

# *How Proper DMS Design Can Increase Lawyer Productivity and Firm Competitiveness*

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A fundamental component of any law firm's knowledge management initiative is its document management system (DMS). For most firms, the DMS serves as the repository for all electronic documents and holds a significant portion of the firm's collective "knowledge," in addition to correspondence, forms and internal memos. This large document repository contains some of the firm's most valuable assets. However, the value of these assets is only realized when the DMS is properly designed and managed.

It is not always necessary to spend large sums of money to develop and implement a firmwide knowledge management system. Most firms already have the necessary technology to build their own knowledge network. By leveraging their existing DMS and supplementing it with the appropriate

support resources, many firms can increase lawyer productivity as well as the firm's overall competitive advantage.

The DMS is a critical component of a firm's knowledge management initiative, because [by definition, it is a system for capturing, profiling, searching, retrieving and archiving documents]. Documents, as defined by the legal community, typically include the types of output generated by word processing software: letters, memos, briefs, pleadings, motions, etc. In the knowledge management context, the definition of documents is much broader and includes word processing and spreadsheet files, as well as scanned images, graphs/charts, web pages, html documents, .pdf files and electronic mail.

The DMS is ultimately responsible for monitoring and managing the life of a document as it progresses through various stages — creation, review, collaboration, distribution, archival and, eventually, deletion. It indexes and stores documents in a central repository, tracks revisions and enables users to search and retrieve work

product at any time, from anywhere. Today's document management systems provide added value by offering functionality, such as workflow (document routing), imaging, web publishing and forms management.

There are a number of ways to leverage the power of a DMS to build a firmwide knowledge network. The first is with the organizational structure of the various document stores. Many firms store all their documents in a single storage repository, or logical library. Documents are located by searching this single library using full-text searching techniques or by searching for the values of the fields located on the document profile. With this approach, one has to sift through myriad internal memos, correspondence, forms, etc., to find the relevant piece of information.

## **Establishing Separate Libraries**

While a single DMS library may be appealing from both a technical and an ease-of-use perspective, it does not maximize the benefit to be gained from a knowledge management program. To

facilitate searching and retrieval, firms should strongly consider segregating their document stores into separate libraries to house the various types of documents. For example, one DMS design may provide for four discrete libraries, including correspondence, contracts/agreements, case/matter files, notables and precedents, and internal administration.

By creating separate libraries, each document type can have an individual and distinct index field tailored to it. This will facilitate document indexing – the critical step in any effective DMS or knowledge management system. Users will not have to peruse long lists of document types to find the correct terms or attempt to determine which generic index term best suits a particular document.

In addition to facilitating document indexing, the creation of separate document libraries will significantly reduce the volume of documents to be searched. With fewer documents, searches are processed faster and with fewer, more relevant results.

Finally, the creation of separate document libraries also enables the firm to set up different levels of access security, and retention schedules for each separate library. For example:

- The entire firm has access to the correspondence/drafts library. This library has a relatively short retention cycle, and the DMS automatically deletes or archives the documents contained therein within a short, predetermined period.

- The contracts and agreements library houses final internal work product, the scanned image of an externally produced document with its related index or the index of a filed physical (paper) document. Documents residing in this library may have a longer retention schedule, depending on the term length of the contract or agreement.

- The firm's administrative documents are housed in a separate library accessible by the entire firm for research purposes, while only authorized administrative personnel are able to access it for maintenance purposes. Retention schedules vary, depending on the content

of the document.

- Client/matter document libraries contain client work in progress, scanned images of external documents, and e-mail references pertaining to a particular client.

- The notables and precedents library is the most interesting. The law librarian, in conjunction with attorney representatives from each practice group, maintains this library. These individuals carefully review all submissions before they are added to the library. The submitted documents are routed to each reviewer for approval and comment. Only when all reviewers approve and agree is the document included in the notable and precedents library. The librarian is responsible for coding all documents for periodic review to ensure their ongoing relevance.

Some firms have used the concept of "project folders" and "quick searches" to enhance the search and retrieval of documents in a DMS, regardless of whether they have one library or multiple libraries. Within smaller working groups, such as practice groups, administrative departments or even individual attorneys, project folders are created to give quick and easy access to frequently referenced documents. This concept differs from a recently edited documents list (quick retrieve) in that quick retrieve lists usually contain the documents most recently edited by the user, regardless of content.

