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Six Signs You Need to Reevaluate Your Cloud Provider

BY JOE KELLY

Many law firms are moving services, software, and storage to the cloud—and those that haven't started yet are probably considering it. According to the 2016 International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) Technology Purchasing Survey, "Cloud computing continues to be one of the hottest topics in legal IT."[1] Law firm respondents cited multiple benefits from the cloud, including versatility/mobility (62%), flexibility (53%), efficiencies and cost savings (34%), and security (25%).[2]

As cloud acceptance has evolved from exploration to execution, many organizations are migrating their IT and workstations fully to the cloud, shunning the need for on-site hardware, excessive IT, and physical workstation access. Yet a single bad experience or problem can negate all the benefits the cloud has to offer.

All cloud providers are not the same—especially when you migrate entirely to the cloud. The wrong provider—one that doesn't understand the unique needs and applications required by law firms—can jeopardize productivity and drain budgets. To avoid making an expensive mistake, law firms should conduct due diligence and understand potential problems before selecting a provider, and then continue to evaluate whether the provider is meeting their needs.

Here are six signs that a cloud vendor may not be the right fit for your law firm.

1. It's not legal-specific.

Law firms operate differently than other businesses. They face client confidentiality needs, must consider conflicts, and often have complicated billing processes. They also rely on apps that have been developed with attorneys and their clients in mind. Vendors that aren't familiar with legal environments may be unable to host legal apps or support the ones attorneys use every day.

With so many software programs communicating with each other, it's important to select a cloud service that can actively demonstrate knowledge around the vital legal applications needed for a practice and the unique

requirements of law firms. Otherwise, workflow efficiency and data access might be hindered.

2. It's not user-friendly.

Deadlines are a way of life in law firms, and lawyers have limited time and attention for tasks that don't directly relate to legal matters. No lawyer or legal professional wants to sacrifice billable work to learn yet another technology. If a cloud provider offers programs or processes that are not efficient or accommodating to a lawyer's work preferences, the chances of acceptance and success will suffer. So will the return on investment.

For example, one law firm recently moved to the cloud only to run into a cumbersome user interface. The cloud desktop the firm began using didn't offer what its lawyers consider a "normal Windows desktop" design or experience. More time was spent navigating the new interface and trying to locate programs rather than practicing law. It was not intuitive, and the learning curve proved to be too steep. Attorney productivity suffered. This quickly led the law firm to reevaluate and move to a legal-specific vendor that could accommodate its attorneys' preferences.

One way to avoid this complication: insist on a demonstration so the firm knows exactly what it will be using each and every day.

3. It's free or dirt cheap.

As law firms continue to keep a close eye on the bottom line, low-cost solutions remain attractive. After all, savings are one of the benefits of the cloud. However, free or suspiciously inexpensive platforms come with strings attached, such as three-year contracts or inefficient data protection.

The firm may not know where its data is stored or whether the data is being housed with another organization's information. There may be data ownership ambiguity or complications with security.[3] This can hurt client relations. If clients ask detailed questions about attorneys' abilities to control privileged data and keep it safe in the cloud, the firm may struggle to provide satisfactory answers. And reaching customer support can be a challenge when using a cheap solution. Plus, the correct level of

security (encryption, two-factor authentication, etc.) may not be offered to adequately protect your clients' case files and communications.

4. It's not scalable.

Many cloud providers like to talk about scalability. But what does that truly mean? Simply put, scalability means your technology can easily grow and contract to accommodate the firm.

With the ideal cloud provider, it should be simple to add new users with just a few clicks or a phone call. It should also be just as easy to delete users when they leave, without incurring

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substantial costs or requiring excessive support. If cloud providers can't scale up or down quickly, it's a sign to explore a different option.

5. The support staff lacks legal experience.

Working with a support team that doesn't understand or have experience with legal programs sets a law firm on an unproductive and expensive IT path. Does the cloud provider offer a support team that knows legal programs and holds certifications?

Vendors without law firm experience won't be able to suggest best practices or offer insights and recommendations about how other law firms handle challenges and successfully use cloud technology. In fact, they most likely won't be able to address questions or fix issues. A

team experienced in legal technology will be able to quickly address challenges and provide recommendations on everything from software to security to devices.

6. The cloud is not vendor-agnostic.

As a firm grows and evolves, it may outgrow its software or find its needs have changed. When that happens, does your cloud provider try to sell the firm its own software? While the provider makes another profit, your firm may be saddled with an ill-fitting technology.

Truly agnostic cloud providers will take a holistic view of the law firm's needs, goals, and challenges and recommend the best solution available.

Conclusion

More firms are finding a competitive advantage by moving to the cloud. However, a provider that isn't the right fit for your law firm can cause added headaches and expenses. When attorneys understand what questions to ask and areas to explore, they can select a qualified, legal-centric cloud provider and start reaping benefits immediately. 🆑

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1. ITLA and InsideLegal.com, "2016 ILTA/InsideLegal Technology Purchasing Survey" 11 (2016), http://insidelegal.typepad.com/files/2016_ILTA_InsideLegal_Technology_Purchasing_Survey.pdf.
2. *Id.*
3. *See, e.g., Harleysville Insurance Co. v. Holding Funeral Home, Inc.*, No. 1:2015cv00057 (W.D.Va. 2017).