

# Is Legal Practice Management Software Worth It?

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The Risk of Not Choosing the Right Legal Software



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## **Change is hard.**

But change is constant.

So while every law firm at some point asks *“Am I ready to change?”* The better, more accurate, question is *“What do I risk if I don’t change?”*

As law firms make adjustments to meet the modern demands of the legal field and their clients (the way law firms are run is changing, that’s a given), they must determine which changes are permanent trends and which are simply fads.

And when it comes to legal practice management software (LPMS), many lawyers wonder if it’s really worth the investment, whether that investment is measured in dollars or hours spent (re)training on the new technology. In fact, common responses to why small law firms don’t adopt technology are usually along the lines of: “sticking with our current system” or “timing is not right,” which basically means “I’m afraid of migrating and learning a new system,” or simply put: *“I’m afraid of change.”*

Attorneys understand why they need to adopt legal technology, but it’s obvious many of them still haven’t made the move and are still asking themselves: is legal practice management software really worth it?

This guide is meant to help readers answer that question and avoid the paralysis that often comes when faced with change.

## **Who is Smokeball?**

Smokeball is legal software for life. Your life. Designed for and by lawyers, Smokeball legal management software automatically records your time, fills in your documents, and provides you with state- and practice-specific forms ready for editing. It was designed with your specific practice in mind.

We take care of your business so that you can take care of yourself while practicing law. We’re ready to be your strategic partner, helping your practice accelerate your success, whether that be through growth, billable hours, or spending less time in the office. Let us work for you: for more information visit us at [www.smokeball.com](http://www.smokeball.com).



# Calculate True Value

Whenever your law firm is trying to decide where to invest your limited resources, it's critical to understand how you can calculate the "true" value of an investment. There are three points of value that you should consider:

- ✓ Usefulness
- ✓ Cost-effectiveness
- ✓ Psychological benefits

Like any legal matter, understanding the utility of the terms comes from understanding the terms' definitions. Let's take a closer look at exactly what makes up each of these three points of value.

## Usefulness

Law firms can measure the usefulness of a software investment by investigating whether it will be used by associates and/or support staff, and for how long. A useful software will help you get jobs done faster or even automatically (like document automation of court-approved forms that take seconds instead of minutes). Sometimes a useful software tool will even eliminate the need to do certain tasks which can save your law firm money. Good questions to ask about usefulness include:

- Who will use the software?
- How long will it take them to learn the software?
- For how long will they use the software?
- How much time and effort can we save by using the software?

## Cost-Effectiveness

How does your law firm know if a software investment is cost-effective? Pricing for law firm software and lawyer apps is pretty broad — anywhere from under \$50 a month for a solo to thousands of dollars for an enterprise solution. The bottom line is you need to find out if it will save you time or money (and ideally both) to justify that cost.

Ask these questions to address that concern:

- Is the money you invest into the software solution delivering long-term cost and time-savings that is greater than what you paid?
- Will it help get you paid faster?
- Can features like automatic time-tracking help you capture more billable hours (so you can increase profitability)?
- Does it provide law firm profitability dashboards and insights reporting so that you can see new levels of productivity and staff activity?
- Is the price all inclusive of the tools you'll need (e.g. email integration, billing, etc.) or will you need to spend additional money to construct a full suite?

If the answers to the above are “yes,” then you’ve got a cost-effective solution. On the flip side, if you and your staff aren’t using the software or were never properly trained, then it quickly becomes a pain point for the firm owner. Or if the software is not easy to use, well, nobody will even want to use it.

One of the reasons why some practice management software packages are so inexpensive is because they come with no training and/or help (or charge you for every call to support.) Be sure to calculate all of the “hidden” costs before putting a value on any purchase.

