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# Springfield Law Department Transforms Practice Management

New solution centralizes legal information and simplifies data sharing, making attorneys more efficient and effective.

New practice management software helps in-house counsel for the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, process cases faster and share information more easily, ultimately enabling them to work smarter and more effectively.

Although the city's Law Department already had a practice management system in place, the old solution had multiple shortcomings, including lack of integration with other software used by the Department and a complex user interface. These problems prompted two of the Department's four divisions to avoid the system altogether. Employees in the remaining divisions found the system so hard to navigate that they devised workarounds that made the Department less efficient.

The new practice management solution, implemented in late 2016, brought all divisions onto the same technology platform, pulled information on legal matters into a single database, and dramatically reduced the time Law Department employees spend on common tasks.

## THE CHALLENGES

"A major concern with the former practice management software solution was its lack of compatibility with Microsoft Office," said Nicole LeBlanc, the paralegal who managed the Law Department's migration to the new solution. For example, the system couldn't feed data into Excel to create a spreadsheet automatically.

"We would make separate Excel spreadsheets with all of our information," said LeBlanc. Some of those spreadsheets were saved on a common drive, where everyone could access them, assuming they knew where to look. But often, people saved their spreadsheets on their own local drives.

Those scattered spreadsheets, along with the fact that many people didn't use the old practice management software, made it extremely hard to share information. With no common repository for cases and associated documents, attorneys, paralegals, and support staff spent a lot of time searching or asking for information.

"When people left the Department for other jobs, we couldn't find where they had stored their documents — on the desktop or elsewhere," said Kathleen Breck, Springfield's deputy city solicitor, who runs the Department's legal services division. "We could search the shared drive, but if it wasn't there, we didn't know where to go."

Lack of central storage also made it hard to generate reports. Staff often assembled data from numerous spreadsheets, and even from handwritten notes. This made providing data to stakeholders tremendously difficult. For example, every couple of months the Department's Legal Services and Litigation divisions must create a list of the projects they're working on for the city's school committee, indicating the time they've spent on each one.

### At a Glance: Law Department, Springfield, Massachusetts

The Law Department serves as in-house counsel for the city of Springfield, Massachusetts, a municipality with more than 154,000 residents, more than 30 government departments and a budget of more than \$600 million. The Department provides services and professional advice to the mayor, the city council, and the school committee, along with all of the city's departments, boards, and commissions. Headed by the city solicitor, the Law Department includes four divisions: Litigation, Legal Services, Code Enforcement, and Licensing.

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“It took days to produce that report,” LeBlanc said.

Another problem arose when attorneys needed to open a new legal matter in the software — a relatively simple task that they couldn’t complete themselves.

“We had to fill out a written form and give it to one of two people who knew how to open a matter,” Breck said. “If that specialist was busy or was away from the office, the attorney simply had to wait. It might take three or four days.”

## A TAILORED SOLUTION

The search for a better solution led Springfield’s Law Department to Time Matters®, a practice management package developed by LexisNexis®. The Department obtained the software through a state contract — avoiding a lengthy procurement — and worked with Circle Management Group® to implement the system on a local server and train staff in all four divisions.

During the implementation, the consultants, Ken Kennedy and Laura Kennedy, spent a great deal of time in each division, learning about their processes and configuring the software to fit the way staff does their work. For example, each division needed a different form to create a new matter.

“The information that might be important for Litigation is not the information that Legal Services needs, and certainly not what the License Commission would want,” said LeBlanc.

In addition, the consultants developed merge documents that each division could use to create contracts, licenses, and other documents, filling them in with data from Time Matters.

Having configured the system, the consultants conducted on-site training sessions, showing employees how to use the software to achieve their goals, and then watching the new users in action.

“They wanted to observe everybody and make sure we were all comfortable using the product,” LeBlanc said.

Breck adds: “The consultants also continued to fine-tune the configuration. As we found things that weren’t working, they were fixing them on the fly, right there.”

Time Matters went live in December 2016, and Law Department employees in the four divisions now use it for nearly all of their work, from tracking activities and communications to generating documents and producing reports.

“Instead of taking a week to get all of the package store licenses done, this year I did it in two days.” This represented a 40 percent reduction in time.

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## BETTER CONNECTIONS

By combining all information regarding legal matters into one database, the new system provided immediate benefits. Employees can now attach Microsoft Office documents and emails to a matter file. Anyone who needs that information and is authorized to access it can find it quickly.

“If a client in one of our city departments wants to know what’s happening with a contract, and it’s not one I’ve worked on, I go to Time Matters, put in a keyword and find the matter number. Then I can go into the matter and look at every document and email,” Breck said. “I can find out the status even if the person I assigned to that matter isn’t here.”

Employees in different divisions also can share information easily. For instance, if a licensed business brings suit against the city, employees in the Litigation division might need details about the licensing process.

“Everyone can have access to the licensing files,” LeBlanc said. “When the Litigation division opens a new matter on this company, it can link that file to the Licensing division’s file on the same firm.”

The new system allows the Department to improve compliance with Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and also makes financial information more readily available to individuals who have permission to access it.

When attorneys need to create new matters, they no longer wait days for support staff to do that work for them; instead, they can easily create new matters on their own. It also takes much less time to produce merge documents. This made work go more quickly; for example, when LeBlanc had to produce documentation for every liquor store that had renewed its license for 2018.

“Instead of taking a week to get all the package store licenses done, this year I did it in two days,” she said.

Finally, Time Matters makes it much easier to generate reports. Now, a manager can pull up a list of cases in the Litigation division to see which attorney is handling each case. And those reports to the school committee that used to take days to assemble now take barely any time at all.

“Once everybody puts in all their time, it can be done in a half hour to an hour,” LeBlanc said.

Thanks to a well-integrated practice management system, closely tailored to its established work processes, Springfield’s Law Department now operates faster and more efficiently than ever before.

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