

Making a Case for the Cloud

How cloud computing brings next-generation business practices to the legal industry.

Overview

The legal industry moves at top speed. At any given moment, a lawyer can be in court, in an office, meeting with clients or on the road. Attorneys need solutions that can match pace with this variable work environment as well as protect critical, sensitive client information. Implementing and managing this technology is often overwhelming for law firms. After all, lawyers are experts at the law, not at Information Technology (IT).

Rather than spending time and money managing IT, top law firms are looking for more efficient alternatives. They recognize that they are better served finding partners who are experts in delivering IT services, instead of spending time and money trying to manage IT in house. These partnerships enable law firms to obtain industry-leading security, mobility and performance, freeing up lawyers to do what they do best – practice law.

Commonly known as IT as a Service (ITaaS), the practice of partnering with outsourced IT professionals is rapidly rising in popularity among top law firms. Cloud-based solutions and support offered in a virtual environment provide these firms with the technical foundation they need to stay competitive and productive in an evolving legal industry.

Benefits of Cloud Computing in the Legal Industry

Mobility

To be at the top of their game, lawyers need solutions that will enable them to connect with clients and colleagues, while on the go. Virtual computing environments, such as the Proxios Virtual Desktop, offer all the tools, applications and information of an in-office desktop computer, but in a cloud-based environment. This means lawyers and their colleagues can have instant access to files, email and other resources from any device with an Internet connection. Current Proxios clients host over 90 applications on their customized virtual desktops, including the entire Microsoft Office suite, and industry-specific applications such as document management, litigation support and e-Discovery.

Mobility and Continuity of Service

Emergencies and natural disasters can and do occur. A storm on the East Coast or a transit strike on the West Coast can make it impossible for employees to report to the office. This can be devastating for global or national law firms. Simply because there is a storm in Boston does not mean a client in Los Angeles will be happy about waiting several days to move forward with a case. Since 22% of clients are looking to switch law firms at any given time¹, modern firms cannot afford to suspend ser-

vice for any reason. In a virtual computing environment, lawyers can continue to provide the high level of service their clients expect. By providing access to all the necessary applications and resources that would be available inside an office, law firms enable service continuity, which directly affects productivity and profitability.

Mobility and Work-Life Balance

As any seasoned lawyer knows, finding a balance between work and home can be difficult. Long hours and weekends spent at the office are normal and expected, however, there is a smarter option. Cloud-based virtual desktops enable lawyers to continue their work uninterrupted outside the office. Attorneys can be home for dinner and then work after hours. Job satisfaction dramatically increases when employees feel they have a good work-life balance² and this means lower turnover and higher productivity.

Many firms have created a remote connectivity option for their lawyers. These options provide basic access to firm resources but they do not provide full access which may limit an attorney's tools and data on their primary computing device. Consequently, these basic remote access computing solutions may be missing a critical piece of software or access to that one document which proves necessary

for these lawyers to actually finish their work remotely. Making the primary computing resources available anywhere, at anytime and from any device solves this problem and ensures that true Work-Life Balance can be fully realized.

Aside from improved family involvement for existing attorneys in a firm, virtual computing environments may help legal firms recruit the most talented new lawyers. This could actually be the final differentiator, all else being equal, in hiring the most qualified candidate for a position. According to a government study, 52% of employees admit to turning down jobs due to concerns about work-life balance and 78% believe that technology enables them to have more flexibility with their schedules³.

Security

There isn't a law firm in the United States that does not need to be concerned about security. Increasingly, government and other watchdog organizations are demanding that the legal industry be able to prove that it employs strict protocols for data security and client confidentiality. Oddly, many firms believe that a "do it yourself" on-premise approach to security is more secure than relying on a cloud provider and may well be spending more money on security alone than a given firm spends on all of its IT activities. Economies of scale

do matter. It is for this reason that firms can benefit greatly from an ITaaS partnership. Instead of trying to keep up with ever-changing data security requirements, firms can entrust security management to experts with experience in implementing and delivering rigorous security protocols.

Why Security Matters

The government takes security very seriously. It has enacted numerous laws designed to protect citizens and to penalize organizations that do not adequately safeguard sensitive data. Federal Trade Commission Act, Section 5 compels law firms to disclose data security and breach issues⁴ and numerous other federal laws regulate the dissemination of specific private data, such as family and health information. Individual states also have additional reporting requirements, but all the laws require that firms accept ownership of critical stored data. Law firms can be held liable for security breaches that attack their servers or individual devices. They may even be required to notify their clients. Recognizing this, many large, prospective clients routinely conduct audits with the aid of outside counsel before they choose a law firm. Those firms that pass these audits get client's business; those that do not lose their competitive edge.