## Psychological Benefits

Not every benefit that your law firm gains from a software tool is monetary, some benefits are immeasurable, such as psychological benefits like a reduction in stress or a better work/life balance. Associates, paralegals, and legal secretaries who experience less stress are more productive. They will actually appreciate of the investment in technology to help them do their job better, and in turn will be happier at work and more unlikely to leave. Ask yourselves these questions about these types of benefits:

- Will the software help my employees do their jobs more efficiently?
- Will the software handle menial aspects of employees’ jobs so that they can focus on the challenging, creative parts?
- Will the software enable employees to report their output and worth to the firm?



# Organizational Solutions with Legal Practice Management Software

When determining if legal practice management software is worth the investment, each law firm should consider how LPMS is a powerful organizational tool. Not all LPMSs are created equal, but at their core all of them are organizational tools designed to help you keep things in one place and sort through your data efficiently. But only certain LPMSs go beyond that basic value and deliver strategy-driven capability that will increase firm productivity and profitability. The following features of legal practice management software (such as Smokeball) deliver on these additional points of value.

## Matter Management

LPMS puts all of your client information into one place so that your associates and support staff don't need to navigate several different programs to find information related to a case or client. With streamlined complete legal matter management, all emails, documents, tasks, events, contacts, and even billing information related to a case are linked and gathered together in one place so that they are easily accessible.

**Usefulness:** Every associate, paralegal, and legal secretary will choose to use their legal practice management software to find information on a client's case every single time because it's a lot easier than going to four or five different places to get the information they need. And since everything is linked in one centralized location, different members of your team can collaborate on documents at the same time. No more hunting for the "right version" of a document, all documents are updated with the latest changes in real-time.

**Cost-effectiveness:** Having one place where all related materials for a case can be found saves you time and money. All the minutes spent searching for that lost email, invoice, or the "right version" of a document adds up in lost revenue.

**Psychological Benefits:** You'll have fewer flustered employees who can't find the right information quickly enough. And by using LPMS, your employees will dodge the inevitable anxiety that comes from wondering if they've got the document that has the all the changes on it.

# Communication Management

When you use legal practice management software like Smokeball, every single email that you ever send or receive out of Microsoft Outlook is saved and tagged so that it is linked to the appropriate client case. You won't ever need to forward or CC anyone in your law office again as all they need to do is open up the matter in the LPMS and all the emails are instantly available. And by using our Communicate tool, you'll have a secure, private client channel that will allow your clients to check in on their cases whenever they like.

**Usefulness:** Legal practice management software's email management system is email made simple. No more wasting time manually labeling, organizing, and copy/pasting emails—your LPMS takes over that job so that your lawyers, paralegals, and legal secretaries don't have to waste their time on unnecessary email or communication management.

**Cost-effectiveness:** Email management can be another time waster. Since your LPMS will free up your paralegals and legal secretaries from mundane tasks such as email sorting, filtering, CCing, and forwarding, you will save a lot of time and money in staff working hours. Those hours can be better spent on higher value work. Likewise, by giving clients easy access to case details via a tool like Communicate, no more wasted hours emailing and texting back and forth with updates.

**Psychological Benefits:** LPMS takes the worry out of email management. No more worrying about if support staff properly organized client emails or if they forwarded the right message to the right person. Since your client's email is already attached to the right case, you can breathe a sigh of relief knowing that anyone in your law firm can access all emails related to a client's case immediately without needing to waste time searching an email system.

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*“Smokeball Communicate is a real game changer. Communicate is one of the most fluid means to interface with clients in today's world. Not only can you text interactively with clients and exchange documents within a private, secured platform, Communicate tracks your time as well.”*

**Rodney P.,**  
*Personal Injury Attorney*

## Form Library

Law practice management software like Smokeball is loaded with thousands (17,000+ as of early 2020) of Federal, State, County, Administrative, and other publicly available legal form templates. Using client and matter data you've entered once, these legal forms automatically populate with the right information. And since there is no need for multiple data entry, you save time and reduce the number of errors on your documents.

