



## Technology Property

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**Technology**—Property provides information on current technology and microcomputer software of interest in the real property area. The editors of *Probate & Property* welcome information and suggestions from readers.

### A Tale of Two Firms: Adventures in the Cloud

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, . . . we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven . . ." and you know the rest. In so saying, Charles Dickens, captured the dilemma of two of my clients who were contemplating moving their law practices into the cloud. The first was a small firm that specialized in conveyancing. Its clients bought and sold real estate. The firm processed thousands of transactions a year for a fixed fee. The second was a personal injury firm that specialized in motor vehicle tort actions and accident claim processing. Most of its work was done on a contingency basis.

For both firms, delivering high-quality legal services efficiently and cost effectively was a premium. For both firms, procedure and process were the keys to their profitability. Both firms recognized that their existing processes and technology were holding them back and limiting their growth. Although profitable, they recognized the need to invest in their businesses, streamline and standardize their procedures, and automate their documents.

The real estate firm had an elaborate system that tied a now-unsupported version of Amicus Attorney to a web portal and a document assembly system called GhostFill that had ceased distribution several years ago. It was time for a change. The PI firm was using Time Matters and PCLaw to handle calendar and billing. Because its practice involved regular court appearances, as well as coordinating staff at different locations, a comprehensive cloud solution was required.

### Evaluation Phase

Both firms had solutions that were working and meeting their current needs. Amicus Attorney calendaring and workflow handled the flow of appointments and tasks required for

the real estate firm. Time Matters and PCLaw handled the court appointments and deadlines for the PI firm. Any new solution would require a combination of flexibility and portability that exceeded what these solid desktop-based solutions had to offer.

To get started, we set up a series of remote meetings with these clients to review their current procedures, identify their goals, and demonstrate alternative solutions. We used GoToMeeting® to set up a recurring web conference. This tool enabled us to share computer desktops both to demonstrate and configure software. A free telephone conferencing utility included with GoToMeeting allowed us to have multiple people on each conference call session. We also used a visual outliner tool called MindManager to layout the issues and proposed solutions, as well as to map out the procedures and workflows.

### Why the Cloud?

Both firms wanted to be in the cloud. To them, being "in the cloud" meant instant access to all their case information, at any time and from any device. It meant they could review and add appointments to their calendars, check the status of open tasks, profile e-mail, and search for and download any case-related documents, as well as track billable time. It also meant that they would no longer need to support and maintain a file server or manage a network, except to ensure access through a router to the Internet. This was only the beginning.

They wanted more. They had come to expect a certain level of sophistication and customizability from their experience with Amicus Attorney and Time Matters. They expected to be able to add custom records and custom fields to their matters. They also expected to be able to define chains and triggers and to be able to import their data into a document assembly system.

For these clients, their practice management systems were how they ran their practices and their law firms. They ran their law firms as businesses, looking at the full spectrums of costs, deliverables, and, of course, receipts. Practice management was the software

system that their staffs kept open throughout the day and used to generate documents, letters, and e-mails. It was a management tool that the firms used to assess performance. It provided a single place to assess the status of a file by reviewing all activity, e-mails, and documents.

### **Document Assembly Requirements**

Document assembly capability was key to both firms' profitability. For the real estate firm, running with a fixed transactional fee, any time saved in document drafting from document assembly went straight to the firms' bottom line. For the PI firm, running on a contingency fee, the faster they could create a comprehensive statement of claim or complete an accident benefit claim, the more claims they could file and the sooner they could collect their fees.

Both firms wanted to use a SAAS-model hosted document assembly service. We presented the firms with several options. Business Integrity has a hosted-service called Contract-Express that was very promising. Its powerful relevance engine allows a user to rapidly create complex templates. XpressDox has a desktop and a cloud product that also uses a relevance engine to define custom interviews, as well as a built-in database connection utility that can connect to both cloud-based and network-based databases. HotDocs has a desktop development tool that lets you publish template packages to HotDocs Document Services, a hosted version of HotDocs Server.

Each of these products could have independently satisfied the document assembly needs of these firms as stand-alone products. But the clients required that these document assembly solutions be integrated with a cloud-based practice management solution. This was a key criterion in putting together a total solution.

XpressDox was the most promising solution. It had a low entry cost and a very flexible database connection. In fact, XpressDox developed a Salesforce.com connection tool that I had already used for several other clients. With that tool, I could connect to AdvologixPM,

a customizable practice management solution that was a Salesforce.com app. If my clients chose AdvologixPM, I had the beginning of a workable solution. At the same time, HotDocs was releasing the API for its HotDocs Document Services to cloud-based practice management vendors. One of these vendors, ActionStep.com, was eager to implement HotDocs Document Services in its program. Until we chose a practice management system vendor, we could not make a final choice on a document assembly platform.

