



Implementing IT Projects in Your Law Firm: Strategies for Success



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Welcome to our August newsletter!

Shifts in the competitive landscape for law firms require a much **greater focus on technology** than in the past. The success and growth of a young law firm is no longer defined by the quality of legal advice and the scope of the client list. Now, Managing Partners and their talented teams need to be able to successfully implement IT projects to improve operational efficiency, enhance client service, and stay competitive.

However, it is no secret that as many as 70% of IT projects fail to meet expectations, causing frustration and wasted resources. In this newsletter, we will explore the reasons behind IT project failures and outline a strategic approach to ensure successful implementation, generating the best results for your law firm.

1. Understanding IT Project Failures



It is crucial to understand the most common reasons behind IT project failures. The fact that more than two-thirds of such projects generate sub-par results could, arguably, be used as a rationale to avoid doing anything at all and just carrying on with legacy systems and inefficient solutions. But that would be a mistake. The competitive environment is changing

rapidly and client expectations around costs and service are changing. So, law firms themselves need to proactively embrace change.

By recognizing these IT project pitfalls in advance, law firms can proactively address them, minimize the risks associated with project implementation and reap the ultimate rewards of successful implementation. **The key reasons for failure include:**

- a. Inadequate Planning:** Insufficient planning, unclear objectives, and a lack of stakeholder involvement can lead to project misalignment, delays, and budget overruns.
- b. Poor Requirements Gathering:** Incomplete or inaccurate requirements gathering can result in the development of solutions that fail to meet the firm's needs or address key pain points. Failure to measure processes and related resources to establish baselines is another critical absence in many plans.
- c. Scoop Creep:** Frequent changes in project scope without proper control and assessment can lead to project delays, increased costs, and diminished results.
- d. Ineffective Communication:** Inadequate communication among project stakeholders, including lawyers, IT teams, and management, can lead to misunderstandings, resistance to change, and delays in decision-making.
- e. Inadequate Resource Allocation:** Insufficient allocation of time, budget, and skilled personnel can hinder project progress, jeopardizing its success.

2. Steps for Successful IT Project Implementation

To maximize the chances of successful IT project implementation, law firms should adopt a strategic approach that encompasses careful planning, effective communication, stakeholder involvement, and diligent execution. Here are the key steps to follow:



- a. **Appoint a Project Champion:** In a very small firm this may be only one key person, or it could be a cross-functional team that encompasses the critical departments/activities impacted by the proposed project. Regardless, there needs to be someone who is fully trained on the new IT system and can act as an internal resource to the rest of the team that you love. Establish the reporting line to the Managing Partner and give the team the authority to drive the changes that will be necessary to make the project a success.
- b. **Clearly Define Project Objectives:** Begin by clearly defining the objectives, expected outcomes, and success criteria for the IT project. Engage stakeholders, including lawyers, IT teams, and office administration functions, to align their expectations and make sure that there is widespread buy-in. These objectives include budget, timeline and measurable outcomes from the project such as expected changes in performance metrics and estimated resource cost savings. These data points will be critical for the post-implementation review and a meaningful assessment of the value created for the firm by the investment.
- c. **Thoroughly Assess Requirements:** First, identify the pain points. Second, conduct a comprehensive analysis of your firm's requirements and collaboratively define the functional and technical specifications that would relieve the pain points and facilitate future growth. Lawyers do great legal work, but they typically don't measure anything except billable time. To kick-start the process of wider, IT-driven change, first measure the time taken to conduct critical functions within the firm that are pain points. This could be the total hours of resources devoted to the monthly billing cycle, for example. Or the amount of time that legal professionals spend doing non-billable admin tasks (hint: this could be as high as 48%!). A transparent analysis of these will create baseline data to compare to the post-implementation phase.
- d. **Plan and Allocate Resources:** Develop a detailed project plan outlining the tasks, timelines, and resource requirements. Allocate the necessary budget, skilled personnel, and infrastructure to ensure smooth project execution. Consider the need for external expertise or project management support if required. Agree with the vendors of the IT system the precise scope of their support and how the implementation teams from both sides will interact.
- e. **Establish Effective Communication:** Establish clear channels of communication among project stakeholders, fostering transparency, collaboration, and timely decision-making. Regularly communicate project updates, milestones, and potential challenges to keep everyone informed and engaged.
- f. **Embrace Change Management:** Don't skip over this important point. The very human inclination to resist any change to the status quo is a fundamental cause for inefficiencies to prevail and law firm profits to be sub-optimal. However, if key decision makers are fully behind the fact that IT projects often involve significant changes in processes, workflows,



and tools the risk of failure diminishes rapidly and the benefits for the firm grow exponentially. To achieve this, implement a structured change management approach to address any resistance to change, provide adequate training and support, and ensure a smooth transition.

- g. Adopt Agile Implementation Strategies:** Consider implementing an agile project management approach, enabling iterative development, frequent feedback loops, and the ability to adapt to evolving needs. This approach enhances flexibility, reduces risks, and enables early identification and mitigation of potential issues.
- h. Test, Test, Test:** Thoroughly test the IT solution at various stages of development to identify and resolve any issues promptly. Conduct user acceptance testing (UAT) involving key stakeholders to validate that the solution meets the defined requirements.
- i. Monitor and Evaluate:** This links with the step under c. Once the baseline data set is in place to monitor the project's progress and measure its success against the defined objectives. Regularly evaluate the outcomes and solicit feedback from end-users to continuously improve the implemented solution.



Conclusion

To survive and thrive, talented legal teams need to deploy a sophisticated suite of digital tools. Done properly, these IT projects will deliver enormous rewards in the form of growth and profitability. However, there are significant risks of these projects simply not meeting expectations.

Successfully implementing an IT project requires a strategic and well-planned approach, encompassing effective communication, stakeholder involvement, and diligent execution. By recognizing the pitfalls that lead to project failures and following the steps outlined above, law firms can maximize the chances of success and achieve desired outcomes from their IT projects. Remember, a well-implemented IT solution has the potential to transform your firm's efficiency, client service, and overall competitive edge.



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