

IT Q&A

Prepared by:



For:



Capital
Chapter

Tabush Group, a proud business partner of the ALA Capital Chapter, recently asked members for their most pressing IT questions. Darragh Fitzpatrick, Partner & EVP at Tabush Group, shares his responses and insights to some of your questions.

What is the best and most efficient way for firm administrators to stay on top of IT issues so that they may support IT recommendations and explain the accompanying budget?

My experience is that many times, expenditures are co-dependent on other decisions and expenditures. There is a sequential nature to the budget which needs support and emphasis.

It is key to have regularly scheduled meetings with your IT partner. Many IT partners primarily focus on the operational support, whether that be proactively or reactively. It is imperative for you to have scheduled meetings so that you and your IT partner can take a comprehensive look at all the decisions that need to be made and to build an overall budget.

When structuring your budget, it's important to consider that all parts of your IT infrastructure have lifecycle limits. Operating systems (OS), servers and applications, and network hardware all have a time limit outside of which support will no longer be provided by the company. For instance, consider a Dell server: After 7 years, every Dell server is considered end-of-life (EOL), and Dell will no longer provide parts for that server. Microsoft will release EOL dates for each OS and once something is listed EOL the company will no longer provide support or patch updates for it. Finding out the lifecycle terms for your infrastructure and application is one of the simplest ways to build a budget for future upgrades.

Additionally, the managed services contract you have in place should be pretty simple and easy to understand in terms of how it will change as your business scales up and down.

I am interested in more information about conference room calendaring programs for midsize firms. We are approximately 40 people and we are moving our offices in June. I need a more robust system, rather than using Outlook as we do now.

There are multiple cloud-based applications that allow for conference room management. The first thing to do when selecting any application is to decide what requirements you have for the application. What requirements are absolutely necessary and what would you put on the wish list?

Once your requirements list is set, begin with online research. You will find multiple best conference app lists. The key thing is to have quick calls with the sales team of each. Rather than having long conversations, simply provide the requirements list to each vendor and ask them to tell you what requirements their app meets. After doing this, select the two that meet the most requirements and dig

deeper within each. I would recommend that you definitely use a cloud application, ensure it is not hardware reliant, has a mobile app, and can integrate with your users' calendars.

Tabush Group works with a trusted audio visual partner who often recommends Crestron Fusion® and Steelcase's application, RoomWizard. I have also seen EventBoard used successfully by midsize law firms. These may be a good starting point for your research. Good luck!

What are the pros and cons of Office 365?

We have a recent blog post, ***Microsoft Office 365 Explained: In the Cloud, Without the Fog***, which you may find helpful: <http://www.tabush.com/blog/microsoft-office-365-explained>

Is there any reason to have an email server in your office?

The simple answer to this question is no. In fact, having an exchange server in your office may cause problems you would never experience if your email was hosted in the cloud. Instead, the question you should ask is: Should I move our email server to Office 365 or a similar cloud service, or do we need to build our own email server in a partner's private cloud?

Moving to Office 365 has some distinct advantages to building your own server in a private cloud. It provides all of the same functionality and the experience for the end user does not change. Office 365, however, will be less expensive than maintaining your own server.

There are several reasons a firm may want to own an exchange server in a private cloud, including specific compliance requirements, integration of their email server to another application, or an aversion to certain public cloud attributes.

Given a lawyer's ethical duty of confidentiality and to protect our client's property, how should we make sure a law firm's cloud or internet providers are meeting our ethical standards adequately? What types of security certificates should law firms ask for when working with cloud or internet providers?

Here are 6 good questions to ask a cloud provider to determine whether or not they will be a good business partner and cloud provider for your law firm.

1. How long has the cloud service provider been in business?

In the technology space, there are many firms that have a good product or service, but may not have a long business history. Having a long business history is not essential, but it means you should look further into the company's finances, founders, history, and focus. Certainly, you do not want to migrate to a cloud service only to find that the firm is winding down operations 12 months later, leaving you scrambling to find an alternate solution.

