

The Complete Guide To

Law Firm IT Support

What Law Firms Need to Know About
Managing IT for Their Firm.



Introduction

Information Technology (IT) Support for Law Firms is an essential component of a well-functioning legal practice in today's digital age.

Yet, it's far more than just having the right hardware or software in place.

It's about ensuring seamless integration of technology into the daily operations of the firm, facilitating increased efficiency, improved communication, and ultimately, superior service delivery to clients.

This necessitates a deep understanding of both the technological landscape and the unique demands of the legal industry, leading to the realization that finding the right IT support will take some dedicated effort.

Often, law firms are confronted with the daunting challenge of selecting the best IT support from a myriad of providers, each boasting different levels of expertise and a bewildering array of services. The complexity is further exacerbated by the rapidly changing nature of technology itself, with new software and hardware

solutions emerging at an unprecedented pace.

Even after choosing a suitable IT support provider, there's the uphill task of aligning their services with the firm's specific needs and workflow. The integration of new systems can disrupt the established routines of legal professionals, requiring a great deal of patience, time, and effort.

The process may involve retraining staff, modifying processes, and experiencing periods of uncertainty and reduced productivity as the firm adjusts to the new technology.

However, despite these potential hurdles, it's worth noting that **effective IT support can transform the operations of a law firm.**



With patience, diligence, and the right support, law firms can harness the power of modern technology to drive their practice forward, setting the stage for success in an increasingly digital world. Therefore, while the journey to find and implement the right IT support may be challenging, the rewards at the end of the road make it a worthy pursuit.

This article will predominately focus on law firms of 5 to 75 total staff. Firms smaller than this range (such as solo practices) tend to take a DIY-approach to managing their IT needs (which are minimal to begin with). Firms larger than this range begin to have some level of internal IT staff. But the 5 to 75 person range of law firms usually:

- Has a real, legitimate need for qualified IT support, and
- Is unlikely to have an in-house IT resource (because the economics simply don't make sense).

With this qualifier stated, let's dive right in.

What is IT Support for Law Firms

"IT Support for Law Firms" refers to a range of technical services designed to assist law firms in setting up, managing, and optimizing their technology resources to support their daily operations.

In an increasingly digital and technology-driven world, law firms, like many other businesses, rely heavily on various technological tools and platforms to carry out their functions effectively and efficiently. The role of IT support is to ensure that these tools and platforms work seamlessly, **enabling law firms to focus on their primary objective – providing legal services.**

Given the specialized nature of legal work, the IT needs of law firms are unique and sometimes complex. From case management systems and document automation software to digital legal research tools and electronic billing systems, there's a vast array of legal-specific technology that needs to be managed and maintained.

Related – [Getting PCLaw Support](#)

In addition, there's also the day-to-day IT management that any business requires, like email systems, office software, hardware like computers and printers, networking, and data storage.

IT support for law firms takes many forms. At its most basic, it can involve troubleshooting minor technical issues, maintaining hardware, and installing software updates.

However, as law firms become more technologically sophisticated, IT support also includes more advanced services like network optimization, data management, system integration, and even training employees on how to effectively utilize these technologies.

Another critical aspect of IT support is the ongoing maintenance and updating of these systems.

Technology is not a static field.

It continually evolves and advances, and to stay effective and efficient, law firms need to keep their systems current and robust. This is another area where IT support comes into play—ensuring that law firms can navigate this changing landscape smoothly and securely.

The ultimate goal of IT support for law firms is to allow them to harness the power of technology without being burdened by the technical complexities. By ensuring that all technology systems are running smoothly, securely, and at peak performance, IT support helps law firms to be more productive, efficient, and competitive.

In essence, IT support for law firms is not just about managing technology — it's about enabling these firms to do what they do best: practice law and serve their clients. By dealing with the technological details, IT support frees up law firms to focus their time and resources on their core legal activities.

It is an indispensable service in today's digital age, helping law firms stay at the cutting edge of their industry.



Why IT Support for Law Firms Matters

The importance of IT support for law firms cannot be understated. It is a vital cog in the machinery that enables law firms to operate smoothly in the digital age.

Here are 7 reasons why IT Support for Law Firms Matters:

1. Streamlining Operations

Technology plays a key role in modern legal practices, from communication tools to case management systems and legal research software.

IT support ensures these tools are well-integrated, up-to-date, and running optimally, helping streamline operations and enhance productivity.

2. Effective Resource Management

Law firms manage a wealth of data – case files, client records, legal documents, and more. IT support ensures effective data management, including secure storage, easy retrieval, and organized documentation.

With proper IT support, firms can turn a potential liability into a powerful resource.

3. Enabling Remote Work

The modern legal landscape often necessitates remote work capabilities.

IT support aids in setting up reliable and secure remote access to work systems, enabling attorneys to work effectively from anywhere and at any time.

4. Optimizing Collaboration

Effective communication is vital in the legal field.

IT support can help set up and manage secure and efficient communication systems, including email, video conferencing, and instant messaging tools, facilitating better collaboration between team members and clearer communication with clients.

5. Empowering Legal Staff

By ensuring that technology systems function well, IT support indirectly empowers legal staff. They can work more efficiently, focusing on legal tasks instead

of getting bogged down by technical glitches.

