Solving the Document Dilemma
The Value of Document Management Software

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Contents

A Brief History of Document Management

Regardless of their practice area, all legal professionals have something in common. They deal with a wealth of documents and emails each day. From contracts and correspondence, to research and requests for information, it can be difficult to keep it all organized without a dedicated document management system (DMS). This is what we call "the document dilemma."

Traditionally, attorneys, paralegals and legal staff came up with different ways to approach document management. Relying on filing cabinets and paper files used to be the gold standard. However, it was easy to misplace documents and files using this method. Not only that, with only one physical copy of the information, it was impossible for more than one person at a time to work on a file.

With the rise of computers and the internet, more legal departments began using file sharing and password-protected folders. While this was a vast improvement over the archaic filing cabinet, it wasn't a perfect solution. This quickly becomes clear whenever someone is unable to find or access a file that they need for a specific matter or case.

Document management software overcomes the problems with past organizational methods, making it easy to stay on top of documents, contracts and emails. Not only does such a system allow users to safely store information, it offers a wealth of features to enhance collaboration and sharing, track the changes to a document, and handle file retention. Basically, DMS is a knowledge management system. It reuses information and work that people have created, allowing users to easily repurpose that information for new projects. Many legal teams find that they're able to be more efficient and productive after implementing a document management system like the one in Legal Files Software.

This white paper will review the features and benefits of document management software. It will also discuss how our customers have used this important tool to help manage what matters to them. After finishing this white paper, you'll be well on your way to having the knowledge you need to select a DMS for your team.

The Features of Document Management

As the name suggests, document management systems exist to make it easier for you to organize, manage and work on your documents. However, this explanation is simplifying the matter a bit. A DMS, such as the one in Legal Files, performs many functions in the name of document management. Primarily, the software handles the storage, access and management of computer files, including emails and contracts.

To help provide a deeper understanding of the features of document management software, here's a list of tasks that we've broken up into three general categories:

- **Storage** relates to the security of the DMS, including the network, firewalls and security rights that the software uses to protect your confidential and sensitive legal and non-legal documents and emails.
- **Access** refers to how you can get to your documents. Depending on the DMS you select, you may be able to access them using an app, an installed desktop client, an online portal or directly from applications like Microsoft Outlook and Word.
- **Management** includes many components, starting with the basic organizational structure within the DMS. An example would be using folders within the software. Diving deeper, document management also handles document automation, retention management, versioning, tracking and locking. It also covers features that are important to collaboration and sharing, including the ability to work with colleagues on the same document and the ability to easily and securely send a document to another party.

Among these general categories of features, some specific DMS functions stand out as being especially helpful for busy legal professionals.

The first being two-way integration. What does this mean? Matter management programs that offer a DMS should be able to seamlessly integrate with tools like your email program and document creation software. Making changes in a Word document should also result in an updated copy of the file in the DMS. This saves time and headaches because you don't have to jump back and forth between the two programs while you work.

The second lifesaver for attorneys and legal staff is a powerful and intuitive set of search tools. It shouldn't be difficult to find the file you need when you need it. Remember, that's why the industry has moved away from filing cabinets. With a search bar, search criteria and options to perform a deeper search, the document you need should only be a few clicks away.

Better Together – The Relationship Between Document and Matter Management

When you think of dynamic duos, document management and legal matter management should be on that list. Both these systems can help you streamline your workflow and manage what matters to you. After all, documents and emails are a huge part of legal matters.

Some legal departments have a separate system for document management and one for matter management. However, it often makes more sense to have legal matter management software that includes a built-in DMS, or at the very least, can seamlessly integrate with document management.

Having document management and legal matter management software combined makes sense because it allows you to see the complete picture when reviewing a matter or a case. It'd be impossible to see the totality of it without having access to the documents, emails and contracts that play an important role in the matter. Furthermore, documents are often tied to the other information that legal matter management software stores, including calendars, tasks and contacts.

The City of Atlanta quickly saw the importance of having an interconnected system for document and matter management. Initially, the legal team there came to Legal Files to get help completing a document and file management project. However, the team realized that it also wanted a system that could handle matter management tasks. Picking our legal matter management software with a built-in DMS was the perfect solution.

What Are the Benefits of Document Management?

Anyone who regularly deals with documents, emails and contracts as part of their work can benefit from a document management system. At the most basic level, a DMS frees up precious office space and money. Instead of keeping hard copies in your office or paying to hold them offsite, you can securely store all documents that matter to you in a digital location. A location that you and your team can access from anywhere in the world with an internet connection.

