

Automated Practice Areas

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The term 'automation' might bring to mind a busy assembly line of robotic devices building cars or other industrial products. The sparks fly as each station performs its task with precision and exactness. Every part of the process ensures that the end result will become the same perfect finished product as expected. Can these ideas be also applied to the procedures of a law office?

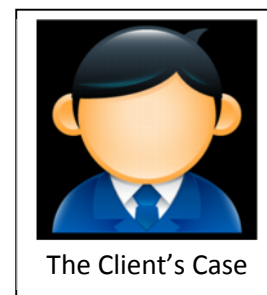
Think of yourself as the architect of your own assembly line. How does your factory function today? How much thought and planning have you put into your procedures? What tools are used to build your end product? The ever changing landscape of technology provides the opportunity to improve how you work on a daily basis.

A few things to keep in mind

- Be open minded to change
- Don't be afraid to invest
- Training makes it easy

General Practice Management tools – The framework for your office – A place for everything

- Case Information
- Events and Tasks
- Contacts
- Phone Calls and Notes
- Documents and Email
- Billing Records



Law office Practice Management tools give you a place for all of your information and relate it to the client's case or matter. Think of it as an electronic version of your physical file, with many improvements. For one thing, this file cannot be misplaced. It's always on your desktop with all of your other files. Your files include all of your contacts and their phone numbers. If your secretary updates or adds a cell number for opposing counsel, it's there too, in seconds. Your upcoming trial date, your notes, phone call history, to do list, billing records, and anything else you might need is neatly organized in one place, your client's electronic file. Another benefit to having an electronic file is portability. Your client's case and their information is not only on your computer at the office, it's on your smart phone, your laptop and your iPad. Calendar, to do and contact information are pushed to these devices to keep you informed and connected while you are away from your desk. These are not the only benefits to practice management software.

Document Management

Depending on the level of management you are looking for, general practice management tools can also provide adequate document management features. Documents saved to the file can be accessed and reviewed by others in the office. Incoming documents from email or snail mail can be saved to the file with notifications sent to those needing to see the document. By adding OCR (Optical Character Recognition) to your procedure, the document becomes searchable. Some OCR programs will watch a folder for incoming PDF scans and automatically convert them to searchable PDF documents. This brings fingertip access to your entire document library.

Document Assembly

General Practice management tools also provide a basic level of document assembly. Client and case information can be merged with document templates to provide a finished document. A more advanced tool such as Hotdocs can add the ability to produce complex documents in minutes instead of hours. Hotdocs will also integrate with Practice Management tools to provide the best of both worlds.

Time / Billing

Time tracking and accurate billing are a challenge for practitioners who bill hourly. A time and billing system specifically designed for the way you work will improve efficiency at each step of the billing cycle while increasing accuracy to the client's bill. It is ideal for timekeepers to enter time as they work throughout the day and include descriptions for work performed. Hand written or spreadsheet time tracking is prone to mistakes and missed billing opportunities, and must be retyped into the billing system. Many practice management tools ease the burden of time entry by doing most of the work for you.

A law office billing program should streamline the billing process. While Quickbooks is hands down the most popular accounting package for small businesses, it does not understand law office billing. A law office billing program is designed to handle hourly, contingent and flat fee billing out of the box. A billing program should also allow you to bill all your clients at once (mass bill). Many practitioners want to preview the bill before it is sent to the client and make revisions (prebill). Offices that collect trust funds which are later applied to the bill as they are earned want to account for this also on the bill. Programs designed to perform these functions dramatically automate the billing cycle. Bills will go out with fewer errors, in less time and you will get fewer calls from clients. Paper bills are quickly becoming a thing of the past. Save a tree, email the bill, get paid earlier, and cut hours from your billing procedure at the same time.

Precautions

Reliable hardware, backups, virus protection, encryption and security are a must.

Practice Management in your office	Practice Management in the Cloud
Amicus Attorney- www.amicusattorney.com	Clio- www.goclio.com
Time Matters- www.timematters.com	Advologix- www.advologix.com
Practice Master-STI- www.tabs3.com	Rocketmatter- www.rocketmatter.com
Needles- www.needles.com	HoudiniESQ- www.houdiniesq.com
Abacus Law- www.abacuslaw.com	Credenza- www.credenzasoft.com
ProLaw- www.elite.com/prolaw	MyCase- www.mycaseinc.com
Legal Files- www.legalfiles.com	