In addition, IT support can provide training to staff on new software or systems, enhancing their tech proficiency.

6. Cost-Efficiency

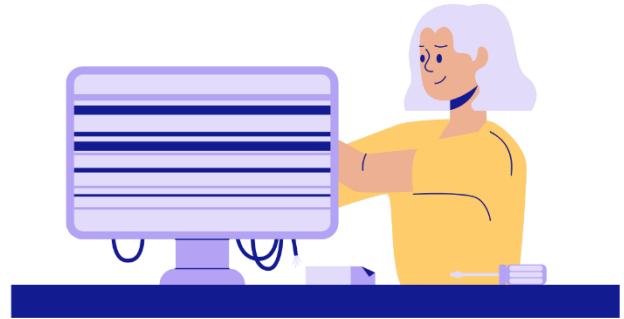
Engaging a dedicated IT support team is cost-effective in the long run.

It helps avoid costly downtime, improves productivity, and may eliminate the need for an in-house IT staff, freeing up resources for other vital aspects of the law practice.

7. Ensuring Business Continuity

In the event of technical issues or system failures, IT support can ensure minimal disruption to operations.

By providing timely troubleshooting and repair, IT support helps maintain business continuity, which is critical to client service and the firm's reputation.



How to Approach Law Firm IT

We're going to explore the three main paths available for law firm IT, specifically: The three (primary) options a law firm has when it comes to getting support and management of their technology.

Method 1: Break-Fix Law Firm IT (AKA: "Plug-and-Pray")

Break-fix law firm IT is exactly what it sounds like. Something isn't working, so you call your local IT consultant or company to fix it... and that's virtually the only time you call an IT professional.

Firms that fall into this camp, generally:

- View technology as a necessary evil (rather than a competitive edge)
- Spend as little as possible on technology (and are proud of it)

- Spend more money to put out IT fires than prevent them in the first place.
- Experience downtime and system outages.
- Suffer software problems
- Lack productivity (often for your entire firm)
- Lose data (yours or your client's)
- Deal with security breaches
- Damage their reputation

As you can undoubtedly tell, taking a purely reactive, break-fix approach to law firm IT is absolutely the wrong way to go about it.

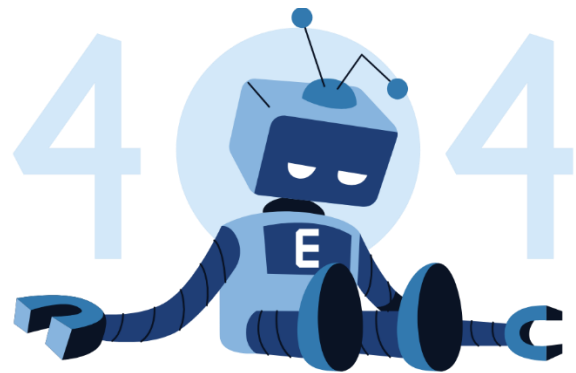
The firm may think they're saving money in the very near-term, but in almost every case, they're being a penny wise and a pound foolish.

And honestly, most qualified, reputable IT consulting companies won't take on clients interested in a break-fix only relationship. And it makes sense — if the law firm doesn't take their technology seriously, why should they? Yes, you can probably find some independent local IT consultant willing to come in as-requested, on an hourly basis. But most law firms want something closer to a gold-standard in law firm IT support (not

just the cheapest guy who will take anything he can get).

The real problem, though, of break-fix IT is it misses the preventative part of IT management. Proactive maintenance, monitoring, preventative care. Updating your systems. Testing your backups. Reviewing server logs.

So, for any readers that employ this plug-and-pray approach to law firm IT management: Please, do yourself, your firm, and your clients a favor, and consider method 2 or 3.



Method 2: Managed (Proactive) Law Firm IT

Next, we have managed, or proactive law firm IT. While the particulars in this method can vary from firm-to-firm (and IT consultant to IT consultant), in general a

proactive approach to Law Firm IT includes:

- Routine preventative care (usually onsite, typically once or twice a month)
- 24 x 7 x 365 server/network monitoring (catching problems before they occur or grow)
- As-needed support (usually via a help desk, this is the reactive, day-to-day support).

This approach costs more money up front, yes. Usually (with the right IT consultant) in the form of a predictable, fixed fee every month (fixed-fee, fixed-scope). But it will save you tons of headaches, drama, downtime, problems and money over the long haul.

Trust me.

Because, fundamentally, the **purpose of proactive IT care is to:**

- Significantly reduce the likelihood of IT problems or disasters, and
- Put your firm in a better position to recover should a problem happen anyway.

If you're going to own servers (which to run many of the best legal practice management applications, is a necessity),

do it right, and **be proactive with your law firm IT.**

Related – [Best Legal Practice Management Software](#)

Being proactive with your law firm IT will result in:

- Less downtime, less system and software problems
- Less frustrated staff
- Much less likelihood of data loss
- Much less likelihood of a data security breach or incident
- Much less likelihood of a virus outbreak or ransomware
- Much faster resolution of problems, when they occur
- Much faster recovery of files, data or systems if they crash
- Early detection of small problems (before they become big problems)

Your goal ought to be to shift from being a firefighter, to becoming a fire marshal.