Mobile Security

By turning to cloud-based solutions, law firms can begin to reduce the risk of security breaches in two ways. First, by enabling employees to create and manipulate files in a virtual computing environment, law firms nearly eliminate the need to store and process sensitive data on individual devices using local applications. Doing this makes centralizing data possible. Data in a single or very few secure, off-site storage facilities can be more easily protected physically and kept safe from hackers through the use of industry-leading security protocols. The fewer devices that store confidential information and the more secure the data repository is, the less likely unauthorized users will gain access to it. This approach almost completely eliminates the risks inherent in the use of local servers, thumb drives and laptops.

Scalability, Agility and Performance

Scalable and agile technologies can respectively grow or shrink in capacity or be updated across a large number of deployed devices quickly and easily. Ideally, any technology used in a law firm would be both scalable and agile. It should be possible for a firm to deploy any technology configuration, e.g., a Windows desktop with all relevant applications, to any user or any number of users with little more than a mouse-click (scalable) and update one or more applications on that desktop for all users just as easily (agile). Virtual computing environments operating in this fashion can be a strategic necessity for firms that are growing quickly or involved in volatile litigation matters.

Scalability

In an attempt to keep up with the data deluge, IT managers who store data on-site routinely have at least 25% more storage than they need. Although this enables them to be certain they can accommodate the enormous amount of data law firms create each day, it also requires firms to pay for storage they are not currently using. Should the demand for storage increase beyond this excess capacity, firms find it may take weeks or even months to add capacity – possibly negatively impacting productivity. A scalable cloud solution makes it possible for firms to purchase just the amount of storage they need. As the data increases or decreases, the firm can “scale up” or “scale down” so it never pays more than necessary and the needed storage is always available with minimal to no lead times.

Agility

Internet Explorer is an application that is available to most attorneys for web browsing. In the spring of 2014, a vulnerability was discovered in Internet Explorer that was subsequently called the Heartbleed virus or vulnerability. The situation was so severe that some were recommending that people discontinue use of Internet Explorer altogether until it was patched. The patch came first as an interim solution then as a finished patch that eliminated the vulnerability completely. Firms running virtual windows desktops, as

opposed to physical desktops, were able to patch the desktop image quickly by essentially updating the virtual image of the desktop. Updating a desktop image on physical computers would certainly have taken longer and may never have been done at all, leaving these firms exposed to a serious security problem longer than necessary.

Performance

The modern law firm faces increasing pressure to deliver high quality client service at a lower cost while maintaining or improving shareholder return. This tightrope is difficult to walk, particularly if the inertia of an on-premise IT solution impedes a law firm's or individual attorney's ability to respond to changing situations and opportunities quickly and with minimal cost. The distraction that comes along with running an internal IT operation, e.g., technology committee meetings, means that the focus of the firm and people within the firm is, more often than necessary, diverted away from the firm's core mission of providing quality legal services. By shifting technology delivery away from the on-premise model to ITaaS cloud services, firms can introduce a more mobile computing platform, improve security, enhance their ability to scale and be more agile in service delivery. At the same time, firms can eliminate the distractions associated with low-value activities such as managing infrastructure like servers or networks systems and can dedicate in-house resources to high-impact, strategic activities that target value creation for the client and the firm. These two factors combined yield a higher performing firm that is more competitive, provides a better service to its clients and finally, delivers more profit to its shareholders.

Proxios ITaaS Solutions

Proxios, a pioneer in cloud computing technology since 1999, offers businesses a full range of IT services on a subscription basis including application hosting and VOIP phone systems. Proxios hosts proprietary and third party software, delivering your desktop to your office, home or mobile device. Proxios is headquartered in Richmond, Virginia serving customers across the United States and Canada.

1 - <http://www.leapzonestrategies.com/blog/2011/02/valuable-stats-about-customer-satisfaction/>

2 - <http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture-IWD-2013-Research-Deck-022013.pdf>

3 - <http://www.accenture.com/SiteCollectionDocuments/PDF/Accenture-IWD-2013-Research-Deck-022013.pdf>

4 - <http://www.federalreserve.gov/boarddocs/supmanual/cch/ftca.pdf>

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