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**FEATURE**

# Cloud-Based Document Utilities Every Lawyer Should Be Using

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Change is the only constant. Thirty years ago, when I left law school, the typical law office was overflowing with paper. Filing cabinets lined the walls and were filled with case files and estate documents. A mix of word-processing typewriters and personal computers tied together by "sneaker-net" (transporting floppy disks on foot down the hallway) represented the cutting edge of technology. The Xerox copy machine ruled the roost. When the world of law was ruled by paper, the lawyer was tied to the office where his papers were stored.

Fast-forward to the present. The filing cabinet is gone; new documents are stored electronically. The only papers left are the "originals" of the estate files, and they are stored in a fireproof safe. Documents are now stored on a centralized file server. Office computers are linked together via a local area network (or LAN) to the file server and connected to the rest of the world through the Internet. Many of the computers are portable laptops connected without any wires, communicating via WiFi signal. A range of other devices—tablets, smartphones, scanners, and WiFi-enabled printers—are used by attorneys even more extensively than the desktop computer. Any lawyer who has begun practicing within the last ten years has never lived in a "paper" world and would not be able to function without a wide range of document utilities.

This change has liberated the lawyer from the paper shackles. Once the bulk of documents and other case information is stored electronically in a centralized file server, three questions arise: (1) Where should this file server be located? (2) Who should have access to the contents of this file server? (3) From where should they have access? The answers generally are as follows:

*1*    The documents can be stored securely in repositories in the cloud, such as NetDocuments (netdocuments.com), Dropbox (dropbox.com), Box (box.com), Egnyte (egnyte.com), ShareFile (sharefile.com), SpringCM (springcm.com), Google Cloud (cloud.google.com), and

Office365 (products.office.com). Your on-premises file server, if you still have one, can serve as local backup.

2   Access through secure login should be given to all firm members and staff, at a minimum. Selective access, via shared workspace, folders, and portals, should be extended to clients and even opposing counsel.

3   Documents should be accessible from anywhere; lawyers work increasingly from home and on the road. With the right document repository, users can access their documents from anywhere and on any device, whether it be a tablet, a smartphone, or even a friend's computer.

Once you make the move to all-digital documents, there are a host of document utilities used by modern lawyers to be more productive. In this article I will review these utilities that are enabled to work with documents stored in the cloud. The utilities that should be part of every attorney's arsenal include:

- **Optical character recognition (OCR) converters.** These tools convert digital images from scanned documents—usually as portable document format (PDF) files—into searchable documents.

- **Digital signature tools.** Because drafts are now digital, why shouldn't the final executed copy of the agreements be digital? If so, why require a formal "closing" with signatures when parties can sign their documents electronically?

- **PDF bundling tools.** When you are finished with a closing, you can bundle the closing documents into an electronic binder or notebook. Bundling tools let you add a mix of Microsoft Word documents, PDFs, and images into a fully indexed PDF with a table of contents.

- **Document comparison tools.** These tools allow you to compare different versions of documents, including comparing PDF versions from outside counsel.

- **Document style and macro suites.** Printed letterhead is gone, but the need to make your legal documents look professional and carry your firm "brand" remains. Once these style and macro suites are properly configured, professional-looking correspondence and documents are just a few clicks away.

- **Metadata scrubbing tools.** Electronic documents store a lot of information that is not visible on the surface, including tracked changes, authorship, and even confidential internal comments. Scrubbing tools intercept outgoing documents and remove the metadata before it goes to clients or opposing counsel.

- **Client portal and document sharing.** Single documents be can sent by e-mail, but when there are multiple documents, you can benefit by giving clients (or opposing counsel) secure access via shared folders or client portals.

## Optical Character Recognition (OCR) Converters

If you convert a Word document, e-mail, spreadsheet, or PowerPoint presentation to PDF, this process locks the form but also creates a searchable version of the document. That is why you can "find" passages in some PDF documents. However, if the PDF is created as an image from either a scanned document or because the creator chose to "print as image," the search options are not enabled. Unless the PDF is searchable, even a fancy document management system (DMS) or search system is limited to search the file name, folder path, or document profile—but not the contents of the document itself.

