

# Top 7 costs to discuss with your firm's client **BEFORE** it shows up on the legal bill

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As every attorney learns in their 1L year of law school, parties are by-and-large free to reach enforceable contract for all types of matters and issues, so long as the contract is legal and there was arms-length bargaining.

But when it comes to attorneys and firms enforcing their own contracts for legal services with their clients, all too often the clients balk when presented with a legal invoice billing them for all types of fees and charges that they now refuse to pay. Maybe you thought you discussed the fees and charges, maybe they seemed like standard industry practice, or maybe they were buried in a retainer agreement that the person now in charge of making payment never quite scrutinized.

Whatever the reason for the disconnect, a few questionable charges here and there can delay or reduce payment and may even cost you the client's goodwill. Here are 7 of the top charges that clients raise their collective eyebrows at, making them important to be clearly communicated before the bill is sent (or left off altogether).

## Database / Online Research Costs

Westlaw, Lexis, and other databases and online legal guides are an absolute necessity for providing zealous representation for many clients, but they are of course expensive. A clear description of the need, cost, and explanation of fee ahead of time will help.

## Document Scanning and Copying Costs

Clients can be quite unhappy to see high internal costs of scanning and copying charged back to them, especially when they feel the actual cost of such work is much lower. Furthermore, they may wonder why so many copies and scans were necessary.

## After-hour Meals and Transportation

Many of your clients work late hours, and the thought never occurred to him that someone else should pay for their meals and transportation as a result of you awarding them your business. While charging for meals and transportation is common in law firms, check first with the client.

## Your Firm's Building Costs (Conference Rooms, AC, etc.)

Yes, some firms will indeed charge clients for use of air conditioning when attorneys come in after-hours or on the weekend. Again, your clients may feel they are being charged for fees that really belong to the firm itself for building costs such as use of conference rooms, air conditioning, etc.

## Postage and Communications Costs

Don't jeopardize your firm's relationship with a big client over the cost of a few stamps, a fax, or a phone call. Make sure charges and fees related to postage and communications costs make sense and are clearly related to the client.

## Multiple Lawyers on a Single Task

Want to bring the first-year associate as a third attorney to the deposition to help him or her learn about defending a deposition? Training your young attorneys is critical to your firm's long-term success, but charging the client for time that benefits your firm could result in arguments.

## High-Billing Attorneys Doing Non-Billable or Low-Billable Work

In a crunch, you always want to put your clients' goals first, but sometimes an all-hands-on-deck approach means high-billing attorneys are charging the client for tasks that could be handled by a junior associate, a paralegal, or even a legal secretary or assistant. Make clear your guidelines to the client regarding how to handle such matters as they arise.

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