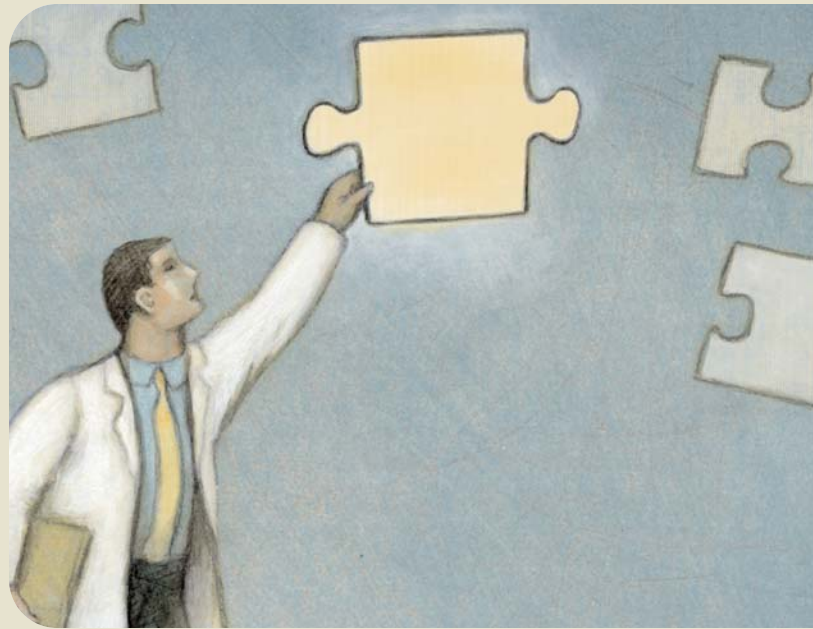


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## :: Leveraging Microsoft Standards For Case Management Application Integration

Case management software has been around for many years. However, the legal community has historically been slow to adopt this technology due to a number of issues that have rendered these systems unattractive. Fortunately, significant technological advancements, the general maturity of this technology and most importantly, advanced integration capabilities designed to assemble case management systems “on top of” Microsoft Office, have created an environment of increased firm adoptability.

Absolutely the most important component of today’s new case management technology is the direct connectivity to and integration with Microsoft Outlook and the other Microsoft Office application modules. An “industry standard” is clearly being established with Microsoft Office as the desktop for most law office users because: (a) Microsoft Word is the dominant word processing system; (b) Outlook e-mail is the way lawyers are communicating; (c) Outlook calendars are the most convenient scheduling tool; and (d) Outlook’s contact directory is clearly the easiest way to track contact information. In most practices, attorneys and the legal staff are already using these tools. They are comfortable with the user interface, and they rely on this technology. Asking or trying to force users to leave this processing environment to input data in a different system with a different user interface is no simple task.

### Business Pressures Are Mounting

As more and more law firms reorganize to operate like true businesses, the needs for productivity enhancements and efficiencies delivered through technology investments have increased. Fierce competition for legal services, escalating business pressures and client demands are forcing law firms to adopt technology that will give them a competitive advantage when trying to maintain existing client relationships, solicit new legal engagements and attract new legal talent to their practices.

Historically, there has been a significant gap between what systems “promised” they would do versus what they truly were able to deliver from a practical perspective. But with today’s law firm case management technology, the gap between “promise and practice” has been significantly reduced. The right type of case management systems offers law firms or practice areas the tools that have substantial impact on client relations, management of legal work product, communications and collaboration, firm productivity, and most importantly — profitability.

### Historical Case Management Challenges

In order to understand why the adoption of this technology is accelerating, it is important to understand why the technology was not effective in previous generations. There were a number of reasons why this technology was rendered “not practical.”

Case management systems represented redundant databases that required users to replicate information and created an excessive workload for an already overworked staff.

The user interface for the case management system was different from other applications and required users to learn a new set of commands, thus significantly reducing the system adoption rate.

