing system and general ledger to minimize the number of manual entries required.

Trust accounting: Management of IOLTA or other client trust accounts in compliance with various state requirements. Optimally integrated with the time and billing system, general ledger and other financial systems to minimize the number of manual entries required.

Financial management, reporting and inquiry: Provides access to management and statistical information through either online inquiry or flexible reporting. In addition to providing basic lists of information from the database, these systems should provide tools to perform analyses of the data, such as component or client profitability analysis.

File and records management: Management and control of physical files. May be used in either a centralized file room environment or a decentralized environment where files are maintained by working groups. Many firms incorporate bar coding and scanning technology in their records management solutions.

Conflict of interest checking: Screening new matters to identify existing matter or contact relationships that may pose an ethical conflict. Optimally integrated with case management, matter management, contact management and other systems to improve the results of conflict searches and to reduce or eliminate the collection and maintenance of redundant data.

Marketing: In general, used to collect and maintain information regarding existing contacts and clients, and potential clients. Again, integration with other systems reduces the maintenance of redundant information and increases its usefulness.

Implementing a Practice Management System

Considering all the available options and all the decisions to be made, implementing a case management system can be a daunting task for any firm. To achieve an effective implementation, a number of issues must be addressed in the process.

Determining the Firm's Specific Needs

The needs of each firm differ when implementing a practice management system. The combination of features available from various vendors makes selecting the system a significant challenge.

Important questions the firm must answer before attempting to select a system include the following:

What is the extent of the project? Will the system be implemented throughout the firm, or only in certain departments or practice areas? Will the system be managed in a single office, or will the firm need to disperse data through database replication or some other means?

Which specific practice management features does the firm desire? Few firms will want or need every possible option.

How cohesive are the firm's needs? Each group will likely require different features from a practice management system. Can these different needs be satisfied in a single, comprehensive system, or are separate systems required for each practice group? How flexible is a system in meeting the needs of each group?

What existing systems are scheduled to be replaced? Should the firm plan to replace all (or virtually all) of its existing practice management tools with a single integrated system, or should some existing tools be retained and integrated with new systems?

Evaluating Various Systems

When the firm has made an initial determination of its needs, the next step is an evaluation of the practice management systems offered by various vendors.

Before seeking demonstrations from vendors, the firm should document its major requirements in writing. This important step helps to ensure that each of the firm's needs is considered when performing the evaluation of different systems. For large or particularly complex implementations, it may be desirable to expand this document into a formal request for proposal.

Once its practice management needs have been clearly defined, the firm can begin the process of

evaluating systems. One good approach to begin the process is to attend a legal technology show, such as LawNet, LegalTech, LegalWorks or the ABA TechShow. These shows provide the opportunity to meet the vendors, obtain a good overview of the various products and perform an initial evaluation against the firm's list of requirements. This process should allow the firm to focus its consideration on a smaller number of vendors.

At this point the firm should be prepared to participate in thorough demonstrations of the systems under consideration. These in-depth demonstrations sometimes entail an on-site visit to the firm, but they can now often be accomplished over the Internet using group conferencing or meeting technology.

During the demonstrations, the firm should make specific inquiries regarding the key system requirements included in its evaluation document. Once the demonstrations have been completed, this document can serve as a scorecard for the firm in making its final evaluation.

Many other factors are also important in the final analysis. Vendor stability, support policies and price are each an important issue that must be considered. Information regarding these areas should also be solicited during the demonstrations.

Planning the Implementation

In conjunction with the selected vendor, the firm must develop a detailed implementation plan. This plan should include provisions for installation, training and transition from existing systems. Larger firms should consider performing a test implementation or implementing in phases using pilot groups.

It is extremely important not to rush the implementation of a comprehensive practice management system. Keep in mind that it is not unusual for a mid-sized implementation to take between four and six months from the time the vendor selection has been finalized.