**Usefulness:** The biggest plus of LPMS form libraries is that you avoid copy/pasting old templates and the need to manually input client data multiple times. Documents that might take hours to generate manually will only take minutes using LPMS. Your legal support staff and attorneys can easily generate the right legal documents across all practice areas for over 250 matter types, and they can populate them by case number, judge, or opposing counsel's details.

**Cost-effectiveness:** Automated legal forms are a serious time-saver which for law firm means more time spent on billable tasks. Associates and support staff no longer have to waste time hunting down the right form for the right municipality; with the right legal practice management software you can generate the exact form you need right away and create your documents instantly.

**Psychological Benefits:** The bottom-line is that using a legal form library reduces stress. You don't have to worry any longer if your legal secretary or associate got your client name, pronouns, or contact information correct. All they need to do is enter the right data once, choose the right form, and the data for the client case is automatically populated in the document.

## Legal Calendaring

Legal practice management software like Smokeball automatically links your legal calendar with the right matter. Just click on a calendar event and you will have access to the entire client file—no switching between programs or digging through various files. Everything—including tasks and workflow—is connected in one centralized place.

**Usefulness:** One of the biggest challenges law firms face is knowing who is doing what, when. Legal practice management software's legal calendaring systems let everyone in the firm see at-a-glance who is participating in a calendar event connected to a matter. Client meetings and court dates are on a centralized calendar that everyone in the law office can access so that you know what is happening, when it is happening, and who is supposed to be at a meeting or court date.

**Cost-effectiveness:** When attorneys miss meetings and court dates it can be very costly for law firms. Miss enough dates and you can lose clients or even get sued for malpractice. But by using legal calendaring that is connected to your client case data you can keep everyone on the same page and fully informed about the meetings and court dates they can't miss.



**Psychological Benefits:** Staying on top of a calendar through a manual system is stressful and prone to errors. Attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries can finally relax and feel confident that everyone knows where they're supposed to be on any particular day.

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*"I had two goals when shopping for my next case management system. I needed portability. I also wanted simplicity. I got both with Smokeball. Wherever I go: court, depositions; out of town; the conference room; my entire file drawer is there with me. At my desk, or on the road with my laptop, I am able to access not just "some" of the file. I have ALL of it: documents; file data; emails; calendar; upcoming tasks – my office in my smartphone."*

**Matthew L.,**  
*Personal Injury Attorney*

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## Integration Tools

The best legal practice management software seamlessly integrates with the software tools you use every day. Tools like Outlook, Word, LawPay, InfoTrack, and Quickbooks are integrated into LPMS like Smokeball so that you can quickly manage your email, handle billing and invoices, easily file court documents, and generate forms from anywhere. A good LPMS is the front door for your firm's business activities.

**Usefulness:** Integration tools pack a powerhouse of usefulness. The biggest benefit is that you don't need to abandon the software that you've already invested in and become accustomed to using. And not only that, LPMS like Smokeball elevates the tools another notch:

- In Outlook, attorneys and support staff won't need to worry about misspelling in an email because client data is automatically generated when you send an email from the client file.
- In Word, client data is presented side-by-side with your document so that you don't need to switch between programs to get important information. Also, multiple people can collaborate on a single document in real-time. No more juggling file versions and mistakenly sending the wrong one.

**Cost-effectiveness:** Integrated tools save you time and money by syncing data so that there are fewer errors and less time spent trying to find the right information in scattered files. And QuickBooks integration allows you to access your law firm's financial data (including bills and trusts) at any time and

from any place so that you can easily see where you stand and quickly respond to looming financial issues before they become a crisis.

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*“Smokeball is tightly integrated with Microsoft Office. Our Outlook, Word, and Excel all work together with the database so that document creation and management (finding, editing, creating, emailing, etc.) is a much more efficient process.”*

*James Z.,  
Estate Planning Attorney*

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**Psychological Benefits:** When your law firm fully leverages the integration tools of an LPMS, your attorneys and support staff will feel more in control of their workload. Imagine being free of the stress associated with waiting to see if a court document has been accepted or not—now you can use tools such as InfoTrack on your LPMS to check on the status of a filing and see the history of a case docket.



