

Chapter 4 - The Internet and Telecommunications

Benefits and Goals of Communication

There are several important strategic benefits of creating and managing an effective communication system for your firm. They are:

Connecting with Clients - The “bottom line” is that your clients have to be satisfied with the service you provide them. The practice of law is a customer service business. There are many technologies to connect and stay connected with your clients as you provide them services.

Lowering Costs to Clients - Clients are constantly trying to control and lower the cost of legal fees. Costs can be lowered both in the exchange of information and in substantive decision making if communications can be constant, open and ongoing.

Cost Effective Access to Client, Legal and Factual Information - The Internet provides low cost access to legal and nonlegal information. These savings can be passed on to your clients.

Global Communication of Information - The Internet is providing a global law office with easily accessible data and connecting people throughout the world. Before selecting the type of telecommunications you are going to use, you need to determine your communication purposes with your clients and others.

Consider some of the following communication purposes:

- Sending and receiving e-mail;
- Joint document drafting;
- Participating in client discussion groups;
- Exchanging documents;
- Accessing billing tasks and costs;
- Avoiding telephone tag and other inefficiencies;
- Sharing work product retrieval;
- Distributing and publishing information;
- Observing the facial expressions of a person using videoconferencing;
- Exchanging messages;

- Sharing case management plan and timetable.

To reach your goals there are several technologies available:

- E-mail;
- Phone;
- Fax;
- Voice mail;
- Computer telephony;
- Shared computer databases and full text files;
- Document sharing software;
- Audio Internet software;
- Video conferencing;
- Workgroup computing software;
- Internet, Intranet and Extranet.

Selecting the appropriate technology requires consideration of a number of factors including:

- Does the product or service meet your specific goal(s)? Is it fit for its intended purpose?
- How easy will it be for the staff to use? Is it easy and fast to connect or difficult and require significant work?
- Is it a one-time cost, or is there a substantial monthly charge? Can a different technology accomplish the same goal without the cost?
- Can I integrate it with other systems?
- Is the technology capable of adding new users? If not, is the company committed to further developments?
- How many parties are participating, when and what type of content will be exchanged?
- Is it stable, or is it the beta or first release of the product?
- Does it allow for security from outside and inside?

Which goals you select will determine the type of communication system and technology that is best for your firm.