

Are internal communication tools right for your firm?

Social media provides a quick and convenient method of instant communication between individuals who are miles away from one another. Are you considering this innovation for your law firm?

Proponents assert that messaging systems promote efficient correspondence between staff members and provide extreme convenience within a law firm, where time is often of the essence and collaboration improves performance.

Yet, opponents question whether these applications actually prevent optimal productivity and take away from the professionalism of the firm.

How messaging differs from email

When compared to the age of legal practice, email is a relatively new tool within firms. But this electronic communication method has already advanced with the introduction of other techniques.

Messaging applications provide firms with instant and constant contact between all firm members. Unlike email, these apps discourage long and extensive dialogues. Instead, they promote short and succinct communications, which can be an incredible time saver. The other major difference is the synchronization ability of each application. While the transmission of email involves some lag time, message apps deliver communications instantly, which resembles more of a face-to-face conversation than written correspondence.

The effect of messaging on productivity

When considering an instant message system, one common concern is its effect on firm productivity. On the positive side, these applications promote

efficient communications among members of a team. Let's consider an example. Several associates are working on a project and an unexpected problem arises. Instead of sending an email and waiting for necessary responses, a messaging app offers an opportunity for immediate notification and response. This saves valuable time, which benefits the firm and the client.

On the negative side, a messaging application also promotes conversation that takes away from the productivity of the practice. These instant communications can easily become chatty and more social than professional. Discussing last night's reality television show or the latest office gossip does not advance the primary goals of the firm. Another negative aspect of instant messaging is the lack of aforethought that often goes into communications.

With email, recipients tend to take longer to consider the content of the email and craft a thoughtful response. Instant message does not encourage the same amount of deliberation, which may prove detrimental.

What to look for in a messaging app

If you decide that an internal message system is appropriate for your firm, it's important to look for some essential features.

- **Administrative control** – Ensure that administrators can manage the messaging system, by determining which staff members and devices have access to the messages.
- **Search ability** – Choose a system where messages are searchable. Communication logs and content may prove necessary for client matters or human resource purposes.
- **Remote usage** – The most useful messaging system allows users to access messages remotely on a number of devices. This is especially useful for attorneys who are often away from the office in court proceedings.

The decision to implement a messaging application is specific to each firm. Consider the pros and cons to determine whether this tool will benefit your firm's overall goals.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a Virginia based writer with a passion for all things legal. As a former domestic relations attorney, she understands the challenge of determining the best fee structure for your practice. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.