

Harnessing the Net

Firms cautiously take advantage of Web-based case management solutions.

By Rachel Campbell

A new breed of Web-based programs are turning the tide on the standard solutions to document and case management. As users become more comfortable with the Internet and what it can offer, from greater accessibility to cost savings and more, these new applications are becoming viable options for law firms.

With lessons learned from the dot-com crash a few years ago, software companies are taking a cautious approach to implementing Web-based applications. Some companies are developing systems from the ground up, while others are redesigning existing systems, said Andrew Z. Adkins III, director of the Legal Technology Institute at the University of Florida Levin College of Law.

Both of these approaches must convince users to embrace a new system of case management, which might be a significant hurdle.

"Traditional client-server applications have become very robust," said Tim Schroeder, account manager for Legal Files Software Inc., a front-office matter management solution. "It's hard to duplicate that functionality in a true Web-based environment. I have not seen a Web application that can compete with a

client-server matter management system. The primary focus of law firms purchasing matter management has been functionality."

Adkins said he agrees. "It's the novelty of a Web-based system. People are used to seeing this on a desktop level, not the Web-browser level." However, as large software providers, such as Microsoft, plan to move their

Thomas of Serengeti Law, provider of Serengeti Tracker.

Large firms with in-house servers also can take advantage of Web-based applications while still using their own equipment. In this case, the IT department can install the program on the server and perform updates and fixes without having to install new programs on each computer.

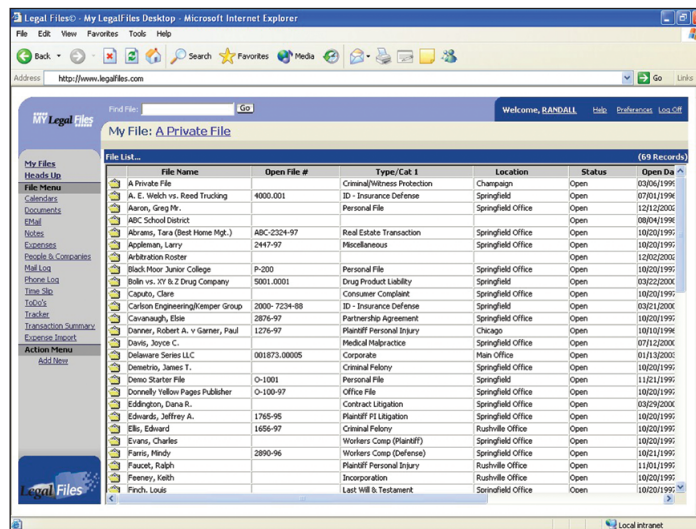
Another positive aspect of Web-based systems is remote access to files. "Attorneys on the road can log in and gain full access and full functionality to the program. All they need is a telephone line," Spies said.

In considering a Web-based case management system, the most important thing to examine is the law firm's needs. As with any new technology purchase, buyers must understand how the firm's attorneys use technology to practice law, and be aware of the technology the firm already has in place, Adkins said.

With companies offering products for large, small and corporate firms, as well as solo attorneys, buyers should take a good look at which solution will work best for their firms before taking the leap into a Web-based environment.

The technology still is considered new and it will be a slow process of adaptation before these solutions are the norm in law firms. However, Thomas and Adkins said they predict that, in general, attorneys will begin turning to Web-based solutions as a viable option.

Schroeder said he agrees. "I see it as the next generation. Just as we moved from DOS to Windows, I think client-server applications will be replaced by Web-based applications," Schroeder said. **LOO**



LegalFiles provides Web-based case management.

core programs to a Web-based environment, others will follow suit, he added.

The advantages of Web-based applications are convincing. One of the most important is cost savings, said Richard Spies, chief executive officer of Solutions in Software, which developed the Web-based case management system, CaseManagerPro.

For small- to mid-sized law firms in particular, having files hosted on an outside company's servers takes the burden off the Information Technology department. "It requires less investment on the technology staff. Updates are loaded one time to the server. Everything is managed at one point. All anyone needs is [Microsoft] Internet Explorer," Spies said.

"We can do any upgrade overnight. Nobody has to lift a finger," added Rob

Legal Files

Legal Files Software Inc.
www.legalfiles.com
(800) 500-0537

This Web-based solution is an addition to the Legal Files desktop version, offering users access to files outside of the office. The program provides a central Rolodex, case management, a calendaring system, to-dos and document management.