Converting Existing Data

In most cases the firm will have certain data that

need to be converted to the new practice management system. The type and extent of this data needs to be discussed with potential vendors as part of the evaluation process.

To achieve an accurate electronic conversion, the format of the data to be converted must be agreed upon with the selected vendor. Various factors affecting existing data, such as the presence of duplicate or redundant items, may require significant manual editing either before or after an electronic data conversion. The time required to perform this editing, which may be significant, must be considered in establishing the implementation schedule.

Validating the Data

After any electronic data conversion has been completed, the firm must perform procedures to test the converted data. While the vendor should have performed basic tests of the data during conversion, remember that no one is as familiar with the firm's data as its users are. In addition to comparison of record counts and other overall tests, validation procedures should include user groups' scanning converted data, on a test basis, for cases they have worked on.

Testing the New System

It may seem obvious, but thorough testing of the new practice management system is an important task before turning off access to the firm's existing systems. Many firms leave the existing systems in place for a period of time in order to validate data and provide a backup system in the event a problem is discovered.

Conclusion

By their very nature, practice management systems affect virtually all aspects of a firm's operation. A detailed assessment of the firm's needs, a thorough definition of the requirements, thoughtful planning of the project and careful testing and assessment of the results will provide the firm with a solid foundation for a successful implementation.

Computerized Case Management

Tickling Utopia Again

by Beth White-Kellerman
and Curt Canfield
Hildebrandt International

In 1997, legal technology was entering a renaissance. Legal technology conferences had a carnival atmosphere as software vendors jammed exhibit halls, pushing toys, T-shirts, candy, raffles and various logo-embazoned office supplies at potential software buyers. There was an abundance of recently released "must have," "true 32-bit" applications.

The buzz in 1997 was **computerized case management**. Case management vendors were springing up like dandelions, each with its own version of how to take case data, slice it, dice it and serve it in a way that promised to make the practice of law as easy as the push of a button. Respected keynote speakers predicted that in two years' time, case management systems would be ubiquitous.

However, like dandelions, many of the case management applications that bloomed in 1997 had blown away in the wind by 1999. Why didn't case management take off like the experts predicted? The following will address why many firms shelved computerized case management after 1997 and why it's time to take another look, and offer some general guidelines for successful selection and implementation.

Part of the impetus for developing case management systems in the mid-90s was the belief that task-based billing would soon replace the billable hour as the standard model for the provision of legal services. Law firms were warned that they would have to find ways to be more efficient in order to remain competitive.

Although task-based billing caught the attention of a few corporate legal heads, the majority of the consumers of legal services continued, as they do today, to pay lawyers by the hour. Thus the need to implement case management became less acute. In the late 90s, the focus turned instead to groupware, document management, enhanced time and billing applications, upgrading network and end user systems, and preparation for the dreaded Y2K.

To make matters worse for the case management business, word got out about a few firms that bought into the case management dream and found themselves in the middle of a nightmare. Complaints included the following:

Vendors had understated the network and desktop requirements for running such robust applications, so performance was at a crawl.

The end-user interface was not as intuitive as it had appeared during the vendor demonstrations, so lawyers who were just getting used to e-mail found the new application daunting and refused to use it.

False promises were given for integration with existing desktop applications. Many found that the integration they thought they were purchasing was still "in development" and wouldn't be ready until the next release—a release that often never materialized.

Plans to migrate to newer operating systems were hampered when it was discovered that the case management system would not work in the new network environment.

Practice groups, married to their manual, paper-driven processes, refused to trust the case management system and saw it as an unnecessary evil that made them less efficient rather than more.

Practitioners refused to get involved with decisions about customization or standardization of the system, leaving IT professionals, who knew nothing about the practice of law, to set up the system in a way that made sense to them—but often not to the lawyers.

In the end, for all these reasons, the search for a case management utopia was shelved indefinitely. Firms took a more conservative wait-and-see approach.

