How COVID-19 is Changing Law Firms and the Practice of Law

It didn't take long for COVID-19 to change the entire landscape of the legal profession. With governments mandating business closures and courts postponing proceedings indefinitely, law firms around the globe are seeking ways to continuously serve their clients in the midst of a pandemic. While some firms struggle to stay afloat as new cases dwindle, others face the challenge of increased inquiries related to the virus.

In general, COVID-19 law firm transformations fall within two categories: administrative and client services. On the administrative end, law firm leaders are having to create and/or implement alternative methods of practicing law outside of their physical law office. On the client services end, attorneys are fielding client questions about their rights and responsibilities in this unfamiliar terrain. They must also figure out how to best communicate with their clients when simple office visits are no longer an option.

Administrative Changes

Seemingly overnight, law firms went from business-as-usual in their physical offices to maintaining their practices remotely. This requires a readiness to adapt, along with the tools to implement changes efficiently. Some of the tools and steps that law firms can make to meet this challenge include:

Updating Their Web Presence

When physical doors close, a law firm's website becomes the virtual office for the continuation of the business. Firms should update their sites to include the best method of contact under the current circumstances. Law firms can also reinforce their commitment to continued service throughout the duration of the pandemic. Website content should also be updated to reflect concerns and questions specific to COVID-19, particularly the issues faced by potential and existing clients.

Ensuring Firm Communications

Law firms must maintain their internal communication in order to continue providing services. There are numerous tech tools on the market to assist with Intra-office communications. Apps like Microsoft 365 Teams and Slack offer easy-to-use audio and video capabilities. Zoom is another popular video conferencing tool.

File Sharing

The practice of law is all about files and documents, so file-sharing capabilities are absolutely necessary for continuity of service. Cloud-based practice management systems often include file-sharing capabilities. Law firms can also utilize cloud-based document storage providers like Dropbox or Google Drive for file sharing.

TimeSolv, a cloud-based legal time tracking and billing system, offers document management to its clients at no extra charge. With this feature, attorneys can securely store a variety of files and share them with other law firm members as needed.

Continuous Billing

For law firms to strive through this pandemic, they must have the capability to continue with billing and the collection of client payments. This can easily be accomplished with an effective billing software that generates and sends

invoices electronically. With TimeSolv, law firms have the necessary tools to create bills remotely through a secure and highly available data network.

Through a collaboration with LawPay, TimeSolv also empowers law firms with the tools to accept payments online. Clients can easily use a credit or debit card to make a payment, and law firm leaders can rest assured that all of their state's security protocol are being adequately met so they remain in compliance with state ethics.

Client Service Changes

In the midst of COVID-19, law firms must find the best methods of communicating with clients and meeting their specific needs. They are also answering numerous questions from the clients about their rights and responsibilities in relation to the pandemic.

COVID-19 Specific Inquiries

Law firms are fielding inquiries from business clients regarding their rights and responsibilities during the pandemic. They have questions about employment law and how to deal with their workers. They are also dealing with employees who are new to remote working environments, which brings up concerns about cybersecurity and confidentiality.

Business clients are also concerned about contract issues and their corporate duties to shareholders. Those with pending deals want to know how to finalize these plans or the consequences of putting these transactions on hold.

Client Communications

With stay-at-home orders in place, client communications become challenging for law firms. Using email, law firms can create a distribution list of client addresses and send a mass email explaining the logistics of how

legal services will continue. Email can also be used to update clients about changes to their case status and remind them of pending deadlines.

Telephone is the other common method of client communication but being away from the physical office can bring about telephone challenges. Lawyers may want to schedule client calls via email first to inform them of what number firm calls will come from. Law firms should also work to reduce exposure to firm member's personal mobile numbers, so firm leaders may want to consider VoIP telephone services for conducting firm business.

If an in-person meeting is absolutely necessary, law firms should ensure that they follow CDC guidelines and practice social distancing by maintaining 6 feet of space between participants if possible.

Client Portals

Some law firms choose client portals to communicate with clients and share needed information. With this option, clients can log into a personal portal to view bills, firm messages, and receive firm documents. TimeSolv offers a client portal with its legal billing services for the convenience of law firms and their clients.

A Forever Changed Legal Industry

While everyone hopes that the COVID-19 crisis will soon subside, it has likely changed the landscape of legal practice long-term. Law firms that were not adequately prepared for this disruption will have to quickly adapt, putting policies and procedures in place to prepare for future emergencies.

In this changing environment, law firms can count on resources like TimeSolv legal billing software to meet the changing needs of practicing law. To learn more about TimeSolv and how it can help in these uncertain times, click here for a 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.