Law practices have invested heavily in technology, and the previous generation of case management systems did not offer viable connectivity or integration with legacy systems, further complicating the redundant database issues.

The lack of flexibility or the inability for the case management system to be tailored to be “on-point” with specific practice areas had a negative impact on the adoption rate of these programs.

## Case Management Essentials

While firms, technology vendors and technology consultants may never agree on a “common” definition of case management technology, it will be beneficial to identify the primary components that make up these systems. The core “building blocks” for a case management system include: task/to-do/ticker management, docketing/calendaring/scheduling, card file/related party database, conflict of interest/avoidance, marketing database/CRM, electronic mail, messaging document management, scanning/imaging and routing, document assembly/forms generation, time tracking/time entry, cost tracking/check request processing and practice area information tracking/databases. Obviously, due to the number of potential components and the associated complexity of an application that performs all these tasks, the process of evaluating, implementing and being successful with a case management implementation has been a daunting task.

## Leveraging Microsoft Standards

Fortunately, the technology has emerged and the standards have been established to allow law firms or practice areas to simplify the implementation of case management systems. The systems that are being quickly adopted by practices throughout the country have a number of key attributes, including: (a) these systems work on top of or integrate with the Microsoft Office modules, allowing users to continue to use the applications they know and rely upon; (b) these systems are simple to use, relying on an Outlook user interface, thus encouraging more users to participate in the system; (c) these systems provide a high degree of flexibility that allow the software to be carefully tailored to accommodate the specific requirements of different practice areas, attracting users to the system and further increasing participation; (d) application modules are much more comprehensive, eliminating the need for a large number of “mini-apps” to handle specific practice requirements; (e) case-related information is aggregated in one location, allowing users to go to one centralized database for answers to case-related questions; (f) data is captured via day-to-day workflow, eliminating the need for redundant data entry and allowing users to build a case information database without the extra workload associated with rekeying data into a separate database; and (g) these systems are much more tightly and conveniently integrated with other applications, including time and billing, document management and litigation support systems.

## Microsoft Integration: Not All Integrations Are Equal

Case management technology that is built on top of Microsoft applications and tightly integrated with Microsoft standards is going to provide firms with a far greater “bang for their buck” than applications relying on a separate set of application modules for core functions, such as calendaring, e-mail messages, contacts and tasks. Let’s take a closer look:

**Calendar Integration.** Attorneys and their staff are using the Outlook calendar to manage activity and review available time, schedule appointments, invite attendees to meetings and synchronize with their PDA or handheld devices. Rather than having users re-input the appointment data into a separate docketing system, today’s systems allow for the Outlook calendar transactions to create the foundation for the firm’s docketing system. This modification occurs as follows: Initially, users are asked to “associate” an appointment or event to a

case or file, and this association is performed by launching a case search window from within Outlook. Once the appointment is attached to a case, the users are asked to categorize the appointment by selecting the “type” of event (deposition, trial, etc.), the “location” of the appointment (court jurisdiction, client’s office or city) and the “status” for the calendar entry. By capturing this information (directly from the Outlook calendar screen), the firm can access a “case perspective” of these events immediately and generate all of the necessary docketing reports by selecting reports based on the file number, appointment type, location and status of the appointments in the system.

**Electronic Mail Integration.** More and more of a law firm’s communication is taking place via electronic mail, and most firms find themselves in an awkward position by not having a mechanism for managing or controlling e-mail messages. Today’s case management technology is designed to manage all of the case-related messaging and record these messages as part of the “case file.”

When users send or receive an e-mail message, they have the opportunity to “associate” this message with a case or file. This is accomplished by launching the case search screen from a window in the Outlook e-mail screen or by “dragging” the message to the folder list within Outlook that is configured to show all of “my cases” (cases that the user has been assigned to work, rather than an exhaustive list of all the files at the firm). By associating the e-mail communications to a case or file, the firm immediately gets a “case perspective” of all

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e-mail messages. These messages are then transferred from the Exchange store to create MS SQL database records. Messages become searchable and become part of the integrated case management information, eliminating the need to have widely circulated e-mail distribution lists.

