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## LegalCURRENTS

# Law practice management in the cloud

Now that my latest book, "Cloud Computing for Lawyers," has been published, I've got cloud computing on my mind. Cloud computing, where your data and software are stored on servers owned and maintained by a third party, offers solo and small firm practitioners many benefits, including affordability, flexibility and agility.

Of course, there are also many ethical and security issues presented when lawyers allow third parties access to confidential client data, and for that reason, some lawyers are hesitant to use cloud computing platforms in their law practice.

However, the tide is beginning to turn, as evidenced by last year's release by LexisNexis of Firm Manager, a cloud-based legal practice management platform. When a company as familiar and well-established as LexisNexis sets its sights on cloud computing, it's a strong evidence that the use of cloud computing products by lawyers is a concept that has staying power.

Another sign that legal cloud computing is coming of age — just last month, Clio, another company that provides cloud-based law practice management software, announced that it raised \$6 million in its Series B round of financing. That's no small chunk of change and offers further proof that the future of legal cloud computing services is sunny, indeed.

There's a reason that law practice management software is leading the way toward a future where cloud-based legal software is commonplace. This is because cloud-based law practice management suites are very appealing to law offices, since, in theory, these products allow lawyers to run every aspect of their practice — from billing to calendaring and internal communications — using just one program from any computer with Internet access. The problem is that these products are relatively new to the market and do not yet interface seamlessly with other software products and systems frequently used by lawyers, so the transition to using a cloud-based law practice management suite can some-

times be a bumpy one.

However, one of the benefits of cloud computing is that it allows software developers the much-needed flexibility to make improvements to their interface quickly and efficiently. Instead of releasing annual software updates based on last year's customer input, cloud developers can respond to feedback within weeks of receiving it and implement changes to the platform that are then instantaneously available to customers.

Legal cloud computing vendors do this all the time and are constantly improving their products based on customer feedback. For example, last month, Rocket Matter, another cloud-based law practice management platform, announced the release of a major update that makes it easy for users to create new legal documents by merging their client and matter data already stored in Rocket Matter with template legal forms.

Similarly, MyCase, one of the newest cloud-based law practice management platforms, issued an update in November that allows for batch uploading of documents and earlier this year, released a new feature allowing each user to upload an avatar, so that the already very user-friendly interface looks and feels more like social networks such as Facebook, with which we're all so familiar.

In fact, as I learned during a demo of MyCase last week, the collaborative nature of the interface is what makes this platform so unique. MyCase provides law firm clients with a secure portal through which they can access case files and communicate with their attorneys. MyCase also allows attorneys and support staff within the firm to communicate with one another about cases and clients on this intuitive and easy to use platform.

In other words, in addition to offering billing, time tracking, calendaring and document management functions, MyCase provides a secure and user-friendly environment for all law firm and

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client communications, thus obviating the need for lawyers to use email, which is inherently unsecure. As I've discussed in the past, although email has received the blessings of ethical committees across the U.S., it is the security equivalent of sending your confidential client data through the U.S. Postal Service via a postcard. MyCase solves this problem by including a seamless communications feature right in its platform.

As you can see, legal cloud computing products are constantly improving. In due time, I'm quite confident that the ethical and security issues will be ironed out and ethics committees will continue to give the green light for the use of these platforms by law firms. As this shift toward the acceptance of cloud computing

occurs, it will become obvious to lawyers that the benefits of using cloud computing platforms in their law practice will far outweigh the drawbacks.

Of course, I could be wrong. Only time will tell, so tune in tomorrow and see.

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