This type of storage also makes it easy to quickly retrieve files so that you don't waste time searching for them. Studies estimate that professionals spend nearly 20% of their time looking for the information they need to do their job*. With a DMS, you find exactly what you're looking for –quickly. Imagine what you could do with that time

In addition to freeing up physical storage space and saving money and time, the following are some other advantages that a document management system can provide:

- **Collaborate with the team**: Working with others is an important part of the legal profession. Document management allows you and your coworkers to work together on the files and the documents that relate to your matters and cases.
- **Document assembly**: Quickly assemble your documents with tools built into the application. Create a template once to use again and again, or automatically generate a document by merging a template and any data fields you choose.
- **Enhanced security**: A DMS allows you to control document permissions and access levels, which ensures that sensitive documents stay out of the wrong hands. Additionally, document management software leaves an audit trail that can allow you to see who has viewed and changed a document.
- **Backup and disaster recovery**: Whether you're using paper files or digital documents, you should have backups and a plan for what you'll do if the worst-case scenario happens. With a DMS, this is much easier because the tool allows you to trace, track and archive all your documents.
- **Maintain regulatory compliance**: It's no secret that certain types of documents and issues have strict compliance requirements. The consequences of non-compliance can range from fines to criminal liability. A document management system can help you avoid these penalties with automated records retention schedules and strong security.

Finally, document management offers other benefits, including increased productivity, flexibility, and improved client relations and staff morale. For

example, a DMS allows staff to be more efficient and organized. As a result, they are more productive, which can improve customer service and the way your team feels about work.

*Cao, Hung. "Workers Spend Too Much Time Searching for Information." LinkedIn, September 12, 2016, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/workers-spend-too-much-time-searching-information-hung-cao/

Document Management in Action – Legal Files Case Studies

Talking about document management is helpful, but it can be even more beneficial to see real-life examples of it. Doing so can allow you to see legal departments with challenges like your own and learn how they overcame those struggles to be more organized and efficient after implementing a robust and intuitive DMS. Here are just three of these many success stories:

- CannonDesign's corporate legal department already had a matter management system in place when they reached out to Legal Files. However, the system "wasn't very user-friendly" and "it was difficult to find and save items." The team jumped at the chance to implement a better DMS, and they couldn't be happier, saying, "It's easier to search and find what you're looking for. If you need to find a certain word or phrase in an email, or any other document, Legal Files can quickly do that for you."
- The University of Connecticut's legal department drafts over 750 contracts and amendments each year, which wasn't easy to manage without a DMS for contract management. The team "wanted a balanced system" and "needed a centralized repository that could store emails and documents." Everyone was thrilled after selecting Legal Files because it "serves as the centralized repository and also links to Outlook, which makes it easy to move documents and emails into Legal Files."
- The City of Pasadena had a document management system that was being phased out when it reached out to Legal Files. Implementing the software ended up producing amazing results for the team. It can now "turn out a consistent product in a timely fashion." Additionally, Legal Files "makes it easy to locate and edit documents quickly" and provides "functions that offer a very wide range of capabilities that didn't exist before."

These examples show that the right DMS can do everything from speed up document production, to significantly shorten the amount of time it takes to find a specific email or document.

What's Right for You? How to Select a DMS

Selecting a document management system is a big decision and an important investment. You already know that documents and emails play a vital role in the work that you do every day, so it makes sense that you want the right DMS to help you keep them in order. Because this decision will affect your team's future productivity, organization and even stress levels, you want to make sure you're asking questions to find the best system for your team.

The following questions are some you'll want to think about and ask before you commit to a document management system for your legal department:

- **Does the DMS allow for customization?** Each legal team is different and has unique needs. Not only that, most legal departments will grow and change over time. You should strive to find a document management system that will allow you to customize its functions and features to meet your needs.
- **What are the important items and activities in your day-to-day work?** For example, does reporting play a key role in your business? If so, you'll want to make sure the DMS you select provides robust reporting features.
- **Do you need to be able to restrict user access to documents or folders?** This may be the case if you frequently work with and share information with outside counsel. If this is true for your team, you want to make sure that the document management software allows you to set different permission and access levels for different users.
- **Is it important for the DMS to notify users that someone else is in the document they are trying to work on?** This is a real concern for teams that do a lot of collaborative work. The DMS you pick should be able to prevent people from changing the same document at the same time, which can lead to conflicted copies.
- **What is your records retention policy?** Depending on the types of documents you handle, you may need to keep them for years. If this is the case, make sure that the document management software you select has an archival tool.
- **Do you have specific security needs?** Everyone wants to ensure that their confidential documents stay that way. This is especially true when it comes to the practice of law. Before committing to a DMS, be sure that you understand the system's security capabilities and whether they will be enough to protect your documents.

Finally, and most importantly, you should think about the system and tools that your team has now. How are they working and how are they failing? Just thinking through these simple questions will often help you produce a solid list of nice-to-haves and must-haves as you look for a new document management system.

Concluding Remarks - Why You Need Document Management

You deal with a wealth of documents, emails and contracts every day. Without the right document management tools, it can be overwhelming to stay on top of it all. However, implementing a DMS, like the one found in Legal Files, can help your team handle the storage, access and management of all these digital files.

From comprehensive document storage, to document automation tools to streamline your workflow, document management can help you develop a user-friendly and game-changing organizational system for your team. These, along with the other functions of a DMS, can provide many benefits, including increased collaboration, enhanced security, and exceptional backup and disaster recovery options. Your team can reap these benefits when you ask the right questions to find the perfect DMS for your office.

About Legal Files Software

Legal Files Software, Inc. develops and markets Legal Files case and matter management software to corporate legal departments, government agencies, colleges and universities, leading law firms, legal aid clinics and insurance companies. For more information, visit the company's website at www.LegalFiles.com.