### **Practice Management Lite**

Integration with document assembly was only one of the factors in choosing a new platform. The clients were sophisticated users who were accustomed to being able to configure and customize their databases and workflows. We briefly considered Firm Manager, RocketMatter, Clio, and Amicus Cloud. These programs were easy to use, handled calendaring, and could be used for basic billing and trust accounting. But on closer examination, they were all rejected.

Recently, Firm Manager was redesigned from the ground up, with an aggressive roadmap of features, but I could only review currently available features. At present, Firm Manager has no customized fields. Nor does it have any pre-set modules for practice areas. [Ed.:? Okay: A user could only choose pre-set modules defined for particular areas of practice; he could not create custom fields.] Nor was there an ability to create automated triggers or chained-groups of tasks. Moreover, there was no document assembly option. The interface, however, was quite speedy, and much more efficient than Firm Manager's prior iteration.

RocketMatter had support for customizable fields. It had a streamlined, easy-to-use interface. But there was no data-typing for custom fields; nor was there support for data collections. Document assembly was limited to creation of basic merge templates without logic.

Clio did have support for data-typing on fields, including support for picklists and dropdowns. It lacked support for data-collections, however. And its implementation lacked the elegance

of a Time Matters "form style." The user had to remember to add a collection of custom data fields. In desktop applications (Time Matters, Amicus Attorney, and PracticeMaster) the user chooses the area of law, and only those fields appropriate to that type of matter are presented to the user. And, like RocketMatter, the user was still limited to merge templates, without logic or any dialogs.

Amicus-Cloud was the most promising. Its DNA was from Amicus Small Firm Edition, a widely used desktop product. It had the comfortable easy-to-navigate interface common to Gavel & Gown products. But its implementation of custom fields was also lacking. There was data-typing, but no support for data collection or custom data records. Moreover, there was no support for merge templates or any form of document assembly.

### **Complex Practice Management**

We expected more out of a cloud-based practice management system; something more than the hype, a real tool. This brought us to consider HoudiniESQ, AdvologixPM, and ActionStep. These hosted services are tools that can really deliver for our clients. They all had support for data-typed custom fields, the ability to add custom records, and support for merge templates. AdvologixPM also could integrate with XpressDox document assembly. And ActionStep was developing integration with HotDocs Document Services.

HoudiniESQ was examined closely. Its architect, as chief programmer of Time Matters World Edition, was intimately familiar with the requirements of lawyers for flexibility and work flow. HoudiniESQ has triggers and automation. It has support for custom fields and records. But the lack of a true rule-based document assembly engine was fatal.

AdvologixPM was a finalist. The Salesforce.com engine is perhaps the leading cloud-platform for customer relations management (CRM). The reporting tools in Salesforce, the workflow rules, and the customizations are enterprise class. Moreover, with XpressDox we were able to launch a template from a matter within AdvologixPM, drawing data from the matter and related records, and even write back changes to that data that occurred during the XpressDox interview.

The fatal issue for AdvologixPM was limited support for law firm billing. The current version of AdvologixPM lets you track your time, but you are required to export the time slips to another program to do billing. Even a firm on a fixed fee or contingency basis wants to track their profitability against time expended.

Both clients ultimately chose ActionStep. The product is not perfect, but it has the features we required. It also had a development team that responded to feature requests, in some cases, overnight. That was refreshing. While we were doing the analysis, ActionStep completed and announced the HotDocs integration. ActionStep included support for custom fields, as well as custom record sets. Custom fields are not a throwaway add-on given to entice consultants to sell their product. Custom fields are closely integrated into the workflow engine that is at the core of ActionStep. Custom fields can trigger

tasks and documents, are tied to steps, and can be used for document assembly.

ActionStep did a good job with the HotDocs integration. HotDocs templates could be uploaded and treated just like merge templates, with the added feature of being able to regenerate an existing document based on changes to the data in the matter. The user can map standard fields, participant data, and custom fields directly to HotDocs variables, both single and repeating variables.

In addition to the custom fields, ActionStep has a unique workflow engine, with branching steps. Each step in the workflow can have multiple dependent tasks, as well as required data fields. It lets the user design customizable web intake forms that can populate a new matter and automatically create linked contact records. ActionStep also has a full billing module, as well as a full online accounting module, including recently added

support for cash-based accounting.

### **Enterprise Document Management**

ActionStep has a decent document storage capability, allowing you to add custom folders on a matter. It also has Microsoft Office integration so that you can open a file directly in Microsoft Word from ActionStep, and when you save it, the file is uploaded back to ActionStep automatically. Further, e-mails can be saved into ActionStep by forwarding them to a catchall mailbox that is accessed via POP. By putting an Action # code in the subject line, emails can be automatically assigned to a particular matter.

The PI firm client, however, wanted more than ActionStep was offering. They had tens of thousands of documents across thousands of matters. Often the matters were related, involving the same parties. The matter-based folder structure was not flexible enough

for them. Moreover, they needed a global full-text search engine that allowed searches along multiple criteria, ranking by relevance and proximity of the words in the search to each other, and a document preview capability.

