Today, the choices for law practice management software are vast and feature-rich with options for cloud-based and premise-based software options, and more and more companies appearing every year. That's why it's so important to take the time to carefully research your options so that you make the right choice for your law firm. In this guide we'll help you do just that. We'll explain how law practice management software can improve your law practice and how making the right choice will increase your law firm's bottom line and streamline your law practice by helping you to practice more and manage less.

How can law practice management software improve your law practice?

You may be wondering if it's worth it for you to start the process of evaluating a new case management software solution. To help answer that, here are some business benefits of using cloud-based law practice management software:

**Move Toward a Paperless Office**

Many law firms are moving away from using paper to save money, improve efficiency and ‘go green.’ Cloud-based practice management software gives you the ability to store and access all your files when you need them — a traditional paper-based office won't give you that freedom.

**Manage Growth and Increase Profitability**

Good software solutions include the ability to automate forms, bill your time and invoice clients no matter where you are, communicate with clients, manage your calendar, and access your contacts in a secure online environment, saving you both time and money by making it easy for you to run a more efficient, cost-effective business.
Securely Communicate with Clients
Cloud-based law practice management software enables you to communicate securely from anywhere, with real-time notifications to recipients. It also helps you to avoid email’s inherent security issues when dealing with sensitive and confidential information.

Manage Your Practice on the Go
Gone are the days where lawyers are chained to their office and desktop. Instead, with modern cloud-based law practice management software, you can use your smartphone or tablet to bill, access important case-related information, and communicate with your clients on the go.

What about law firms that invested in a software solution years ago?
Did you spend thousands of dollars on state-of-the-art practice management software a few years ago and are still calculating the ROI on that investment? Many of these products have outlived their expected life and are being pushed beyond their original design and capabilities. If you are in this situation you may experience:

- Database crashes
- Non-existent product support
- A clunky, unintuitive interface
- Time-consuming employee training (and re-training)

If your law practice is growing, these problems can be a real drag on productivity and should be a strong sign that it is time to evaluate new solutions. And if your practice isn't growing, it might be time to evaluate whether these problems are taking up valuable time that you would otherwise spend on generating new business.
What should I think about when evaluating law practice management software?

Choose the Right Type of Software

The first decision when evaluating law practice management software solutions is whether to choose cloud-based or premise-based software.

Premise-based software is run on a local computer or server with a database and is typically located on site and typically can only be accessed from computers located in your law office. Alternatively, cloud-based software can be used wherever you happen to be, using any Internet-enabled device.

Here is a comparison of the advantages of each type of software:

### Cloud-Based Software
- Lower initial investment and unlimited storage
- Faster, more cost-efficient deployment
- No software or hardware maintenance
- Access data from anywhere
- Continuous product upgrades
- Training and support included

### Premised-Based Software
- Data is stored locally in your office
- Access is not dependent on internet connection
- Most costs are paid up front
- You own — and are responsible for updating and managing — the software

Total Cost of the Solution

An important note when evaluating the price of each solution is the difference between one-time purchases and ongoing subscription services.

When evaluating the total cost, be sure to identify expenses for items such as:
- Training
- Upgrade fees
- Add-on modules
- Annual licensing fees
- Support

Be sure to consider any additional savings both in money and time that the new legal practice management software can offer with any integrated services that you may currently be paying for separately. These can include:
- Online payment services
- Outlook or Google sync
- Website services
- DropBox compatibility
- QuickBooks integration
## Important Criteria to Consider When Evaluating Products

### Data Migration
Can this product import all of my existing data and how easy is the data migration process? How easy is it to use the software? Am I able to obtain my data in an easily read format if I decide to change providers?

### Accounting Integration
Does the law practice management software integrate and automatically sync with accounting software such as Quickbooks? What about supporting both trust and operating accounts?

### Paperless Office
Will this product allow unlimited online storage of all firm documents and data? Will it support the elimination of paper invoices? Will it help reduce the need to mail letters to clients by facilitating secure online communication?

### Electronic Payments
Can I send invoices to my clients through the system? Can my clients pay their bills online?

### Security
Is this product reliable? Who is the provider, how long have they been around, and are they financially stable? Is my data secure and can I restrict users’ access to certain cases or files?

### Easy To Use
Is it intuitive and easy to navigate? Can I quickly and easily search for all types of information?

### Training
How much training is included with my investment and are FAQs and on demand trainings offered? If I hire additional employees, will I have to pay for more training?

### Support And Upgrades
What are the additional charges (if any) for ongoing product support? How often is the product updated? Are client services managers available by phone or email when I need help?

### Websites And Portals
Is a law firm website included as an option with purchase? Can I have unique branding for my law firm? Can I provide my clients with an online portal for easy access to their case-related information?

### Pricing
Is the pricing clear and transparent? Do I know exactly what I’m paying for?

### Cost Vs. Value
Try to calculate a quick return on investment and figure out how long it will take you to realize the savings that these solutions will offer.
Where do I find the right product for my law firm?

Clearly, good legal practice management software solution can be valuable for your law firm, but as we’ve covered, finding the right one for your firm’s needs isn’t always easy. A few places to start your online search include a Google search, blogs, forums, and LinkedIn discussions.

Here is a list of places to look for ideas and recommendations:

› **ABA’s Solosez listserv:**
  www.americanbar.org/groups/gpsolo/resources/solosez.html

› **Macs in Law Offices forum:**
  https://groups.google.com/forum/?fromgroups#!forum/milogroup

› **Above the Law:**
  www.abovethelaw.com/

› **Attorney at Work:**
  www.attorneyatwork.com/

› **ABA’s Legal Technology Resource Center:**
  www.americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/legal_technology_resources.html

› **Solo Practice University**
  www.solopracticeuniversity.com/blog/

Are you ready?

By investing just a bit of your time up front to explore your options, by learning what the different modern law practice management software products offer, and then evaluating products, you’ll save time in the long run because you’ll be able to focus more on representing your clients and less on managing your law practice.
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Nicole Black is the Legal Technology Evangelist at MyCase, a cloud-based law practice management platform. She is an attorney in Rochester, New York and is the author of the ABA book Cloud Computing for Lawyers, co-authors the ABA book Social Media for Lawyers: the Next Frontier, and co-authors Criminal Law in New York, a West-Thomson treatise. She speaks regularly at conferences regarding the intersection of law and technology and can be reached at niki@mycase.com

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