Another piece of technology that has been incorporated into the e-mail management module is designed to deal with the huge problem associated with documents that are attached to e-mail messages. Too many lawyers and staff are leaving important documents attached to e-mail messages and are not storing these documents in the document management system. Although this problem is not widely acknowledged or discussed, it is rapidly affecting the integrity of the document management systems in most law practices. The technology available with today’s case management systems will prompt users to make a decision on how to handle documents that are attached to incoming e-mail messages, providing an easy option for “detaching and storing as a document on the case,” while leaving a link and/or note on the e-mail message to show that the message arrived with a specific document attachment.

As lawyers or timekeepers spend more and more time communicating via e-mail, it is becoming increasingly more important to track these messages and the amount of time spent crafting e-mail communications. This technology allows timekeepers to immediately create a time ticket based on the file number associated with the e-mail message and the amount of time spent creating the message. Timekeeper studies show that a timekeeper will capture up to 20 percent more time if recorded at the time the work is performed. This feature alone may be enough to justify the cost of the entire case management system.

**Card File Integration.** Lawyers, paralegals, legal secretaries and administrative users are entering important client-related data in Outlook card files. Unfortunately, this approach creates a number of problems. Most notably, each user's card file is separate, and a client's information could be stored in hundreds of different locations throughout the firm, virtually eliminating the opportunity to easily create a master contact list.

Today's systems overcome these deficiencies by building a SQL-based related-party database and integrating the Outlook card file entries with this database to create a firmwide "related party database." Essentially, the basic card file entries from all the users in the firm will build a "master entity database," so when addresses or phone numbers are changed, the master database is updated.

In addition to creating the centralized "party database," there are a number of enhancements that increase the functionality of the Microsoft Outlook card files. Users have the ability to assign a "category type" (plaintiff, defendant, client, expert, accountant, corporate officer, governmental agency, etc.) to each party that is put in the card file. The type of category will allow practice groups to display additional information to be tracked about these particular entities or parties, creating a much more powerful database of contact information. Once the party is placed in the card file, the system allows users to associate the party with a case (or multiple cases), thus identifying the party's role for that case. This approach will allow the firm to search the system to easily identify a list of parties associated with a case and reflect the relationships that each of these parties has to the case and/or to one another.

This not only establishes a very powerful "related-party database," it also creates an effective conflict avoidance or conflict of interest checking methodology. While most conflict systems are back office-based, this approach continues to add new parties to the cases as they become involved. Attorneys have the ability to search, based on people and company names, to see if the firm had any previous dealings with the individual or organization and if the role this party plays represents a potential conflict.

### **Case Management Application Deployment Framework**

From a technical and conceptual perspective, today's systems do not come in prepackaged form, but in the form of a "case management development kit" or an "application deployment framework." This approach allows law practices to build a framework, assemble necessary application modules, integrate existing legacy applications and capitalize on the Microsoft standard that is normally in place. The

result of this approach is that firms get the best of both worlds. They get to (a) use existing systems, which enables them to retain their current investments (and in some cases actually extend the life cycle of certain products); (b) maintain native environments reducing the level of training and support; (c) integrate data among systems; (d) provide a unified case information portal or knowledge base; and (e) establish a system that appears to be customized for each practice group.

This new approach to case management and the tight integration with Microsoft Office delivers a number of significant benefits to today's law practices that are looking to capitalize on the implementation of technology to manage their practices more effectively. Most importantly, the software is easy to use, so more users participate in the system. The data is captured via day-to-day workflow, eliminating the disadvantages associated with asking users to perform duplicate work. The software is "tailored" and therefore makes these systems more "on-point" and invites various practice groups to organize specific case-related data in the system. The combination of all of these advantages allows this technology to exponentially increase the amount of case-related data that is captured and creates a system that includes a much more comprehensive case information database, client information portal or firmwide knowledge base. Information is finally available so that attorneys and firm management can make educated decisions based on firmwide collaboration.

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