## LPMS Improves Productivity

Law firm productivity is a cornerstone of profitability. The more efficiently and effectively attorneys deliver legal services to customers, the more money they can earn for their firm. But how does a law firm increase productivity when there are certain essential tasks that take a certain amount of time? Smart law firms leverage the productivity tools of law practice management software so that their associates, paralegals, and legal secretaries can get done in minutes what would have taken hours before. Here are some productivity features that Smokeball offers to address this:

### No-Click Time-Tracking Software

Recording and tracking associates' time spent on a case has traditionally been an overwhelming and wasteful process. The old way was manual—hours and minutes recorded on scraps of paper or at best a spreadsheet or computer timer. And no matter how hard lawyers worked to record their time correctly, their reports were inevitably filled with errors and time estimates that didn't account for the full amount of hours they invested into a matter.

The biggest difference between a law firm who has invested in LPMS and one who is holding on to their manual systems is that the old-fashioned law firms have attorneys spending hours recording their time while law firms using certain LPMS platforms have attorneys who have their time tracked automatically—every time they work on a matter, the exact amount of time they've worked is recorded by the time-tracking software of their LPMS.

However, most LPMSs have plug-ins or manual Start/Stop functions that help lawyers track time. Only Smokeball has built-in, automatic time-tracking capability that is not only hands- (and worry-) free, but also directly integrates with billing and reporting.

**Usefulness:** This is another no-brainer, when you can virtually eliminate the need for manual time-tracking, you're getting back hundreds of hours wasted on time-tracking AND you're improving the amount of accuracy your law firm has in their invoices. When attorneys can show clients exactly how they spent their time on a case there are fewer billing disputes and rarely a disgruntled client. Likewise even flat-fee law firms can use the tracking to prove work done to judges, and to improve their transparency and reputation for clients.

**Cost-effectiveness:** One of the things many law firms don't realize is that manual time-tracking is costing them in billable hours. Many lawyers just aren't able to track their time as they work on a task, so they rely on their notes and memory. Since everyone's memory is fallible this means that lawyers are severely underreporting the amount of time they spend on a case. Once your law firm begins to use automatic time-tracking in your LPMS, you will discover that the amount of billable hours increases.

**Psychological Benefits:** In a law office, every billable minute counts. Even for flat-fee firms, time spent on a case is a money-dependent resource. Associates and partners will rest a lot easier when they can see exactly how many hours they've billed at any given time and on what they spent their time. Partners can even access firm-wide reports so that they can see how much time each of their associates are billing. This data-driven knowledge allows you to make immediate adjustments to fit your business needs. No more worries about time-tracking accuracy when you're no longer relying on memory and manual entry of time.

## Legal Document Generation and Assembly

Document creation is easily one of the most time-consuming tasks in a law firm. Many law firms have devised their own systems for legal document creation—copy/pasting frequently used forms, search/find names and other custom data to make template forms populate with the right case information, and manually creating documents that are once in a while affairs. But all of these old methods aren't very effective—they're prone to many embarrassing typos and confidentiality breaches when you accidentally put the wrong data into a form.

Law practice management software keeps these old ineffective methods in the past. Many LPMSs rely on form fills: essentially making documents into forms to be filled out, which still relies on lawyers to step through each entry box to fill in the correct information.

Only Smokeball provides true automation: pulling information from your matters to automatically personalize your documents, down to using the correct pronouns for your clients. This legal document automation and assembly allows attorneys and support staff to quickly generate just about any form they need using Word and automatically populate the data specific to a case.

