

Top Seven Advantages of SaaS Document Management Systems

by Liz Kurtz



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TechnoLawyer®
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Small and midsize law firms currently find themselves buffeted by a variety of competing forces. They need to offer top-notch client service while also cutting costs. Law firms can accomplish these directives by staying on the cutting edge of new technologies.

It's worth doing because in the current economic climate, clients increasingly demand efficiency, which tends to favor smaller over larger firms. These clients expect the best legal representation, but have lost patience with sky-high billing rates.

Which technology can best help smaller firms take advantage of this situation? Software as a Service (SaaS or cloud computing). SaaS enables you to run an array of productivity applications using only your Web browser. These applications are securely hosted offsite in one or more datacenters. With SaaS, you can access sophisticated applications without committing to the cost or operational complexities of buying and maintaining your own software and servers. In short, you can run your firm with little more than an Internet connection and a Web browser.

But which application should you explore first? More than any other type of SaaS application, a document management system (DMS) tends to provide law firms with the fastest and most profound return on investment. A DMS organizes all of the documents your firm creates. It can also house records such as correspondence and court documents. This report answers seven questions intended to help you determine whether a SaaS DMS would benefit your firm.

1. Do You Spend Too Much Time Looking for and Organizing Your Documents?

Every lawyer who has practiced *without* a document management system has, at one time or another, watched time slip by searching for a document on a local or network hard drive. SaaS DMS, by con-

trast, provide sophisticated search engines that enable you to find and access documents quickly and easily.

When you create a new document, the DMS prompts you to create a profile, which includes client and matter information among other identifying features, which you can customize to suit your needs. The rest of the heavy lifting is performed by the DMS, which organizes documents based on profile information. You can then search by client or matter number, as well as name, author, or any of the other factors indexed by the creation of the profile.

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Also, since you will return to a document repeatedly while it is in progress, your own personal dashboard can list recently opened or edited documents so that the last document you worked on is the first thing you see at the next login. In addition, some SaaS DMS offer full-text searches, displaying results in the user-friendly format offered by Internet search engines like Google.

2. How Often Do You Wear Your Information Technology (IT) Hat?

Solos and small firm practitioners wear many hats. Among the most frustrating is the IT hat, which typically has to be donned at the most inopportune times. A SaaS DMS enables you to "outsource" IT headaches. Instead of focusing on the management and operation of servers and software, you can instead wear your lawyer hat and devote that time to the immediate needs of your clients and their business.



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3. Can I Afford a SaaS DMS?

One of the most compelling advantages of SaaS entails the potential cost savings. In addition to the benefits of economies of scale, these applications offer a more nimble approach to technology, thus freeing your firm from large capital expenditures on applications and features that may not suit your firm's needs. With a SaaS DMS, you gain access to the most current technology without incurring the costs of consultants, hardware, and software licenses. Moreover, the freedom to add or drop features or applications can dramatically improve utilization rates.

A SaaS DMS offers sophistication on par with traditional DMS used by larger firms — except for the cost

4. Will a SaaS DMS Enhance Our Client Relationships?

Cloud-based DMS have the capacity to enhance client relationships in several ways. First, they facilitate information sharing by giving clients streamlined, secure access to documents and other information. Rather than emailing documents back and forth, tracking changes on multiple versions of a Word document, and struggling to integrate edits, you can take comfort in knowing that everyone can view the most current work product. Because these systems both create an audit trail and enable you to control access and editorial rights, the integrity of the work product does not become jeopardized.

Second, a SaaS DMS offers sophistication on par with traditional DMS used by larger firms — except for the cost. In a market in which clients increasingly demand more value for their dollar, having the organizational and technological ca-

capacity to compete with bigger fish offers a distinct advantage.

SaaS DMS reduce costs, increase efficiency, facilitate document sharing, and offer security against disasters and unauthorized access.

5. Do You Ever Share Work Product With Other Lawyers?

SaaS DMS also facilitate collaboration with other attorneys. You can create a “work space” so that the lawyers involved in a case or transaction can view documents, collaborate on changes, and easily access an archive of relevant documents. These work spaces are invaluable as a tool for production or due diligence. They create an audit trail for data produced and accessed, and enable users to personalize access with varying levels of authority. These benefits — in addition to the simple ease of delivering and exchanging documents from a cloud-based server — improve the efficiency, accuracy, and reliability of data production and eDiscovery by significant orders of magnitude.

6. Are You Concerned About Protecting Your Client Documents From Potential Disasters?

Every new disaster — whether it's a cloud of volcanic ash or a hurricane — reminds us of the importance of business continuity planning. With a cloud-based DMS, both infrastructure and access to information are protected — without having to lift a finger. A SaaS DMS resides on multiple, redundant servers. The servers are offsite, maintained by the service provider. Thus, if you cannot get to your office, you can still access your documents. The same, of course, is true for the attorneys and clients with whom you collaborate. As long as everyone has access to the Internet, you can all continue to work.



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7. Does Your Practice Management System Adequately Address Your Document Management Needs?

Practice management systems are useful for contacts and calendars, but they do not offer sophisticated document management features. For example, they do not force you to create a document profile. You must remember to do it — and somewhere along the line someone on your team won't remember. Good luck finding that document.

Conclusion

SaaS DMS reduce costs, increase efficiency, facilitate document sharing, and offer security against disasters and unauthorized access. Any size law firm — even solos — can reap these sophisticated benefits without the typical up-front price tag usually associated with DMS. In short, a SaaS DMS enable you to maximize your time, serve your clients better, and compete in today's dynamic legal marketplace.

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