We looked into cloud-based document management systems for the PI firm. It was currently using DropBox for its files. But DropBox had no consistent structure for the firm's case folders, nor was there global search. Further, DropBox lacked enhanced security for confidential files. And while the user could share file folders with clients, he could not share subfolders. We use DropBox extensively to share documents with our clients, but we have a completely separate system for confidential client data.

We demonstrated Box to the client. Box has a few more options than what is offered in DropBox. We discussed GoogleDrive and Office365/Skydrive/Sharepoint. We then looked at Egnyte, which has folder-synching capability with multi-level permissions. We also tried out SpringCM, which has a Salesforce.com integration module. None of these products had the combination of security, structured profiles, and search capabilities that we found standard with NetDocuments.

In the end, we chose NetDocuments. NetDocuments is an enterprise-level document management tool that resides in the cloud. It has custom profiles, client-matter lists, multi-criteria full-text searches, and multi-layer security that the user would expect from an enterprise-level desktop DMS. It also has Microsoft Office integration with File>Save and File>Open. It works on any device, including Macs and iPads.

The one missing piece from our strategy was ActionStep integration with NetDocuments. Both Clio and AdvologixPM have NetDocuments integration. ActionStep does have a plug-ins capability, so it is likely only a matter of time before we see a similar capability in ActionStep.

For our two clients, the IP firm and the real estate firm, the cloud proved to be a viable, practical solution for a business-oriented law firm with its eye on both customer service and costs. Both firms also saved themselves a good deal

of time and aggravation by engaging an expert early on in the process. This allowed them to offload time and effort on product research that might have otherwise eaten valuable hours of attorney time. It saved them from spending money on a one-size-fits-all product that might have eventually proven inadequate to their needs, instead of

combining best-of-breed solutions. Bringing a law firm to its fullest business potential requires not only the ability to think outside the box, but also up into the cloud. ■

## Programs and Services Referred to in Article

Every product mentioned in this article has been carefully reviewed and/or used extensively by Basha Systems LLC. I have listed the products by category, and included the name of the vendor and a link to their website. For many of these products, we have gone further and become formally certified as consultants and development partners, in order to better serve our clients. I have even served on the Advisory Board for product development for a few of these products. There is an asterisk next to any products where I have had a formal relationship as a certified consultant or partner. For most of these products, I have also received free licenses to use them.

### Consulting Tools:

- GoToMeeting, Citrix Online, [www.GoToMeeting.com/online](http://www.GoToMeeting.com/online)
- MindManager for Windows & Mac, Mindjet. [www.mindjet.com/MindManager](http://www.mindjet.com/MindManager)
- Office365 For Business, Microsoft Corporation, <http://office.microsoft.com/en-us>
- GoogleApps for Business, Google, Inc., [www.google.com/intx/en/enterprise/apps/business/products.html](http://www.google.com/intx/en/enterprise/apps/business/products.html)

### Online Practice Management Systems:

- ActionStep\*, ActionStep Software Ltd, [www.ActionStep.com](http://www.ActionStep.com)
- AdvologixPM\*, Advologix.com, [www.advologix.com/web](http://www.advologix.com/web)
- AmicusCloud\*, Gavel & Gown Software Inc., [/www.amicus-cloud.com](http://www.amicus-cloud.com)
- Clio\*, Themis Solutions, Inc., [www.goClio.com](http://www.goClio.com)
- Firm Manager\*, LexisNexis, [www.firmmanager.com](http://www.firmmanager.com)
- HoudiniESQ, LogicBit Software, [HoudiniESQ.com](http://HoudiniESQ.com)
- RocketMatter, Rocket Matter, LLC, [www.RocketMatter.com](http://www.RocketMatter.com)

### Online Document Management Systems:

- Box, Box Inc., [www.Box.com](http://www.Box.com)
- DropBox, DropBox Inc., [www.DropBox.com](http://www.DropBox.com)
- Egnyte, Egnyte, Inc., [www.Egnyte.com](http://www.Egnyte.com)
- NetDocuments\*, Netvoyage Corporation, [www.NetDocuments.com](http://www.NetDocuments.com)
- SpringCM, SpringCM Inc., [www.SpringCM.com](http://www.SpringCM.com)

### Online Document Assembly:

- ContractExpress\*, BusinessIntegrity, [www.business-integrity.com/technology/ContractExpress-dealbuilder](http://www.business-integrity.com/technology/ContractExpress-dealbuilder)
- HotDocs Document Services\*, HotDocs Corporation, [www.HotDocs.com/products/document-services](http://www.HotDocs.com/products/document-services)
- XpressDox\*, O2Smart Ltd., [www.XpressDox.com](http://www.XpressDox.com)