The Wait Is Over

For those who have been waiting, right now may be the time to take another look. Even though task-based billing didn't take off as some experts (mostly accountants) predicted, there is increased competition for legal services from nontraditional legal service providers and from other law firms that continue to leverage technology to increase their competitive edge. In addition, as computer-literate clients become more and more aware of their lawyers' inefficient business practices, there will be increasing downward pressure on the fees charged for standard legal services.

Law firms that have waited for case management to mature may have a distinct advantage over those that already made --and perhaps already

lost -- their case management investment. If your firm is dusting off the idea of case management, it may be extremely valuable to redefine what it means and follow some of the guidelines suggested in this paper for selection and implementation.

Getting Ready for Case Management

One of the first things that will need to be addressed before any case management system is selected is the firm culture and dedication to the case management organization. Any "management system" your firm decides to invest in, such as a financial management system, client relationship management system, matter or case management system, will need to have firmwide acceptance and commitment to make it a success. Most important, at the operational level, these systems need the support staff to take over the care and feeding of these systems before the attorneys and their clients can effectively use them. As new management tools, they require a new way of working (such as reallocating and retraining staff and retooling procedures) before they can be of any benefit.

To have an effective case management program, there must be a leader. This is usually a highly respected firm partner who has the confidence of the rest of the partners and has been given the authority to make decisions and enter into contracts on the firm's behalf. This person should have the backing of the executive or technology steering committee, which has made case management a strategic program for the firm.

In addition, there will need to be a case management design team with a knowledgeable member from each of the firm's practice areas serving as a representative on the team. These representatives will be responsible for making sure the practice group's case or matter management needs can be met with the product selected. They will assist with identifying the necessary customizations, and will help set the standards for how data is entered for their particular practice group. They are the "champions" and "sponsors" for making case management work for their particular practice group.

Practice Support

The next part of this team is the Practice Support Specialist (PSS; an associate or senior paralegal) who is in on the ground floor making sure not only that the technology works but that there are processes developed for feeding the system and staff dedicated to making those processes work. Many midsized and larger firms have established a full-time practice support position—either at the practice group or the firm level.

The PSS is closely aligned with the IT organization to assist in identifying practice area needs. Large to mega-size firms will have practice support departments with managers who oversee practice support specialists, each assigned to support various practice groups within the firm. The most successful practice support professionals are those that have a legal background and an affinity for computers.

The practice group representatives or practice support specialists will be charged with identifying each step in the existing manual, paper-driven case or matter management process. It sounds easy, but typically, lawyers all have their own unique processes, so trying to document the whole mass can be a bit overwhelming. As the firm moves toward case management, these same lawyers will be asked to adopt new ways to achieve the same results, with a process driven by computer rather than paper. Often, a firm must accept short-term disruption to make a long-term gain—not only in efficiency but also in client service and quality. This is an area where an objective outside consultant can be very useful. Consultants can provide insights as to what has worked and what has failed at other firms, and prevent your firm from making some of the same mistakes.

Selecting a System

After the case management team is put in place and current case management processes are identified, the firm will be in a good position to make a sound case management system selection. One error that some firms make is to identify the case management system that works for them, only to find out that they have not upgraded their hardware and software—their operating environ-

ment—to levels acceptable to current business practices. The selection process described later in this paper presumes that the firm's systems are up to today's standards.

Because the term case management has a litigation feel to it and because most case management applications are built around the litigation process, non-litigators may confuse "case management" with "litigation support." The primary function of programs defined as litigation support is dealing with the massive amounts of paper that accompany litigation. Thus litigation support software offers users the ability to search through, annotate, organize, and report on such items as transcripts, documents, and nontext documents like blueprints, photographs, medical notes, or videotapes. Case management software may link to important documents, so some litigation support function may be involved in case management, but they serve distinctly different purposes. Case management systems are **not** just for managing litigation practices. For non-litigators, it would best be described as a matter management system: the automated management of every task related to a client's matter.