If I've convinced you to take a proactive, managed approach to law firm IT – we're one step closer!

Now, be sure to find the right Law Firm IT provider.

Method 3: Law Firm IT – in the Cloud

Finally, our third method for managing law firm IT: **doing it in the cloud.**

And, I'm not talking about abandoning any server-based Practice Management or Document Management Software that your firm relies on in exchange for a watered-down web application.

Let me explain.

Many of the best case management applications (as well as other types of software used by law firms) requires a server; it needs a place to live. That's why many law firms have servers in the first place. And for many years, if you wanted to run practice management software like ProLaw, PCLaw, Time Matters, Tabs3, or even Timeslips and QuickBooks, you needed a server, one way or another.

This used to mean you had to buy a server and (hopefully, following method #2 above) retaining a capable IT consulting firm to manage it for you.

Today, you have another option: **A Private Cloud.**

Related Video: [Why You're Struggling to Work from Home](#)

A private cloud is a completely hosted, secure IT platform for your law firm and all of your software, documents, data and (sometimes) more. Applications like those I mention above require a server (as I said, one way or another); and in the case of private cloud, a private cloud is the server.

Here's how it works.

With a private cloud, the cloud provider builds dedicated, private cloud servers just for your law firm. They'll install your legal software (and other software), move your data, documents and in some cases email from your local, on-premise servers to your new servers in the cloud, or your new private cloud.

With the right private cloud company, that company will be intrinsically knowledgeable about the software your firm relies on. They'll know how to install it, support it, optimize it, and keep it running at peak performance. (Have you ever had an IT consultant give you that deer-in-

the-headlights look when you present a problem within your legal software?)

The cloud service provider is responsible for all backups, maintenance, updates, and cybersecurity. Your firm simply logs in (from anywhere, anytime on any device), and get to work.

And everything just works.

Each person in your firm logs into a virtual desktop, which runs full-screen, and across all of your monitors. In your virtual desktop you'll find your legal software, your file system (EG, "the S: drive,"), your Office suite, Outlook email – everything you need to work.

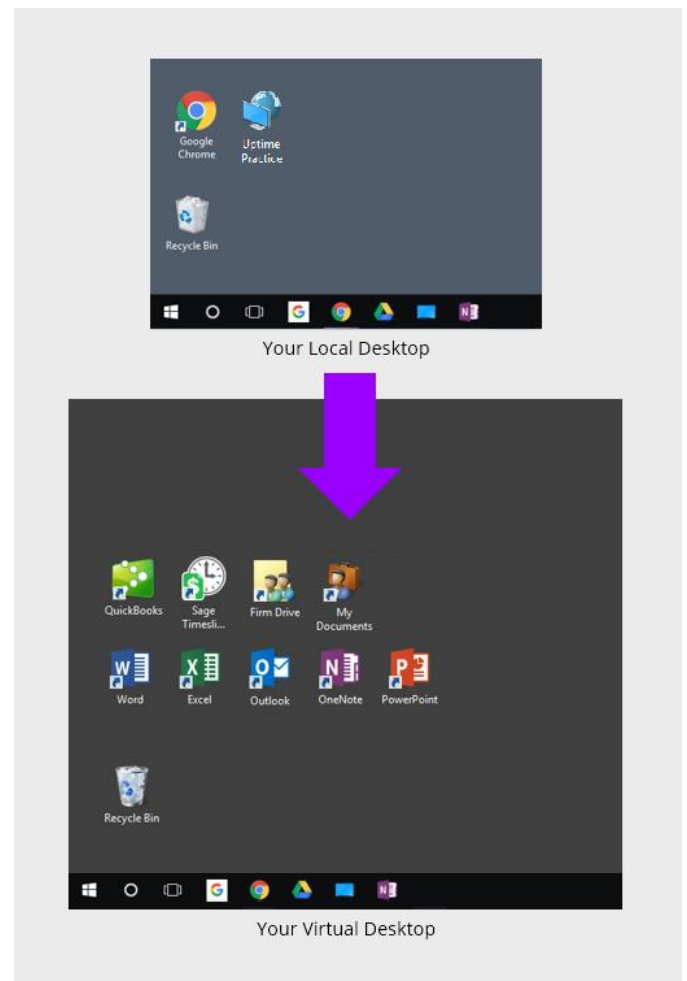
Law Firm IT in the cloud brings the benefits of managed, proactive, IT with the **added benefits of:**

- No servers or IT headaches
- Work anytime, anywhere (on PC's or Macs)
- Maintenance, security, backups—all handled for you
- Expert legal software support when you need it
- Much more reliability (cloud infrastructures are always more

reliable than a server sitting in your coat closet)

- Fixed, predictable law firm IT costs.

Related – [Virtual Desktops for Law Firms](#)



Best Practices for Law Firm IT

Law firm IT is a pain in the ass. We're not being crude, we're being honest.

Keeping your firm's computers and servers up and running; installing, updating, and maintaining software; and proper data and document security are just a few of the law firm IT components you need to stay on top of to keep the machine moving.

