

PUT YOUR HEAD IN THE CLOUD

Solos and small firms are going virtual. Don't get left behind.

BY VIRGINIA BISEK

THE CONCEPT OF CLOUD COMPUTING IS SIMPLE: greater mobility and streamlined efficiencies by being able to access your virtual office on the go. But the concerns over costs, privacy, security, and ethical issues continue to be raised in the legal profession. The handwriting, however, is on the wall.

Lawyers are increasingly moving to the cloud for the convenience of working anywhere at anytime using any

device. Cloud technology yields savings in time, resources, and money—and often results in happier clientele by swiftly addressing needs.

Several state ethics committees and the American Bar Association have determined that it is ethical for lawyers to use cloud computing, as long as reasonable steps are taken to ensure that confidential data is protected from unauthorized access.



The advantages of utilizing cloud technology are simply too numerous for small firms and solo practitioners to ignore. By going virtual and welcoming the cloud, one lawyer can single-handedly expand his or her practice, manage more clients, control costs and overhead, and, indeed, compete with the big firms.

What Can You Do If You Join the Cloud?

- *Centralize your documents and files.* No more filing cabinets. Cloud-based document management allows access to material from any place at any time. Providers usually include options that encourage productivity and enable collaboration, such as sharing and editing documents. And unlike a local server (such as your computer), the cloud continually updates and backs itself up.
- *Collaborate with clients.* No matter your location, you can stay connected and improve communication (think videoconference). Activity can be logged and time-stamped to eliminate the “I-didn’t-receive-the-document” syndrome. This is a more secure approach than using email, as a reputable cloud provider uses modern security measures to safeguard privacy.
- *Manage basic operations.* Project management, record keeping, accounting, or payroll applications can be accessed from anywhere. Build schedules, oversee budgets, track milestones, and collaborate on important presentations. You can also use electronic signature applications or remote conferencing capabilities.

There are other benefits, such as saving on energy and IT costs, and the peace of mind of having a big-picture disaster-preparedness plan is priceless, for the obvious reasons.

3 Types of Clouds

There are three types of cloud computing:

Public: A third-party service built and managed on a third-party platform. The costs and levels of services vary, and concerns for data security are the highest in this category.

Private: Built and managed entirely within your company’s IT system, using its own servers and hardware. You have complete control over security, but it’s costly.

Hybrid: A combination of public and private platforms for a tailored solution. Your internal team can oversee sensitive data in-house, while using a public service for less sensitive material.

Vet Your Provider

Regardless of the type you choose, exercise your due diligence in vetting your cloud provider. The key is choosing a company that employs data encryption and identity

verification. These companies should be able to identify, authenticate, and track user information using industry standard methods.

There are several critical questions you should be asking your cloud provider. For an excellent list of questions that should be mandatory for any firm moving to the cloud, read the American Bar Association’s article “The Ethics of Cloud Computing for Lawyers.”

The barriers to using cloud computing are temporary and minimal. Almost every smartphone or tablet uses some type of cloud storage. It’s no exaggeration to say that just about everybody uses cloud computing in one-way or another.

Still Apprehensive?

Start small. Try a project management platform such as Basecamp or Wrike. Neither company markets specifically to lawyers, but both have popular products (and free trials) that are used by many attorneys to manage components of their practice.

Share documents. Collaborate with partners in real time. Edit files and easily maintain version control. Keep on top of discoveries and communications. Control access. Organize emails. Find out, at a glance, who has checked in and who has not. Assign and manage tasks. And don’t forget—you can do this from anywhere at anytime.

Once you start, you’ll never go back. The law is going virtual. Don’t be the last to put your head in the cloud. **TBJ**

Resources

“Cloud Computing 101: It’s a Brave New Virtual World,” by SmartBrief and American Express OPEN Forum.

“3 Technology Tools to Build a Virtual Law Firm” A Clio Production by GoClio.com. Available at: http://www.goclio.com/wp-content/themes/clio-v1/whitepapers/Clio_eBook_3_Technology_Tools.pdf.

“4 Ways to Safeguard and Protect Your Small Business Data,” by Caron Beesley, U.S. Small Business Administration. <http://www.sba.gov/community/blogs/4-ways-safeguard-and-protect-your-small-business-data>.

“Online Law Practice Management Software: Cloud-Based Law Practice Management Tools for Lawyers and Law Firms,” by William Pfeifer, About.com. <http://law.about.com/od/lawpracticesoftware/tp/Online-Law-Practice-Management-Software.htm>.

“The Ethics of Cloud Computing for Lawyers,” by Nicole Black, American Bar Association. http://www.americanbar.org/publications/gpsolo_ereport/2012/september_2012/ethics_cloud_computing_lawyers.html.



VIRGINIA BISEK

is a copywriter and content developer who works with small firms, bar associations, and large enterprises on projects ranging from publications to website development. Visit her at virginiabisek.com or email her at ginger@virginiabisek.com.