**Usefulness:** The biggest benefit of legal document automation is that you avoid the copy/paste methods of the past which can leave you with embarrassing errors; not to mention the mundane and time-wasting ways of the past are now no longer necessary.

**Cost-effectiveness:** Since attorneys and support staff don't have to retype information or painstakingly go through a document to make sure all the pronouns have been changed, legal document automation and assembly can save law firms hundreds of hours in manpower.

**Psychological Benefits:** Manually creating documents is exhausting and stressful. Even if you have a template to work with you still have to retype data if you're not using an automated system. Legal

document automation and assembly takes the stress out of document creation so you can feel assured that you're getting the right data into the right document quickly—no stress and no fuss.

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*“Smokeball document automation has drastically reduced how much time our attorneys and paralegals spend creating documents. I don’t know if I have ever worked with a friendlier or more congenial staff with training and customer support. Day or night Smokeball is always there – answering our emails or taking phone calls.”*

**Steve D.,**  
Family Law Attorney

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## Legal Tasks and Workflows

Whether your law firm is a small two- or three-person operation or a growing practice with dozens of attorneys and a small army of paralegals and legal secretaries, project management can be an overwhelming beast that’s impossible to tame. Even if your attorneys and support staff are the most organized people on the planet, doing project management manually can cause many important tasks to simply slip through the cracks.

Legal practice management software like Smokeball takes the strain out of project management by seamlessly connecting task and workflow management to your client data and making it easy for all team members to collaborate.

**Usefulness:** This capability allows someone else in your office complete a task for you. No need to send an email or hurry across the office to have a chat—use your LPMS to assign tasks to anyone in the office and that task will automatically show up on their system. LPMS allows you to attach documents, emails, and templates to any task you assign. Your LPMS also allows you to get a birds-eye-view of every task your attorneys and support staff are responsible for. You can even set reminders for the tasks you’ve assigned so that a task is never overlooked. The legal tasks and workflows in Smokeball feature allow you to quickly manage every case across your law firm so that you know that every important task is accounted for.

**Cost-effectiveness:** When cases get bogged down because someone forgot a task or didn’t realize they were supposed to do something, it costs the law firm money. Using LPMSs’ legal tasks and workflow tools, you can easily manage every case and check in to make sure everyone is staying on schedule.

**Psychological Benefits:** When associates and support staff feel that they know what they're supposed to do on a case they are a lot less stressed. They can relax knowing that they have the details scheduled and organized, and they can focus on the more important tasks and the bigger picture.

## Mobile App

The modern lawyer lifestyle is mobile, that's why attorneys need access to client data everywhere they go. If you're on the road or in court, you can access your legal practice management software remotely since all client data is stored securely in the cloud.

**Usefulness:** LPMSs that have a mobile component make it easy to prep documents on the road, pull up matter information while in court, and access your task list and calendar. Whether you need to access forms, look up client documents, or collaborate with other attorneys in the office, a lawyer mobile app lets you take care of your business even if you're not physically in the office.

**Cost-effectiveness:** When you're reliant on practice management tools that require you to be in the office to get things done, you can lose hundreds of working hours a year. Law practice management software mobile apps allow you to not only manage your client cases but you can also issue client invoices from anywhere.

**Psychological Benefits:** No more stressing about forgetting a file, your LPMS mobile app lets you access the right files even when you're already at court. And if you need to take a few days away from the office, you can still check your calendar and tasks to make sure that everyone is still doing what they were assigned to do.



## LPMS Improves Profitability

Making more money with less effort is the smart road to profitability. That's why modern law firms are increasingly choosing law practice management software that makes it easier to become more profitable. Since LPMS helps attorneys and support staff do more in less time, there are fewer employee hours committed to doing administrative tasks. This is especially important for associates who aim to increase their billable hours. Let's take a look at two other ways that law practice management software improves profitability.

### Legal Billing Software

When law firms manually manage client billing, there are inevitable errors and possible delays. Using LPMS helps you get paid faster because the automated time-tracking is integrated into the legal billing software so that you can generate invoices instantly.