And you didn't go to law school to become an IT manager. So, to help you navigate the complicated, often frustrating world of law firm IT, we've put together this list of **5 best practices** to help you improve your law firm IT experience.

In fact, I wouldn't call them best practices, but rather rules your firm should abide by, or risk problems like:

- Downtime and halted productivity
- Data loss
- Software slowdowns and bugs
- Data security breaches.

So here are 5 rules you should always follow when it comes to managing law firm IT.

Let's get started.



Rule #1: Don't Be Reactive

When it comes to managing law firm IT, possibly the first, most important rule is to be proactive rather than reactive. This may be advice you've heard again and again – but in today's day and age, there are still so many law firms that don't practice this.

Avoid reactive, break-fix law firm IT management (what we referred to earlier as: "plug-and-pray").

- Do you only call your IT consultant when something is wrong?

- Does your IT consultant/company remotely monitor your systems, but rarely sets foot into your office?
- Do you spend as little as possible on IT and technology?

If so: Stop it.

You're doing your employees, your clients and yourself a huge disservice. You don't need to take a Cadillac approach to law firm IT management, but you do need to be proactive about it.

See Rule #4, below, for an overview of how to be properly proactive when managing your firm's technology.

Rule #2: Don't Hang onto Old Equipment

Warranties on servers, computers, and workstations exist for a reason. While it's not really a guarantee that things will go wrong after it expires, it can give you insight into what you can expect once a certain amount of time passes.

Maintaining and repairing existing servers, computers, and workstations longer than their warranty may seem like a good idea, but it can (and almost always will) cost

your law firm more money in the long run. It's another form of break-fix, reactive law firm IT management, and it simply not worth the risk.

As a rule of thumb, you should recycle equipment, especially servers, **every 3 to 5 years**. Any more is taking significant risks.

Rule #3: Keep Your Software Current

Similar to keeping your hardware current, you need to keep your software current; especially your critical law firm software.

This includes:

- Productivity Software (Microsoft Office Suite)
- Practice Management / Billing Software
- Document Management Software

I'm not saying you need to jump on every new update or release of your practice management software the day it comes out.

But you should keep your software reasonably current, either using the latest version or one version back. At a bare

minimum, make sure you're at least on a version that the publisher still supports.

I've seen many law firms hesitate to spend money on their main application's annual maintenance plan or support agreement... only to lose countless hours of their employee's time dealing with bugs, outages, slowdowns, and other problems.

Related – [PCLaw® and Time Matters® – Why Your Law Firm Needs an Annual Maintenance Plan](#)

Rule #4: Adopt Managed IT

It's important for every law firm, regardless of practice area, size, or location to proactively address their IT. The term for this is adopting Managed IT.

Managed IT is the combination of proactive and preventative care for your core IT infrastructure (server, switches, firewalls, etc.) and streamlined support for your firm's employees when they need it (IE: an IT Help Desk).

In general, IT consultants and consulting companies fall into these categories:

- Hourly / Time & Material / Consultants (EG: "Call me when it breaks,"), and

- Managed IT Providers, often Called MSP's (EG: "I'll keep it from breaking.")
- Routine, onsite preventative care, performed by an IT professional (usually monthly).
- 24 x 7 x 365 server/network monitoring (catching problems before they occur or grow)
- As-needed IT Help Desk support – the only part of an IT care plan that's reactive by design.

Rule #5: Consider a Private Cloud

Law firm IT problems are a certainty, even with new, under-warranty servers, up-to-date software and capable Managed IT providers. And even with all the right elements in place, your IT management/support costs are difficult to predict.

Enter a Private Cloud.

A Private Cloud is a fully-managed, fully-hosted IT platform that will provide hosting for your critical software, your filesystem (files and folders) as well as your email and other systems. A Private cloud serves as a single, central system where all of your firm's technology lives

and is maintained and is the alternative to the cycle of buying servers, repairing, replacing, and repeating.

For many law firms, a Private Cloud liberates the firm from having to think about, deal with and pay for law firm IT challenges.



With the right private cloud company, that company will be intrinsically knowledgeable about the software your firm relies on. They'll know how to install it, support it, optimize it and keep it running at peak performance. (Have you ever had an IT consultant give you that deer-in-the-headlights look when you present a problem within your legal software?)

The cloud service provider is responsible for all backups, maintenance, updates, and cybersecurity. Your firm simply logs in (from anywhere, anytime on any device), and get to work.

And everything just works.

Related – [7 Reasons to Move Your Law Firm to a Private Cloud](#)

Getting IT Support for Law Firms

Technology changes fast. Legal technology often changes even faster. Not only is managing law firm IT challenging, doing so requires skillsets from both the “general IT” category as well as the “legal technology” category – a combination that’s hard to come by.

In the general IT school of knowledge and expertise, you have networks, servers, hardware, software, security, email... and more. In the legal technology area of expertise you have legal case management software, document management software, eDiscovery, dictation... and so on.

So how does a small practice manage law firm IT? Should they try to do it in-house? Hire a local IT person? Ask a colleague what they do?

Let’s first talk about this difference.

