

The Federal Lawyer In Cyberia

MICHAEL J. TONSING

More Ways to Cap Your Costs and Increase Efficiency

In the last issue, this column discussed ways to save money on hardware and software for your office in the home or for your start-up office. Given the extraordinary popularity of saving money, I want to take that conversation a bit further, offering you two more ideas that might cap your overhead expenses and still improve your overall production. After all, there's more to running a law office than hardware and software.

LawDocsXpress

When I attended a lawyer/techie conference in San Francisco back in 2002, I met two very impressive women for the first time—Sharon Quaintance and Catherine Massey, the brains behind a brand new start-up company that was built around an incredibly useful idea that melded their two skill sets. Sharon had a technical background, having spent nearly two decades in corporate voice and data telecommunications. Cathy had more than 25 years of experience running a legal temporary placement service and she had a background in human resources. Voilà!



Calling themselves LawDocsXpress™ (lawdocsxpress.com), they had figured out a way for firms to use stay-at-home legal secretaries as typists using an ingenious, encrypted, Internet-based system. The two women blew my socks off with their business plan and their savvy. I signed on as a member of their advisory board almost immediately and have followed their company's development ever since.

I can send them encrypted dictation. (This can be as simple as a faxed set of handwritten pages from my legal pad, to a dictation system that uses the keypad of my telephone, to a digital tape recorder that can create a "wav" file that I can then upload to the LawDocsXpress Web site—whatever is handy.) They will have the transcript beautifully typed overnight (using Cathy Massey's Rolodex of former legal secretaries/soccer moms who can efficiently complete that work from home, seemingly at any hour of the day or night) at a cost that is far less than I would have paid a local typing service. And their product is far better. Amazingly, they operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year; there are no minimums and no premiums for evening or weekend work. Try that with your local typing service!



I can use LawDocsXpress services for legal secretarial, word processing, and other specialized support services on a full outsourcing basis or for occasional help with overflow work. I have found them to be a godsend when evening or weekend work is necessary. Plus, there's nothing like being able to have their service in your arsenal during out-of-town trials when you need to prepare unexpected motions and the like from your hotel room at night.

As a bonus, sort of as a gift to myself, I use them to clean up briefs that I type as drafts using Microsoft Word,™ asking them to clean up the inevitable flaws and glitches and to add the table of authorities as well as the table of contents. (I hate doing tables of contents and tables of authorities!) I just upload my glitch-ridden drafts and back come very professional looking versions ready to be filed.

LawDocsXpress isn't just for solo practitioners. The company handles considerable work for a wide variety of types and sizes of firms. To give you an idea: their at-home typists are comfortable with projects in areas such as intellectual property, litigation, securities, medical malpractice, and insurance defense, as well as corporate transactional work. Their services include:

- Inputting text or edits
- Converting .pdf files
- Cleaning up formatting and red-lined documents
- Transcribing digital dictation
- Completing custom templates and complex database entry
- Preparing PowerPoint™ presentations, Access™ databases, and Visio™ drawings
- Reviewing documents and compiling relevant data for entry into Excel™ spreadsheets
- Retrieving information from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and proofreading awards against original claims

Not bad! LawDocsXpress typists are assigned to attorneys based on practice area, not only enabling checking of conflicts but also allowing the secretaries to become familiar with the legal jargon of each lawyer's subspecialty. Now, I know what you're thinking. And no—this isn't another off-shore operation. This is the real deal. Sharon and Cathy use only U.S. labor with at least three years of on-the-job experience in a law firm and good references.

For those firms that have done their post-Katrina disaster planning, LawDocsXpress is ideal. They use

a distributed network—not a “typing center” sweatshop—and they draw from a nationwide talent pool, ensuring built-in local disaster recovery.

As a 100 percent woman-owned small business, LawDocsXpress qualifies for virtually all corporate vendor outreach programs. The company is registered in the federal government’s PRO-Net database as a 100 percent woman-owned small business and is in the Centralized Contractor Registration database. Business is good.

Sharon and Cathy have come a long way from the start-up booth at the San Francisco techie fair just five years ago. I reviewed their service at that time, but they’ve grown considerably since then. Fortunately, even with that growth, they haven’t lost their attention to the individual lawyer’s needs. Success like this couldn’t happen to more worthy entrepreneurs than Sharon Quaintance and Catherine Massey. With their help, I can take on any brief or memorandum and bring it in ahead of deadline and below budget.

eVoice Receptionist

So much for the low-cost, high-efficiency legal secretary. What about the receptionist? Well, eVoice Receptionist™ (www.evoice.com) is available for \$29.95 per month, which includes three “SmartExtensions” and 1,000 minutes. Each additional SmartExtension costs \$9.95 per month and includes an additional 100 minutes; extra minutes cost 4.9¢ per minute. But, you can throw away any PBX machine and do away with your ongoing maintenance and administration tasks. And, there’s no need to purchase any hardware or software. Your firm’s incoming calls are answered with a recorded custom greeting that has been professionally recorded in a studio so the sound is top quality. “Welcome to the Tonsing law firm!” The client/caller then has the option of reaching a desired contact (perhaps that’s you) by SmartExtension, department, dial by name directory, operator, or hotline information. When the caller responds by, for instance, pressing 4, the eVoice Receptionist connects the call immediately. But like the receptionist’s announcement (Mr. Tonsing on line 2”), this method is better, because you will know who is calling before you answer, allowing you to prioritize your communications for greater productivity. (The caller is asked to state his or her name before being connected, so you hear a live recording of your caller’s name before you decide whether to accept the call or to send it to voice mail.)

Standard voice mail, you say? Well, from your end of the line, the system is much more sophisticated. The virtual eVoice Receptionist can reach you or your employees even if they aren’t currently available by phone. If a caller gets no response after 30 seconds, the call is sent to a cell phone you’ve designated, to your home, or to a voice mail receptacle so that the caller can leave a message. After that, the

eVoice Receptionist sends an e-mail attachment of the message to your or your employee’s e-mail inbox, allowing both of you to listen to the message on a computer wherever you or your employee may be. Messages can also be accessed by phone. In doing so, the system will send an automatic text notification to your mobile phone, providing the Caller ID and the time and date the call came in, so that you will know that there is a voice mail waiting for you, when the call came in, and who it is from.

Try the eVoice Receptionist service by calling their eVoice Receptionist at (800) 646-0258. You can sign up for a 30-day free trial when you call.

Conclusion

Now you have enough to get your law office started. But keep coming back for Cyberian updates. TFL

Michael J. Tonsing practices law in San Francisco. He is a member of the FBA editorial board and has served on the Executive Committee of the Law Practice Management and Technology Section of the State Bar of California. He also mentors less experienced litigators by serving as a “second chair” to their trials. See www.YourSecondChair.com. He can be reached at mtonsing@lawyer.com.

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