2. What is the cloud service provider's history in delivering support and services to law firms of your size?

It is important to remember that for the all "magic" that is talked about with regards to the cloud, it is still technology. If there is one thing can be guaranteed about technology, it is that at some point it will fail. One of the most important factors to consider is whether the service provider has the structure, ability, and experience to provide the support required, to resolve issues in an effective and efficient manner to ensure that your firm can function, practice law, and service your clients.

3. Does the cloud service ever have any issues or downtime?

If a cloud service provider states that it has 100% uptime, move on. EVERY service will have an outage at some point. To state otherwise is not dealing with reality. Moving forward with that provider will set unreasonable expectations for you and may end up being a nightmare.

4. How is data protected?

Data loss is always a possibility, whether using cloud or not. It is imperative that the cloud provider has a fully functional backup plan in place and that the details of it are transparent to you.

What does a fully functional backup plan entail?

- Data is backed up in a manner that allows for a versioned restore (a restore from any specific date/time)
- Data is backed up utilizing a retention policy (a specific number of days that data can be restored from)
- Backup data must not be stored on the same part of the cloud infrastructure as the "live" cloud data
- A replicated copy of the backup data should be stored in another geographical part of the cloud, at a minimum, to allow for recovery in the event of a complete shutdown of the primary facility

5. How is data secured?

For the last couple of years, security has been a hot topic in the legal industry. Whether the bar associations move quickly or slowly on this is somewhat irrelevant. Your clients and business partners that you collaborate with will do so, and likely much sooner. The key places encryption will be required is:

- All systems and data need to have business-grade perimeter protections in place
- All systems and data should be protected with multiple layers of security, including virus, malware, content, threat specific, systems, and software
- There should be the ability to have all data encrypted when it is being stored, even when it is not being accessed. This is called encryption at rest
- There should be the ability to allow for encrypted transmission of data via email or downloading/uploading from a portal, etc.

6. How is compliance ensured?

Compliance for your office means compliance for cloud. As a law firm you need to abide by certain state and federal regulations, ABA guidelines, and possibly regulatory and compliance laws. Each of these can have an effect on how and where data is stored, accessed, backed up, replicated, and shared. The cloud does not magically eradicate the need for these concerns; however, with the right service and provider, it will allow you to meet these requirements without ownership or responsibility to manage. Discuss the needs of your practice with the provider so they can show that all are met by their solution.

What are disaster recovery and business continuity solutions our firm should consider?

The backup and business continuity solutions being leveraged by most law firms now are hardware-based backup devices with cloud replication built in. These business continuity appliances enhance backup and provide high availability for your on-premise servers and applications. If a server fails, not only can the server data be restored, the server itself can be spun up on the backup device for live access within about 20 minutes of failure. All of your servers and applications can also be brought online in the cloud for critical user access, if need be, in the case of a disaster situation that prevents access to systems in your office space.

The easiest way to add business continuity to your firm, is not to procure, build, and manage another piece of infrastructure. Instead, leverage the cloud! When a company moves its entire IT to the cloud, they eliminate the hardware and infrastructure in the office and gain backup and business continuity. Cloud provides these protections inherently since everything, including apps, data, and files, live in the cloud.

What are alternatives to MSPs where a law firm is seeking a hybrid solution (employee + MSP)?

Tabush Group works with multiple companies that have internal IT staff, and in some cases we have even helped these firms build their IT departments. There is no simple formula or a "best way" to setup a hybrid solution with your IT partner. Each firm is different in size, geography, culture, etc. A good IT partner will come with a very specific framework of how best to deliver IT services to your firm, and that framework should be flexible enough to incorporate and fulfill your needs. For instance, our Managed Service Plan allows for desktop support to be managed by internal IT staff. In some cases this need was dictated by size or culture of the law firm; in some cases we proposed it; and other times the law firm requested it. The fee structure is amended to reflect this change in service need. The law firm's internal IT team utilizes all the same systems management, support ticket, and monitoring tools as our team, so that both work together seamlessly.