In-House IT vs Outsourced Law Firm IT Support

The traditional method of obtaining IT support was to hire an in-house team of IT professionals. This isn't cost-effective for smaller firms, however. While hiring in-house specialists might be great for large firms, there are other options for smaller ones.

Managed service providers (MSPs) are third-party teams that deliver IT support to your firm. Traditionally, they remotely manage your law firm's on-premise servers and provide IT help desk services. And—because on-premise IT infrastructures requires hands-on administration, MSP's typically provide boots-on-the-ground services, either as-needed or on a regular schedule.

Here are a few of the many benefits to choosing an MSP (Law Firm IT Support team) over an in-house team:

- Lower costs: There's no need to vet, hire, and train IT professionals for your firm. Plus, the more progressive MSPs come with a set payment structure, so you always know what to budget for each month or year.
- Easier access to qualified support: MSPs offer professionals with experience in every tech niche. This means you'll have access to qualified support, regardless of your tech needs.
- Fast response: MSPs are dedicated solely to your IT which can improve response times when issues occur.
- Single point of contact: If you or your team need help, you'll know exactly who to call. The MSP will then take over, so you can get back to work.

5 Considerations for Evaluating Law Firm IT Providers

1. Exclusively Legal-Focused

When looking for a law firm IT consultant or provider, look for a company (or person) that is solely devoted to the legal industry.

Knowing how to setup a server or computer network is one thing (and, by the way, something every basic IT professional should know).

Knowing the difference between practice management vs. document management

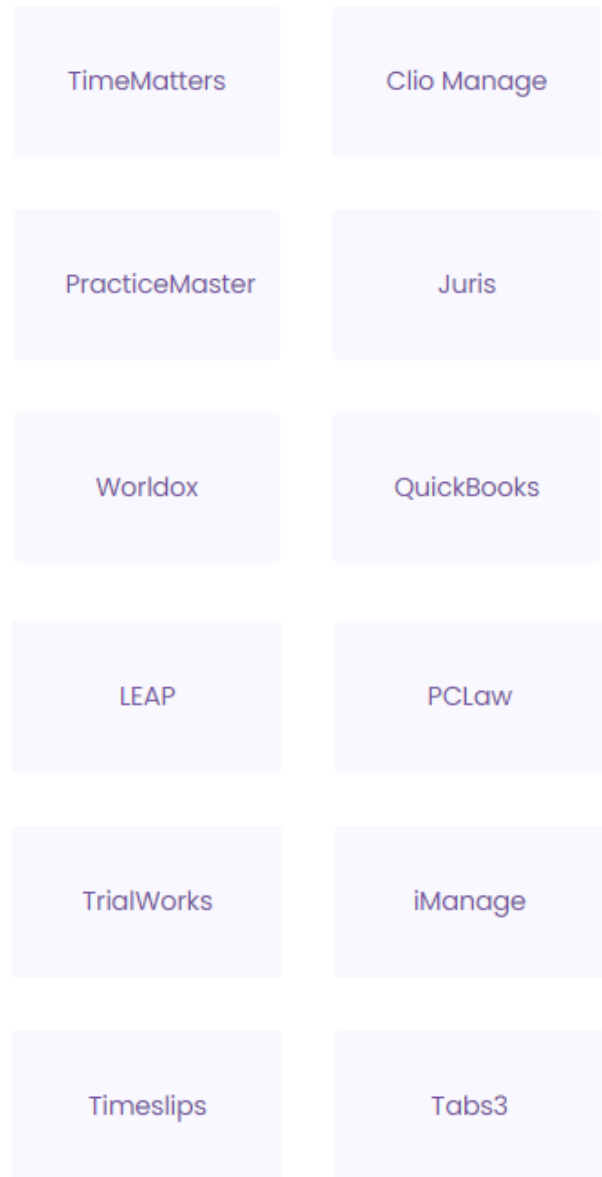
software, or how to deploy and manage that high-maintenance eDiscovery is another thing entirely.

2. Certified in the Software Your Law Firm Uses

Our next best practice tip for choosing the right law firm IT provider is to look for a provider with certifications (or at least tons of experience) working with and supporting the software your law firm relies on every day. At the risk of being repetitive on point #1 above—being a good IT person alone isn't enough.

I cannot tell you how many law firms have groused to me that their IT consultant, while otherwise capable, takes a shrug and “not my area of expertise” attitude towards the nuances of their legal software.

Make a list of the software your law firm relies on and ask the law firm IT company specifically if they have certification for those applications. If you're not sure where to start, the **most common software applications used by law firms include:**



Equally important as knowing how to install, manage and support each legal practice management or document management application in your firm is understanding how they will all work together.

Some legal case management applications integrate well with Microsoft

Office, but only specific versions. Some document management systems (DMS) can talk directly to your practice management app... but must be setup just right.

Knowing these nuances requires a lot of experience and requires a true legal technology expert.

Related – [Get Time Matters Support](#)

3. Proactive Maintenance, Monitoring, & Updating

The right law firm IT provider will include proactive maintenance, monitoring, and updating. They don't just come around when something breaks. (And shame on you if that's all you use them for.)