**Usefulness:** LPMS legal billing software allows you to accept credit cards and online payments, set due date reminders that are automatically sent to clients, and set hourly, flat, and contingency fees according to client or matter. Attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries can drastically reduce the amount of time they spend invoicing clients when they're using this automated system.

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*"I have had my office for 7 years and within the first month of using Smokeball my revenue increased by 45% and since then over the past few months, revenue is up 72%. You don't lose track of time – everything is clearly shown on the invoice – so people pay."*

*Elisa R.,  
Transactional Attorney*

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**Cost-effectiveness:** Billing errors and delays can cost you money, LPMS legal billing software reduces the prevalence of both. No more forgetting to send reminders for outstanding invoices, LPMS legal billing software automatically sends reminders so that you don't miss out on the revenue from overdue invoices.

**Psychological Benefits:** Even if most of your clients pay on time, managing your legal billing system manually can be daunting. When you use LPMS legal billing software, you don't have to worry about whether you've sent an invoice, if it was correct, or if you set reminders, it's all done in a systematic, automated, and archived way.

## Law Firm Insights

Law practice management software makes it easy to get an overview of your law firm's financial health. Unlike manual billing and financial tracking systems, LPMS law firm insights allow you to access real-time, practice area specific data about your law firm so that you can make business decisions based on accurate knowledge.

**Usefulness:** Many law firm partners pride themselves on having good instincts; but why rely on your gut when making decisions about your business? Using law practice management software like Smokeball you can examine data by business trends, cash flow, KPIs, and client information.

**Cost-effectiveness:** When law firms make decisions based on their gut instinct sometimes they can be wrong, which is costly. By using law firm insights, law firms can leverage real data to make the best decisions that are more likely to deliver the most desirable outcomes for their business.

**Psychological Benefits:** Flying blind while you're running a law firm is nerve-wracking. Attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries can use law firm insights to see exactly how much work has been done on a particular case.





## World Class Support

The best law practice management software provides marketing tools such as websites and excellent customer service and training which includes installation, hands-on training, and one-on-one support when needed.

Many LPMS platforms provide no onboarding or support (or charge on a per-call basis when they do provide eventual support.) This is not true with Smokeball, where our Client Success team will onboard you and be available alongside our Help staff to answer your questions.

Additionally, Smokeball was a 2018 Stevie Bronze Winner for sales and customer service. We were standout best for our one-on-one attention from a dedicated Account Manager and a tailored onboarding program.

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*“Without a doubt the best support from a software company I have ever experienced. And it does not stop after commitment and migration. The Smokeball team constantly works to improve its product and continually focuses on the users experience and needs to make those improvements.”*

**Monty Y.,**  
*Personal Injury Attorney*

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## Is It Worth It?

If you've read this far you're likely still looking for a definitive answer on the question contained in the title of this ebook, mainly: Is LPMS worth the initial and ongoing investment?

The short answer is yes.

When your law firm is deciding whether to invest in a law practice management software, just remember that if it meets the three points of value—usefulness, cost-effectiveness, and psychological benefits, it's probably a good investment in the longevity and profitability of your law firm.

There are cheaper LPMS options than others, but you get what you pay for. Make sure your chosen LPMS meets all of your needed criteria before committing. Do your research on all available options and make sure that your eventual LPMS choice is interested not only in your business, but in investing its time in supporting your success long-term.



LEGAL CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE



**THIS IS SMOKEBALL  
- AND I INVENTED  
THE HELL OUT OF IT.**

\* but not really

**Voted #1 Highest Rated & #1 Easiest to Use on G2 Reviews**

Smokeball for personal injury law tracks all medicals, negotiations and documents so you can focus your energy on fighting for your clients. Access referral and profitability dashboards, securely communicate with clients and grow your practice with Campaign Monitor email marketing integration.

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