Some devices such as the Fujitsu ScanSnap (scanners.fcpa.fujitsu.com) include software that will perform OCR on the image as you scan it and add a text-searchable layer to your PDF file. Fujitsu does this by including a licensed copy of ABBYY FineReader's OCR engine. Most PDFs, however, are not searchable when they arrive at your office. One solution is to get a copy of Acrobat Professional or ABBYY FineReader and individually convert each PDF. This process can be quite time consuming.

A far better solution if your practice involves hundreds of PDFs is to get a "content crawler" tool that reviews all your PDF files and batch converts them to searchable PDFs. Trumpet, Inc. (trumpetinc.com), has a tool called Symphony OCR that you install on a file server. This tool is enabled to work with cloud-based document storage systems, including NetDocuments. DocsCorp (docscorp.com) has a competing product called contentCrawler. One version of the product, contentCrawler cloud, doesn't even require a local installation. A third option if you don't have a DMS is to license MetaJure (metajure.com). This Google-like interface includes an indexer that runs ABBYY FineReader in the background. As the tool encounters PDFs that are not searchable, it converts them to searchable PDFs.

## Digital Signature Tools

In this day and age, business is no longer local. Communications are via e-mail and the phone. Often, clients never step foot in the lawyer's office. But still, as lawyers, we are required to have verifiable signed documents that can hold up in court. For years we have been getting by with faxed copies and conforming paper signatures sent in the mail several days after the closing.

There is a much simpler solution: digital signatures. These are legal in most states, but I do not wish to give you legal advice on whether they are legal and valid in your jurisdiction. Please check with your local bar association. Where they are legal, you will find that using electronic signatures, whether for engagement letters or legal agreements, will speed up an area of your practice that might otherwise be unbillable.

DocuSign (docusign.com) is perhaps the leader in e-signatures. It has a tool that allows you to open an incoming e-mail and click "sign attachments." Nothing could be simpler. DocuSign also has a sophisticated workflow engine that lets you embed custom tags in a document that you assemble with HotDocs. Upload the document, add the e-mail addresses of the recipients, and you are good to go. If you use NetDocuments for your DMS, you can get a third-party product from Trumpet, Inc., called SignatureBridge to send out a document for signature and track its progress directly from NetDocuments.

Citrix Systems, Inc., has a competing tool called RightSignature (rightsignature.com). It integrates with Citrix ShareFile, as well as other tools such as Salesforce.com. Adobe has also entered the business with its Adobe Sign service (acrobat.adobe.com), which has right-click integration with files in Dropbox.

## PDF Bundling Tools

If you are doing document production or preparing closing binders, you might consider a PDF bundling tool. These tools allow you to aggregate a mix of Word, PDF, TIFF, JPG, and other documents in a single electronic binder and distribute them to your client or opposing counsel. Tools such as Bundledocs (bundledocs.com) and DocsCorp's pdfDocs Binder (docscorp.com/products/binder) allow you to retitle documents, prepare a table of contents, set pagination, and even add Bates stamps to the binder contents. Binders can be made fully searchable and then delivered securely. Bundledocs includes content hosting and the ability to restrict access to different parts of the bundle. By contrast, pdfDocs Binder includes a template approach with the ability to publish different portions of the bundle selectively, depending on the targeted recipient.

## Document Comparison Tools

If you are running a transactional law practice, clients and opposing counsel expect that all revised versions are accompanied by a redline showing all changes. Of course, you can use "track changes" or comparison features built into your word processor. However, your word processor's tools are limited. They don't handle text moves effectively, and they get confused by formatting changes and tables. Also, they don't allow effective comparisons with PDFs or with spreadsheets.

And so, if you are serious about transactional accountability, you will be looking at one of the following tools: DocsCorp's compareDocs (docscorp.com/products/comparedocs), Workshare's Workshare 9 suite (workshare.com), or Litéra's Change-Pro TDC (litera.com). DocsCorp's compareDocs allows you to compare a Word document to a PDF version of the same document; it does this by performing an OCR conversion in the background. Change-Pro TDC offers a hosted comparison service whereby you can launch a comparison from any device, even an iPad, and has OCR, intelligent table comparison, and support for embedded objects. Workshare 9 offers an option to move the comparison online and add a shared workspace.