A capable IT management firm is less of a fire fighter and more of a fire marshal. They work with you to reduce the likelihood of something going wrong. The best IT firms will only agree to take on a client if that client agrees with their proactive stance. (These are, by most standards, the best IT firms.)

Said another way, don't adopt a plug-and-pray mentality, and don't hire an IT consultant that caters to that audience.

(Plug-and-pray being a play on the term "plug and play," and refers to a purely reactive, break-fix approach to law firm IT.)

I probably don't have to tell you just how devastating it would be for your law firm if data was inaccessible for hours (or days).

4. Truly Looking Out for Your Best Interests

This one may sound incredibly obvious, so let me explain.

Many IT consulting firms describe themselves as "consultants" and "advisors" to their clients. And they should be those things. But at the end of the day, an IT firm, like any other business, has bills to pay. Unfortunately, this can lead to recommending to your firm what's best for them, not so much what's best for your firm. A classic (and unfortunately frequent) examples of this are:

Your server is end-of-life. Naturally, this is a good time for your law firm to consider replacing all on-site servers or (instead) moving to the cloud. When you ask your "trusted IT advisor," they tell you that the cloud is insecure... or that the cloud "isn't a

good fit” for your firm, or that the cloud “puts your data in other people’s hands,” or some other FUD (Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt).

Why? Because if you don’t stay on the buying/replacing server merry-go-round... there’s much less for your IT firm to do (and to charge for).

Related – [Does Your IT Consultant Really Have Your Back?](#)

Don’t get me wrong – many IT firms are honest brokers and will put their client’s needs above their own. But keep a skeptical eye when evaluating recommendations that come from an IT consultant.

5. Transparency in Contracts

Of course, you know that you should read the contract.

The real questions you should consider are:

- How transparent is the company in regard to what they charge and when they charge it?
- Are there hidden fees?

- Are some things covered as part of a fixed fee... but other things are extra?
- What is the term of the agreement?
- What all is included in the contract?
- Does it limit you to just the computers in the office or does it include laptops, smartphones, tablets, and other devices the law firm relies on?
- Are you charged extra for emergencies?
- Are you penalized for needing them?

Pay close attention when you review the contract. **Don’t get yourself into an ugly situation.**

Speaking of...

Beware Server Proliferation (Pushed by Your IT Firm)

After working with hundreds of law firms for the past decade plus, I want to caution law firms that are being advised by a local IT firm or Managed IT provider.

If you’re like many law firm lately, you’ve moved some, if not many of your software functions to web-based/cloud based

software. **For instance, perhaps you've moved:**

- Exchange email to Office 365
- QuickBooks (desktop) to QuickBooks Online
- Practice Management to Clio, LEAP or CosmoLex
- Document Storage / Management to OneDrive or LexWorkplace



Many law firms are in some phase of transitioning each element of their firm's technology to cloud-based tools. And with each step, **there's one less thing your on-premise server is needed for.**

The natural progression here is that, eventually, there is no remaining need for an on-premise server. Once you've moved email, your main software

applications and your files/folders to the cloud, there is no longer a need for onsite servers in the first place.

But here's the thing.

Most local IT service providers understand that no onsite servers means far less for them to manage, which directly translates to **less revenue for them.** It simplifies costs (a lot) less to manage a law firm that doesn't have servers, and is using entirely cloud-based tools.

Unfortunately, this leads many local law firm IT support companies to insist: "No, you still need a server for (XYZ reason)."

These purported reasons may include:

- "You need server for Active Directory / user management."
- "You need a server to manage DNS/DHCP."
- "You need a server to be your print server."

The truth is, these few remaining utility functions can cost-effectively be moved to other cloud-based services (such as Microsoft Azure or Practice Next), truly eliminating any residual need for on-

premise servers. Unfortunately, we've witnessed local IT firms cling to onsite servers to keep their management fees and revenue intact.

If you've moved all data, documents and apps to the cloud, make no mistake: You no longer need onsite servers, or the ongoing cost to maintain them.

Related – [25 Things to Ask Your Legal Private Cloud Provider](#)

Managing Your Law Firm's IT

Something I frequently hear from law offices is that the firm is sick and tired of managing IT Support for Law Firms.

Firm Administrators, Office Managers, and Attorneys are educated, trained, and well equipped to manage the workload, process, and people of the firm. But many times these professionals are also charged with selecting, managing and coordinating with an outside IT vendor.

Long before I joined Uptime Legal, I was one such legal administrator at a big law firm. Today I'm in charge of managing all of Uptime's cloud service delivery; the

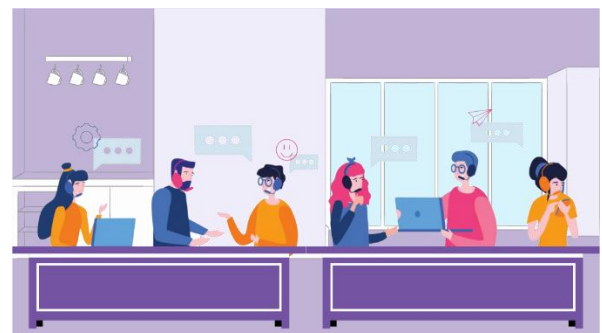
combination of this experience gives me a unique perspective on what management of law firm IT support looks like, how it's perceived and how it really goes down in a law firm.