A case or matter management system will streamline your office automation process so you only have to enter certain client information once. The data should automatically merge with other information systems, such as time and billing applications and document assembly programs, so you do not have to reenter the client data in any other office system. All the information you need: contacts, e-mail messages, calendar entries, task lists, time and billing information, status reports and documents are related to a particular matter, case, project, client, attorney, etc. Any time you need to refer to events concerning a matter, the system will have all the information you need without consulting the physical file. The goal is to save you substantial amounts of time looking for information and to enhance your clients' opinion of your efficiency and ability to serve their interests. Selecting a case management system that provides everything your firm needs off the shelf is a practical impossibility, so the best you can hope for is to find the case management system that best suits your law firm's needs and is compatible

with your existing environment. Most systems today allow for a certain amount of customization that the firm can do on its own. Alternatively, a firm could hire programmers to develop its own customized solution. However, most firms have neither the resources nor the desire to get into the software development business.

Defining the existing case management processes can be tedious, but it is amazing how doing this step will bring to the surface what the primary case management system needs are. No one program, regardless of the ability to customize, will meet all the needs of every practice area. Depending on the quantity of matters to be managed, and the complexity of the practice, certain specialty practices area may require their own specialized case management systems. Intellectual property, bankruptcy, collections, probate, personal injury, workers' compensation and real estate are all represented by customized products that track information and generate documents for that particular kind of practice. These specialty case management software products may cost double or triple what a generic litigation package runs, but may cost less in the long run when taking the expense of attempts at customization into consideration.

You Have Choices

So what features should you look for in a case management system? Inexpensive programs can be feature rich, and should include the following:

~Solid calendar control, such as:

Automatic generation of ticklers (reminders)

Multiple calendar views (daily, weekly, monthly)

Individual calendars for each user

Group or master calendars for the entire firm or practice area

Private or hidden appointments

Recurring appointments

Definable "rules" for particular deadlines

~Customizable contact and case information databases that include:

A ditto feature

Sufficient number of fields to record all important matter information

The ability to link contact information to multiple matters

Easy search interface

The ability to save search queries

Generous note-taking capabilities

~Basic network functionality

~Some level of information import and export (usually as word processing merge files or billing software data files)

~User and program level security

~Customizable user preferences

~Context-sensitive, hyperlinked help

Higher-end products should provide all of the above and much, if not all, of the following:

~Rule-based docketing

~Custom report writers

~Solid support for a range of networks and operating systems

~Imaging support

~Browser-based interface

~SQL support

~Client expense tracking

~Built-in document assembly

~Integration with other software

~On-site installation, training, and customization

Finding What You Want

An endless number of helpful links to case management product lists, articles and reviews can be found by doing an Internet search on Google for "case and matter management." Most product web sites will provide feature lists and will assist you in narrowing down the list of products that you might want to pursue. Consultants who have their finger on the pulse of the case management market are a good source to help quickly narrow the field of choices and help develop a strategic technology plan that will incorporate the case management system plan with other enterprise systems, such as knowledge management, financial management, other matter management, client relationship management, and litigation support.

The following table is a guide to assist you during your case management selection and evaluation process:

Vendor Name	
Product Name and version	
Address	
Internet HOME Page	
E-mail address	
Sales Phone Number	
Year Product First Published	
Total Installations	
Pricing (new customers)	
Number of Total Users	
Tech Support Hours	
Tech Support Number	
Tech Support/Maintenance Plan	
Are version upgrades included in annual maintenance fee?	
What kind of training assistance is provided?	
What operating systems will it work with? Which one is optimal?	
List the minimum hardware requirementsList the optimal hardware requirements	
What is the program sizeOn the desktop?On the network?	
What is the program type?	
Does installation cause Windows Registry changes?	
Is it networkable?	
What is the backend database server?	
Is there a built-in imaging component?What imaging formats does it support?	
Does it support DDE/OLE?	
Is Laptop/Remote synchronization available?	
Can it be accessed through an intranet portal?	
Does it have a browser interface?	
Is it integrated with the Palm OS to allow for handheld synchronization of Palm devices?	
Does it provide for workgroup scheduling?	
Is there a date calculator available?	
Does the program have optional rules based calendaring?	
Can it automatically calculate court dates for your jurisdiction?	
Does it have automatic Alarms/Ticklers?	
Does it provide for inactivity monitoring to assist with cleaning out dead files/matters?	
Does it integrate easily with the firm's word processor to create forms?	
Does the address book integrate with the firm's word processor?	
What are the fields in the address book? Is the address book searchable?	
Will it integrate with contact management systems? Which ones?	
Does it provide for e-mail integration? Which ones?	
Is field level security provided?	
Are there audit trails so that database administrators can tell who is making entries in the system and when?	
Is there automatic task generation available?	
Is there WAN Support?	
Will it run on a Linux server?	
Does it allow for reports to be created with your specific needs?	
Is there an accounting module?	
Are timers available to assist with time entry?	
Does it integrate with the firm's time and billing system?	
Does it have the ability to perform conflicts checks? If so, what fields are checked?	
Will it index and manage case documents?	
Will it integrate with the existing document management program?	
Is it intuitive and user friendly?	
Can you customize the interface screens?	
Does it keep up with the latest technologies?	

Settling In

After product selection, the next steps include installation, integration, training and development. Finding an integrator who is a certified specialist on the program of your choice is preferable. A person trained in project management should also be charged with overseeing each step and phase of the project. If the firm doesn't have resources to assign a full-time project manager during the installation and integration, consider hiring a project management consultant to assist. Look for independent project management consultants who have a legal practice background, enterprise software implementation experience, and access to not just local but regional and national resources. The goal of project management is to make sure that the firm is meeting its project milestones on time and on budget.

It's impossible to say too much about piloting and training and their impact on the overall success of the case management project. It is recommended that you have two different groups pilot the system before rolling it out to the entire firm. One group should be relatively tech-savvy, people who will push the program to its limits and find weaknesses. The other group should be more tech-challenged, so that you can see where training needs to be focused.

Training for each end user should be mandatory before access is given to the system. Preferably, the trainer will also be certified in the application and will have comprehensive training manuals for each user to take back to the workplace. Training doesn't stop after the initial rollout. Often, because of time constraints and end users' ability to absorb information, only the basic data entry, search and navigation of the case management system is taught. The practice support specialist or practice group representative tagged as the case management design team member should constantly be testing the system to enhance usability and exploit its available features and setting up training sessions where new tips and tricks are presented. Offering free food is a good way to get employees to sign up for these sessions. The best way to increase usability, however, is to sell it to the part-

ners. If they are committed to the system, getting people to training will not be a problem.

The most incredible thing will happen once the benefits of a well-implemented case management system start to become manifest. Lights will go on in people's faces. The overall quality of the workplace will improve. The capabilities of the system will continue to unfold new opportunities for efficiency. Anytime, anywhere access to case documents and information will provide opportunities for personal freedom. For those worried about the bottom dollar, it will provide opportunities to build billable hours from the comfort of home.

A certain level of client access will also provide for improved relationships and client satisfaction. It is not too unreasonable to predict that a high percentage of clients will come to expect electronic access to their case files as a standard part of legal services. Law firms will increasingly use their ability to provide client access to improve their competitive edge.

Indeed, the technology has matured. Case management systems today look less like dandelions and more like trees, and they're taking root. Taking a long-term view with short-term practical steps and ongoing communication and leadership will make for an effective and efficient transition from individual, paper-bound case management processes to a standard case management system that can be shared with your colleagues, your co-counsel, and your clients. It's an effort worth making if you want your firm to prosper into the future.