

Web-Based Litigation Management Solutions

for Firms of All Sizes

by W. Cas Campaigne of Liquid Litigation Management, Inc.



It is a common misconception in the legal community that Web-based solutions work only for large firms handling massive cases. In fact, Web-based solutions are extremely beneficial to cases and firms of all sizes. By their sheer design, these systems lend themselves to being the ultimate collaborative tool for litigation. Regardless of firm size, litigation preparation tasks are all basically the same, so to better serve clients, firms look to Web-based solutions for efficiency.

Here, There and Everywhere

There are universal elements to every case in litigation. For example, pleadings must be prepared, exhibits unearthed and attached, and depositions prepared and taken. Each of these tasks — at the very least — requires collaboration of work among lawyers and between lawyers and their support staff.

Web-based solutions allow users constant and instantaneous collaboration by allowing everyone to see the most current information. Teams working on a case are guaranteed access to the same information day or night. This access eliminates the need for one entity to duplicate CDs or paper documents or to disperse the information to others.

Multi-office firms have learned the benefits of Web-based applications and the ability to share information instantly. Teams preparing a pleading can identify exhibits by utilizing search engines and production review features and then compile them in folders or into one single Portable Document Format (PDF) file. While one lawyer is drafting a pleading, another person can add, delete or sort the documents that correspond to the pleading. This can all be done in a fraction of the time required for traditional physical paper handling, allowing you to meet tight filing deadlines. In a practical setting, if working with local counsel in Texas while based in New York, local counsel can simply log into the Web-based solution, print the relevant file and head to the courthouse instead of having to fax or courier the document for filing.

When Web-based solutions take advantage of the now widely used PDF file, attorneys and staff are empowered to do more with less. They can accomplish the same set of tasks and involve less physical paper and people. In a time crunch, lawyers now have the ability to be more independent by having all information relating to a case at their disposal.

A partner in a large New York-based firm that specializes in complex litigation and international arbitration says Web-based solutions allow him the flexibility and access he needs every day, both at home and on the road. He uses a software product that allows users to create an electronic binder of documents, in any order and comprising any subset of information. Users are able to print the “virtual binder” remotely and instantly create a case file anywhere in the world. Whether attorneys are traveling across the U.S. or the world, a virtual binder ensures they will have all relevant documents available to them.

One misconception is that “all Web-based solutions are slow.” It is true that certain products can be slow because they do not take advantage of current technology. Some may not take advantage of this technology because it could create an extra step in the operational process. Be assured, however, slowness is not an inherent element of Web-based applications.

Untethered Flexibility

Another critical point to consider is that users of Web-based management applications aren't necessarily tethered to the Internet at all times. Web-based applications that have offline components offer the best of both worlds. Users can enjoy all of the work collaboration benefits experienced with the Web component plus the flexibility of having a case available when an Internet connection is not. The offline component allows lawyers to have their entire case at their disposal, ready to respond in depositions, hearings or trial. Additionally, modern technology has enabled these offline components to look and function exactly like the online component.

Small Firms, Big Benefits

Litigation management technology is not exclusively the domain of larger firms. Smaller firms experience the same benefits, if not more, in certain areas. Web-based solutions allow smaller firms to handle increased numbers of cases and larger cases by making them more efficient and the ability to use the resources they have more effectively.

Ultimately, the party who benefits the most is the client. No matter the firm size, firms are able to handle more tasks and deliver a higher level of service quality more efficiently. The advantages of Web-based systems are magnified when applied to complex litigation.

Consider This

If the product uses PDF, make sure that the files are optimized (or linearized) for the Web. Optimization allows for a document to open and the pages you are viewing to load first while the rest of the pages load. This is an advantage PDFs have over multi-page TIFF files. However, TIFF files can be compressed, which does help slightly with the loading speed.

When looking at the data side, it is important to examine how the documents and data are indexed. A good indexing system will help to provide fast search results.

Be certain that the application you are reviewing utilizes caching or some other method that allows for a minimal amount of data to be retrieved for a given data set or list of documents. Investigating these elements will help to ensure that the Web-based application you are reviewing will not give you speed problems down the road.

Technology Rules!

Undoubtedly, technology makes good business sense, and Web-based solutions offer unsurpassed efficiency for law firms of all sizes with the added bonus of eliminating copying and shipping expenses. Time-honored traditions certainly have their place in the practice of law, but when the "old way" of managing litigation is surrendered for the latest innovations, law firms and their clients benefit in big ways.