This section will help answer questions like:

- How much involvement should you have in managing your IT?
- How much do you need to understand about IT, IT terminology, and the workings of your network?

I'll share lessons learned and offer suggestions on what to look for in an IT vendor, what level of involvement you should have in your firm's day-to-day IT support, support options for procuring new equipment (computers, network equipment), and office moves.

Let's dive in.



IT Partner (aka IT Vendor)

Whether you have on-premise servers, manage law firm IT support with consulting resources or utilize a private cloud, you need an IT vendor who is available, dependable, and understands your practice.

I had you with available and dependable but shocked you with “understands your practice,” right?

No, I don’t mean your IT vendor should be an attorney who still practices on weekends. But your IT vendor should understand what separates law firms from other office-based businesses. Your IT vendor can better support you if they understand you and your business.

If they are expected to support your software applications (and they should be), then they should be familiar with them. Is your current law firm IT support vendor familiar with and capable of supporting legal applications such as [Time Matters](#), [PCLaw](#), [ProLaw](#) or [Tabs3](#)?

Your IT service provider should not only take your direction but should be your **partner** in guiding your technology

decisions. From helping you select the right software, to implementing that software, to managing backups, virus protection, to managing file/folder permissions and establishing secure remote access. They can’t do that if they don’t understand what it is you do.

When it comes to technology support for a law firm, its not just about bits and bytes. Law firms are special: They have a unique culture, unique requirements and use specialized software to manage their firms.

Related: [Why Did Uptime Choose Legal for Specialized Cloud Services?](#)

When selecting a law firm IT support partner it’s important to properly [vet them and do your due diligence](#). And–don’t forget to find out **these key things that tend to get forgotten until it’s too late:**

- What’s not included in the monthly cost?
What other project fees or extended services fees, or items are simply not included or covered?
- What is their service level agreement (SLA) response time and during what hours?

This is an area where what looked too-good-to-be-true often is.

There are always limits to what's included in any given service, and it's important to understand where those limits are.

Determine which "gotchas" can you live with and where do you draw the line on being nickel-and-dimed.

Things to specifically look out for include:

- Is adding / removing a user included or an extra fee?
- What support of your local network and equipment is included?
- What if your server(s) needs to be rebuilt to resolve a technical issue – is that covered or a fee?
- What about OS upgrades?

Unless you pay your IT Partner by the billable hour (and I don't recommend that at all), adding and removing users should be included at no additional cost.

If you are with a cloud company, they may draw the line at supporting your local equipment. Your local equipment (namely your firewall and switch) play a huge role with how your connection to and printing from the cloud work. At a minimum some basic remote support of your local network should be included.

Sometimes, despite the best troubleshooting efforts, a server needs to be rebuilt from the ground up. Though infrequent, there are a number of reasons this can happen and it is something you should ask about.

Will your IT Partner rebuild your server(s) at no additional cost? If not—what is the fee structure?

Similar to the above question but slightly different: What about Operating System upgrades – like moving from Windows 8 to Windows 10 on your computer, server have an OS and every few years a new OS is released.

This is a major project and does impact your firm. Most IT and Cloud Service Providers don't cover this service by default (but the best ones do).

You will eventually want to move to the newest OS for security reasons and for software compatibility.



When you need support, you want to make sure you are going to get it in a timely manner. Your definition of timely should align to your IT Partner's SLA. Think of how the users of your firm will feel being told a ticket has been submitted and they'll hear back within 24 hours – I'm betting that's not good enough. Look for an SLA of 2 hours or less and find out if phone calls have a different SLA than emails or other methods of notifying your IT Partner of an issue.

Caution: don't be fooled by IT or cloud providers that claim 24/7 support. More than likely there is a very low-level tech, maybe even just a receptionist, who will take your ticket and tell you someone will call you back the next day.

Ask thorough questions to understand what level of support you are truly receiving during non-peak hours.

In my experience it's very rare that such level of support is truly needed. It may make you and members of your firm feel secure, but it's not likely to be something you will truly need or utilize.

Managing Your Law Firm IT Support Needs

Now that I've briefed you on what to look for in an IT Partner, let's delve into your level of involvement in your firm's day-to-day IT management.

The golden rule is: You should be aware of issues that are persistent, pervasive, and high impact.

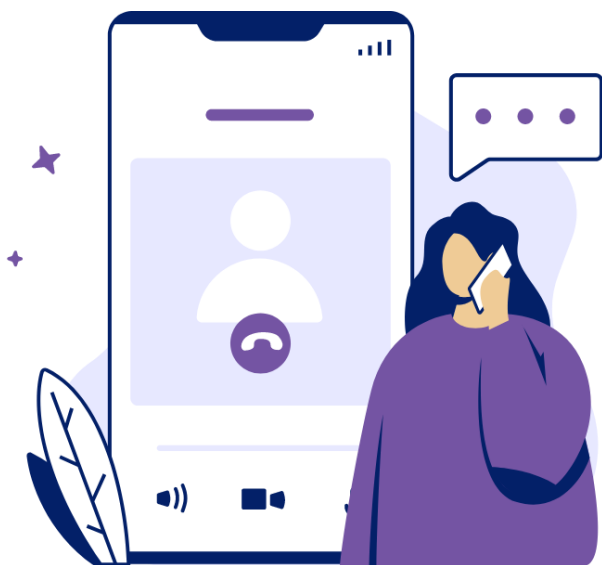
Being aware of these types of issues allows you to be in the loop as to whether your IT services are truly working for your firm (or just causing headaches). You want to make sure that persistent or recurring issues are getting proper attention for full resolution and that high impact issues are resolved quickly.

