

5 Reasons to Virtualize Law Firm Computing

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For several years information technology pundits have debated when is the right time to move your small business, and specifically small law firms, to virtual IT environments. The default answer has always been "It depends." Although that still rings true in some cases, trends in the market, and recent experiences with moving law firms to virtual environments, makes now the time to move your law firm to a virtualized IT environment. Here are five reasons:

1. It increases profitability. It's not a secret that many law firms are behind when it comes to their advanced and even more basic technology know-how. In fact, some consultants have actually conducted tests to see how behind legal firms are with their technology practices and how it may affect their profitability. Nine out of ten law firms failed the test or technology audit.

This lack of core technology knowledge can become a major issue as your firm begins to expand and may create barriers to profitability. Virtualization is one piece of specific technology that could create several bottom-line benefits for your law firm. For instance, once you reach 15-20 employees, virtualization can bring new efficiencies and mitigate down-time, which can impact billable hours and profits.

In addition, with less risk of IT outages and potential data loss, firms and their IT managers can focus on core business needs. Firms that have not virtualized their servers are often underutilizing their servers for fear of them crashing. Firms using virtualization and the flexible IT environment it provides can transform servers running single applications into single servers running multiple applications. Therefore, core business applications run more quickly and consistently, on a consolidated number of servers.

2. New products are pricing small law firms into virtualization. In addition to incumbent offerings from the likes of VMware Inc., Oracle Corp. and Microsoft Corp., which all provide good options for small businesses, new products and services are also entering the market aimed at making virtualization effective and affordable for small businesses.

Microsoft offers Windows Hyper-V Server as an affordable, all-in-one product, to increase manageability of server technology for small businesses. It has worked well for many law firms in the past. Several of those firms have reported Hyper-V's cost effectiveness, due in large part to many firms already utilizing Windows operating systems.

3. Virtual servers reduce energy use. With more applications running on fewer servers, less hardware is needed—meaning a decrease in energy and specifically server

cooling costs. Some experts have noted that this energy savings could be as much 40 percent off total energy bills. Forrester Research has noted that servers use up more than 40 percent of total data center energy consumption and 30 percent of this is on dead servers, which are servers running one or less non-business-critical applications.

By cutting electricity bills through virtualization, law firms can also take a first step towards establishing more sustainable practices. The [Lawfirm Sustainability Network](#) is pushing this sustainable initiative with law firms across the country by cutting these types of energy usages, as well as cutting the use of paper and moving firms into energy efficient buildings.

4. Virtual servers enhance security. As your law firm continues to grow it will likely encounter larger clients that [demand your cybersecurity practices to be up to best practices](#). With the increase in cyberattacks, law firms with less rigorous security practices are being eyed by hackers as a way into corporate data. In fact, Mandiant issued a report in 2012 that found 80 percent of the 100 largest U.S. law firms had some malicious computer breach the previous year.

Law firms can fight back against these threats through virtualization. For instance, by only making Web browsing activities available in a virtual environment, firms can reduce access to proprietary files and data. This type of isolation and segmentation of virtual networks protects the physical network and gives an added layer of security. If cyberattackers were able to launch an attack through the browser, a system administrator could restart to delete the threat.

In addition, virtualization makes data recovery from cyberattacks and potential natural disasters much easier with the snapshots it takes throughout the workday.

5. Virtualization is easy to deploy and scales to computing requirements. If your law firm has the staff or managed service support, getting virtualization up and running can be quick with the right plan. The partners and staff at your firm will see little change as there isn't much change for the end user. Their computers are still the same. Once virtualization is set up, it also becomes much easier to scale or make changes with IT infrastructure. Moving files and memory between virtual servers and machines as you grow can be done with the click of a button.

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