

**Getting the Most Out of Your Technology
Dollars: *How to Cut Costs While Improving
Your Technology Infrastructure***

By Kevin Page

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1. **Budget, Budget, Budget!** – We cannot stress this enough. Too many times technology purchases done on an ad-hoc basis justify the costs of the purchase; but, sooner or later you're going to realize the full-extent of your expenditures. Budgeting allows purchasing decisions to be in line with your firm's overall business needs, as well as bridling useless impulsive spending. Also, remember to always include amounts in your budget for training, support and maintenance (maintenance costs for a server and workstations are usually about 2 to 3 times their purchase cost—don't forget a maintenance contract).
2. **Don't reinvent the wheel—outsource IT** – The fact is that you do not have the time or the expertise to stay in touch with IT industry trends: leave this to the experts. Professional IT consultants keep in touch with industry trends, new products and services, and “best practices.” The experience that legal IT professionals have with implementing and maintaining IT infrastructures and practice management modules for many other law firms allows them to choose the “best” of what works for your own firm's needs. Professional IT consultants not only know what technology is available and what technology is best suited to your firm's unique business needs, but they also can negotiate with vendors for lower prices.
3. **Invest in training** – The word *invest* is used here intentionally. The best software package on the market is useless if its users do not know how to use the software effectively. Training will allow your firm to get the most out of whatever applications your firm uses: be they general office productivity applications, time/billing/accounting applications, or more legal-specific practice management and litigation/trial applications. Wasted time spent on correcting errors and self-training will cost your firm dearly.
4. **Replace server and workstations during or shortly after warranty period** – Hardware vendors usually discontinue the manufacture and update of many parts after 3 years.
5. **Invest in practice management software** – There are many different practice management (case management) products on the market (Time Matters, Amicus Attorney, PC Law, Juris, and AbacusLaw being the leading applications), but they all provide effective tools for handling or managing your firm's information by putting case, client and contact information at your fingertips (many of which integrate time/billing and accounting functions and document management options, along with facilitating email, calendaring/docketing and managing appointments and to-do lists). With a strong practice management system firmly in place a firm

can save time looking for documents, contact information, etc. and bill more during the day. If an attorney can bill 15 minutes more a day (instead of spending that time looking for files, contact information, etc.) and typically charges \$200 per hour, the year-end savings from utilizing practice management software would be \$12,000 per attorney. A practice management system is an investment with a very good return.

6. **Standardize on one office productivity application** – Standardization among the entire firm on a single office application reduces friction, training time and support time, while increasing collaboration and streamlining the flow of information and knowledge.
7. **Invest in an LCD projector** – If you plan to spend any time in the courtroom, having an LCD projector on hand can be a god-send. In conjunction with PowerPoint or trial presentation software, it can be a powerful tool to assist you in winning cases in the courtroom. The price of LCD projectors has dropped dramatically in the past two years, allowing you to purchase a decent one for \$2,000 or less. Go ahead and purchase one: you'll use it frequently enough to make renting one cost-prohibitive. You can also get a light-weight projector screen for less than \$200.
8. **Purchase HP network printers** – A few large, workgroup printers are cheaper to use and support than a multitude of cheap desktop printers. Desktop printers also tend to have shorter lives than larger network printers. We recommend HP due to their proven quality and durability.
9. **Stay current with updates and patches** – True to the old adage: “an ounce of prevention is worth more than a pound of cure,” keep an eye on updates and patches to make sure your system is current. Using Microsoft's free Windows Server Update Services (WSUS) is a good way to do this, by allowing WSUS to automatically “push” updates and patches to your operating system, software and hardware. Not keeping your system up-to-date opens your operating system to security vulnerabilities and stability issues that can cost your firm time and money.
10. **Don't purchase technology for technology's sake** – Only purchase technology that will serve your firm's unique needs (both current and future); do not try to simply get the latest technology. Purchasing technology for technology's sake is not only costly, but it can also “clog” up your firm's operations if it does not effectively meet your firm's needs or if not implemented correctly. Also, everything that can be automated does not necessarily need to be automated. Weigh the costs and the benefits with your overall business needs in mind.