A project folder is content specific and contains documents that have been placed in it by a user for easy reference. The documents in the project folder are part of a group of related documents and are not necessarily those most recently accessed.

For example, a project folder can be created to house all documents pertaining to a particular deal on which an individual or group of attorneys is working. Placing the documents related to the deal in a project folder reduces the time that would otherwise be required to search the entire database. A project folder might also be used by an attorney to hold documents pertaining to a specific area of law, type of practice, etc., that he or she references on a regular basis. In an administrative capacity, project folders

can house lists of reference items, such as training materials, support documentation and other materials that are made available for easy and secure access.

### **Enhance Productivity**

Other firms have used aspects of front-end document profiling to enhance the productivity of their systems. Front-end profiling refers to the process of completing a document profile (index) *before* creating a document rather than afterward, as is often the case. Document types (a typical document profile field) are linked to macros and templates that assist in the assembly of the particular document.

For example, an attorney who wants to write a letter can invoke the word processing system to create a new document, and the DMS immediately presents a document profile screen. In completing the profile, the attorney records the name of the document, the author, the client and matter, and, among other data, the document type: LETTER. The DMS has been customized to launch a macro that will prompt the attorney for his/her name and address (or provide a link to the user's personal name and address book), the means of transport (facsimile, certified mail, Federal Express, etc.), the greeting, the salutation and any cc:'s or enclosures. The macro then leaves the user at a prompt where the body of the letter is to begin. Other document types are linked to the creation of other standard format documents, including briefs, motions and internal forms.

Arguably, the most exciting use of today's document management systems is to access data stores via the Web. Access to the DMS via a web portal truly enables "anytime, anywhere" access capabilities. Whether at home, at client offices or "on the road," attorneys are able to access their own DMS and, theoretically, their firm's knowledge network through the Internet.

Publishing documents to the firm's own internal intranet provides all employees with access to information without having to become involved with the underpinnings of the DMS. Taking this a step further, some firms have established secure areas

on their extranets to allow clients access to particular documents. In order to access their own information, clients are no longer limited by lawyer availability – all that is needed is an ID and password. If the firm has already set up separate libraries for contracts and agreements and for client/

matter files, it's a simple procedure to either copy or move those libraries to an ExtraNet server for secure (controlled) client access.

Whether a firm wants to take greater advantage of its current DMS technology or is in the process of developing a knowledge management strategy,

implementation of a well-defined, fully configured document management system will provide the necessary foundation for a firmwide knowledge network.

### Four Major Criteria to Consider When Selecting a DMS

There are still a few law firms functioning without a document management system, and many others in which the DMS is under-used. In addition, the vast majority of corporate legal departments do not have a DMS. Consequently, an increasing number of firms may be turning to DMS vendors for new systems or upgrades. The following is a list of four major criteria to consider carefully when selecting a DMS:

- **System Architecture and Environment.** The various document management systems are designed to function optimally in different operating environments (both large and small). For example, GroupWise is best suited to a Novell environment; Domino.Doc was designed for the Lotus Notes/Domino environment; iManage is built on a 32-bit, three-tiered client/server architecture well-suited to large Microsoft NT/SQL Server environments; Worldox has a unique, two-tiered architecture that does not require a Microsoft SQL Server and is the best choice for the majority of small to mid-sized environments; and PC DOCS/Fulcrum offers a wide variety of products geared to knowledge management, three-tiered document management and client/server document management that can be optimized for Windows NT, Novell and Unix server environments.

- **System Features.** The features most widely used and required for effective document management are full-text indexing; version control; audit trails (document history); document level security; remote access via the Web; automatic archival and retrieval mechanisms; document echoing or shadowing; extensive searching capabilities, including the ability to save search results; flexible document profiling and workflow capabilities.

- **System Support.** Expertise is required to install, configure, customize and support the DMS. Support services are available in a variety of formats: in-house, local and remote. The DMS must have a good support structure to ensure quality training, maintenance and end-user support.

- **System Configuration.** It is critical to give substantial thought as to how documents should be indexed and subsequently retrieved. To configure the system, the firm will need to define its requirements for an indexing scheme, physical storage locations (centralized, remote offices, etc.) and media (disk, optical, etc.) and archival strategies relating to document retention.