Beyond that, it's up to you and firm whether you should be copied on every support item. Unless you are paying for IT support by the billable hour, you should allow your employees to work directly with

your IT Partner to ensure they receive timely and effective support.

If you are paying for IT support by the billable hour (again, not recommended), you may want to funnel everything through you just to make sure you are aware of the potential costs involved.

Note that a billable hour model will inherently place a higher burden of basic IT support on you to save the firm money.



How to Get the Best Results from Your IT Partner

Law firm IT support is a two-way street and many (if not most) IT issues can't be resolved behind-the-scenes with no

involvement from the user experiencing the issue. It's important that users experiencing issues work with your IT Partner. This allows your IT Partner to see the issue in action which gives them more information and should lead to quicker resolution.

It's important to provide clear information on what is happening, and which users are affected (or unaffected) by the issue.

Clear and accurate information narrows down the possible cause of the issue, leading to quicker resolution.

Other Support Requests: New Equipment and Office Moves

Periodically, your firm may need new network equipment including a firewall, wireless access point, switch, copier, or computers.

Your law firm IT support partner should be able to provide you consulting and advice, free of charge. Some IT providers will resell you equipment, though you can probably find comparable pricing and better warranties by buying direct from the source.

Other times, and the best of both worlds, is when your IT partner has a relationship with a vendor and can get you discounted pricing and standard manufacturer warranties.

Moving offices can be daunting without considering the implications to your IT and employee ability to work during the move. If you are in the cloud, your employees should be able to work remotely while your old office is taken apart and your new office is put together – with minimal downtime!



Your cloud provider should be able to assist you with making any network updates necessary because of the move.

If you have an on-premise server, your law firm IT support partner will most likely charge a project or billable hour fee to physically take down your new equipment and reconfigure it in your new location.

This can be costly and moving equipment can be risky. You should plan for at least a day of downtime, maybe more.

You should now have a better understanding of how your IT partner should work with you to support your firm and hopefully you've found some ways to get back more of your work time by doing less of your firm's IT.

Cloud Service Providers vs. Managing IT

That may have felt like a lot – my apologies for that.

Nonetheless, I believe it was important for you to have a comprehensive understanding of what it meant to obtain, retain, and manage IT Support for Law Firms.

If you are looking at your notes and thinking, "There has to be an easier way..."

There is.

This process is burdensome, costly, and disruptive of the important duties your law

firm needs to pay attention to. That's why we've developed [Practice Next](#).

Practice Next is a platform we developed to get Your Complete Law Office in the Cloud™.

By operating in the cloud, you don't need to worry about server updates, software updates, an anchor to a single location, and more.

Here are some of the features that make Practice Next worthwhile.



Legal Software Support

Setup, training and support for your practice management and legal software.



Office 365

The Office 365 suite, customized to work the way your law firm does.



Cloud Storage

Simple Cloud Storage or Comprehensive Document Management software.



Collaboration Tools

Remote meeting and communication tools to keep your firm working together.



Security & Compliance

Multi-Factor Authentication, Email Encryption, Compliant Backups, Desktop Protection.



IT Support

IT Help Desk: Support for your Desktops, Laptops, Printers, Network & more.

IT Support for Law Firms – Frequently Asked Questions

WHAT DOES IT SUPPORT MEAN?

“IT Support for Law Firms” refers to a range of technical services designed to assist law firms in setting up, managing, and optimizing their technology resources to support their daily operations.

WHY IS IT SUPPORT IMPORTANT?

IT Support is essential to any technology strategy.

Without it, you have no way of ensuring the technology you rely on will continue working tomorrow... next week... next year... and so on.

CAN ANY IT SUPPORT PROVIDER WORK?

Short answer, no.

You need someone who understands the inner workings of a law firm. Only then will they be able to provide tailored support for law firms.

DO I NEED TO REEVALUATE MY CURRENT STRATEGY?

Best practice is to reevaluate your technology strategy regularly.

However, if you have been experiencing regular issues, disruptions, or downtime, I recommend doing an evaluation ASAP.

The same applies if you feel like your law firm is not operating at optimal capacity.

IS THIS WHOLE PROCESS REALLY NECESSARY?

100% yes.

If you intend on managing your software in-house, you need to have someone playing the role of IT support.

If you have less than 5 people, you may be able to handle it yourself. If you have over 75 people, it may be cost-effective to employ an IT Support specialist.

Better yet, if you don't want to go through these hassles, consider an option, like Uptime's [Practice Next](#), to handoff all responsibility, so you can get back to practicing law – what you're really here to do.