COVID-19 Virus and Law Firm Operations: Is Remote Work a Viable Solution?

As concerns about the COVID-19 virus mount, lawyers across the country contemplate how to continuously operate their legal practices while also preserving the health and well-being of their staff. With more than 100,000 confirmed cases worldwide, the coronavirus is fast becoming a serious worry for the legal community.

Several big law firms have made public statements about their plans to deal with this pandemic. Some have instituted travel restrictions for its members, particularly to areas hardest hit by the disease. Others have installed hand sanitizer stations through their office spaces or conducted special training to teach staff members safety tips. Transportation stipends have also been mentioned, to help employees avoid the crowds of public transportation.

Unfortunately, while all of these strategies are helpful in dealing with COVID-19, it is altogether possible that law firms nationwide may have to operate remotely for a period of time. The good news though is that, in this ear of legal technology, it is easier than ever for law firms to conduct business virtually.

Gone are the days of expensive conferencing systems and administrative tasks tied to a physical office. With the assistance of innovative legal tech systems like TimeSolv, many law firm tasks can be handled by budget-friendly applications and web-based services.

Planning Ahead

Ideally, your law firm already has a contingency plan in place in case of interrupted operations. While COVID-19 is causing an uproar right now, the reality is that law firms are constantly under threats from potential natural disasters and cybersecurity breaches… and even with these looming threats, most law firms operate without any disaster response plan in place.

The government is already making strong suggestions for people to stay home and avoid going into crowded places. How would widespread societal disruptions affect your legal practice? Consider this:

- Amtrak has already suspended some train service routes.
- Some school districts have made the decision to close their doors, leaving parents to make alternative childcare arrangements.
- What if someone in your office tests positive?

These are not just remote possibilities any longer, and law firms need to ensure that they can still conduct business in the midst of trying times. But even if you haven't developed a business continuation plan for your practice, you can still implement measures to communicate and collaborate with firm members and clients even when they are unable to physically come to the office.

Tools Required for the Virtual Practice of Law

Successful remote working arrangements require tech tools that properly facilitate virtual business activities. Here is a useful checklist of the tech you need to keep your law firm up and running remotely during an emergency:

- Encrypted email software that keeps client information confidential and safe from breaches. These technologies help law firms ensure that an email error or hack doesn't lead to sensitive data falling into unauthorized hands. With encrypted email software, firm leaders can also track the delivery and status of emails, which provides an added level of confidence with operating remotely.
- Voice over IP technologies (VoIP) phone services transmit telephone calls over the Internet, which is vital to the efficiency and professionalism of a virtual law office environment. With VoIP, even if

one firm member is working from their cell phone and another from a home landline, clients will make and receive calls as if they are communicating with a standard office telephone system. There are many cost-effective voip options on the market, with such features as AI-powered text transcripts, audio files, and call highlights.

- Cloud-based document management allows virtual law firms to share, collaborate, and save documents through a centralized library in the cloud. To enhance security measures, access can be managed to ensure that only credentialed colleagues have case access. While most medium and large law firms have already made the movement to the cloud, many small and solo firm leaders are still hesitant. But in these times, the cloud-storage is a vital for accessible and secure remote access.
- Cloud-based time tracking and billing capabilities help law firms keep up with the work being completed on client matters, while also promoting the continuation of revenue into the firm. If your firm is consistently providing legal services to clients, it should also be consistently compensated for those services. With the right cloud-based billing software, law firm members can continue tracking their time quickly and accurately, so that administrative staff can complete the invoicing process even if they aren't physically within the law office.

TimeSolv Helps Law Operate Virtually When Emergencies Arise

With TimeSolv legal billing software, law firms can create professional invoices with easy-to-use time-tracking and expense-tracking applications that can be accessed from anywhere. With their cloud-based technology and convenient mobile app, TimeSolv provides safe and secure virtual access to your firm's time tracking and billing records from.

Among its numerous innovative features, TimeSolv offers:

- Reporting capabilities so you can monitor your firm's financial health during the emergency
- Project management functions to keep attorneys and staff on task and collaborating
- Time tracking from virtually anywhere in the world

- Remote billing and payment options to keep revenue flowing into the firm
- Free training and ongoing support to help you prepare for any emergency that may close your law office doors.

Can Your Law Firm Afford to Wait Any Longer?

COVID-19 is a global epidemic that is likely to impact your firm's ability to operate as usual. While you hope for a quick solution, don't you owe it to your clients and staff members to be prepared and ready to go virtual if necessary? To learn more about how TimeSolv can help you maintain a virtual law office, click here to start your free trial.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, Personal Touch Edits, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to TimeSolv and a variety of other publications.