## Document Style and Macro Suites

It used to be that only large firms purchased macro suites for Word. Well-styled, professional-looking documents are no longer the exclusive domain of large firms. Small firms can "look big" and become more efficient by implementing one of these suites. These suites can link your address book in Outlook to Word and allow you to create letters and memos that can be electronically delivered. Using paragraph numbering tools, you can create professionally styled agreements with proper outline numbering and correct cross-references.

Infoware (infoware.ca) has a product/service called Word Renovation Tools that will create a series of outline styles based your current documents. PayneGroup has Numbering Assistant (thepaynegroup.com/products/numbering), and Levit & James has Stylizer (https://levitjames.com). Microsystems' DocXtools (microsystems.com) is widely used, but my personal preference is BEC Legal Systems' LegalBar (beclegal.com/products/legalbar). LegalBar is one element of a suite built on the BEC CoreRelate Framework. In addition to styles, the suite of products includes templates, clause libraries, and a sophisticated document assembly engine. Future plans include integration to Office 365 in the cloud.

## Metadata Scrubbing Tools

There is more to a document than what meets the eye. There is a complete history from the creation of the document, including all changes and comments. This is not a problem for internal documents. If you send out all your documents as PDF images, you are safe. However, if you send out word-processing documents, and possibly searchable PDFs, you may be revealing more than you wish.

There are a number of tools that will "scrub" your documents clean: BEC Legal System's MetaReveal (beclegal.com/products/metareveal), PayneGroup's Metadata Assistant (thepaynegroup.com/products/metadata), and Microsystems' aforementioned DocXtools. If you implement a scrubbing solution, be sure to understand how to select different profiles. There will be times when you want to send a draft with track changes enabled.

## Client Portal and Document Sharing

There are times when collaboration requires more than sending an e-mail with attachments. There is a need to make sure everyone is reviewing and editing the most current version. NetDocuments (netdocuments.com) lets you send a link to the file, instead of the actual file, and so do Dropbox (dropbox.com) and Box (box.com). This makes sure that everyone is viewing the current, official version of the document.

Coordinating revisions when working on multiple documents rises to a new level of complexity. NetDocuments lets you create a folder in your matter workspace and share the contents of the folder with your clients/collaborators. You can monitor their usage and revoke access once the matter is closed. Citrix ShareFile (sharefile.com) lets you share individual files (by sending links to the uploaded file) or enables you to create a client workspace that can be shared with others outside the firm. With both NetDocuments and ShareFile, collaborators can upload revised file versions.

A less secure option is to create a Dropbox folder for a particular client; all files in the folder are then made available to the client's Dropbox account. You can store up to 2 GB with a free account. Google Drive (Google.com/drive) and Microsoft Office 365 also have file-sharing options. I personally prefer Dropbox for ease of use and its automatic versioning of files every time you do a save, as well as the optional RSS feed, which gives you a complete log of all changes in your Dropbox.

Another option is available if you have a cloud-based practice management system such as Clio (goclio.com), Actionstep (actionstep.com), Amicus Cloud (amicusattorney.com/amicus-cloud), CosmoLex (cosmolex.com), AdvoLogix/Salesforce (advologix.com), or Rocket Matter (rocketmatter.com). These programs allow you to give your clients restricted access to the practice management system, including access to profiled documents. Tabs3/Practice Master (tabs3.com) and Worldox (worldox.com) have optional web portals available for an extra fee.

## Full Disclosure

In Michael Crichton's 1994 novel, *Disclosure,* his protagonist entered a virtual file room by using a virtual reality (VR) headset and gloves. By using his hands and looking through the headset, he had the experience of manipulating thousands of paper records. While this was a fascinating look into the future, it was limited by the belief that the old-style file room would always exist.

Now, with most documents available in the cloud and accessible via powerful search engines, we can enter this world without the VR headsets, from almost anywhere, whether from a courtroom, a closing room, or a beach in Key Largo. Your old file room is gone, replaced with a comfortable staff lounge. Your attorneys and staff are free to roam with their laptops, around the office and around the world. You are now free to share your documents securely with clients and collaborators. You are free to work wherever and whenever you please.

## Authors