

THE DAILY RECORD

WESTERN NEW YORK'S SOURCE FOR LAW, REAL ESTATE, FINANCE AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE SINCE 1908

Making your law practice more portable

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I know, I know. Some of you are wondering, "Why in the world would I want to take my law office with me? It can stay right where it is, thank you very much."

Rest assured there are a number of legitimate and, dare I say, logical, reasons to consider making certain aspects of your law practice more portable, not the least of which are flexibility, efficiency, and convenience.

The ability to access relevant information anytime, anywhere saves both time and money. Free or inexpensive online applications and resources provide lawyers with cost-efficient alternatives to the traditional office-based law practice.

As we all know, time wasted is money lost. One of the more frustrating aspects of practicing law is finding yourself unexpectedly delayed, in court or elsewhere, and knowing that if you just had certain information you would be able to make productive use of the time.

Portability provides you with the ability to do just that by allowing you to access contact information, e-mails, documents and other relevant information with the touch of a button.

The first step toward portability is to invest in a smart phone, and if at all possible, a laptop. Smart phones, such as the iPhone or Blackberry, are an indispensable part of the portable office. Smart phones allow you to access your contacts, your e-mail accounts and the Internet no matter where you are.

Internet access is extremely important, since it is the key to the portable law office. Web-based applications and the ability to utilize them via your phone or laptop free you from practicing law within the confines of your office.

Web-based e-mail is ideal and Gmail is one of the best email systems available. It's free, has a huge storage capacity, conveniently groups related e-mails into "conversations" and has a number of unique mechanisms that assist in organizing, labeling and accessing stored e-mails. Contacts are easily managed and accessed via Gmail, and, best of all, Gmail is compatible with the vast majority of cutting edge Web-based productivity applications.

Gmail can be easily used in conjunction with office-based e-mail

servers. For example, my work e-mail address is set up so that all messages are forwarded to my Gmail account. Messages from that account are automatically labeled and filtered as they are received into my Gmail account. And, my Gmail account is programmed so that all new messages sent from the Gmail account are sent from my work e-mail address. In other words, my work e-mail address is the default address for all new emails created from my Gmail account.

Opening a Gmail account also automatically provides you with access to a number of free and useful Google applications. The first is Google Calendar, a simple and intuitive calendaring system that is fully integrated with Gmail.

Another very useful application for the legal practitioner is Google Docs, a Web-based word processing system. With Google Docs, you can upload or create documents, spreadsheets, presentations and forms. You can then access and edit the files via any computer or smart phone that has Internet access. You can also permit others to access the files, thus providing a simple way to share and collaborate online.

Once you're familiar with Google's Web-based applications, the world is your oyster and true portability becomes a reality.

There are innumerable free Web-based productivity applications and organizational tools that are compatible with Google's mail and calendaring systems. I'll discuss some of the options in the near future, but in the meantime you can visit the blog *Practicing Law in the 21st Century* (<http://21stcenturylaw.wordpress.com>) and explore the many applications available by clicking on the navigation tabs located at the top of the Web page.

Portability is the key to practicing law in the 21st century. Once you've made the jump, you'll wonder how you managed to get work done in the "old days," when the portable law office was simply a fantasy.

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