A 12-Month Plan for Going Paperless

rocket matter

Introduction

Was the ancient philosopher Lao Tzu thinking of law offices in the 21st century when he wrote, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," in the 6th century B.C.?

Without question!

According to legal technology speaker Bryan Sims, going paperless is the single most important thing you can do to run a more efficient law practice. That is why our annual eBook series, The Paperless Law Office, is the most popular one my team has ever produced—lawyers understand the criticality of ditching physical files, but a lot of times they get hung up on how to start what seems like such a herculean task. After all, you've got years', possibly decades' worth of paperwork stored in filing cabinets or boxes all over your office. How could you possibly make the switch?

The good news is that it's a lot simpler than you might think—and it's a change you can't afford to overlook.

Here at Rocket Matter, we're committed to helping your firm with this process, through both our legal practice management software and our content-rich eBooks and webinars.

For those struggling with going paperless, let this year be different. This eBook lays out an easy month-by-month plan that will set your firm up for success and enable it to run the paperless law office that you've always wanted. You'll also find important resources such as file-naming conventions and suggestions for apps and hardware.

Let's get started!

-Part 1-

A 12-Month Plan for Going Paperless

Commit to Starting Slowly and Chipping Away

This month, make a commitment: You will chip away at going paperless step by step. Approach this project with grit and determination, and don't get knocked off track by setbacks.

Overcome resistant employees, *removing them from their roles* if need be, because *you* deserve a more profitable and stress-free enterprise.

Determine Your Process

The trick to becoming paperless is to not transition too quickly: You must first sketch out a process.

Specifically, you need to define how you will handle two situations: internally created documents and externally created documents.

Once you define this process, create a checklist that your staff must follow. Discipline is key here! Everyone must follow the same steps, or chaos will ensue.
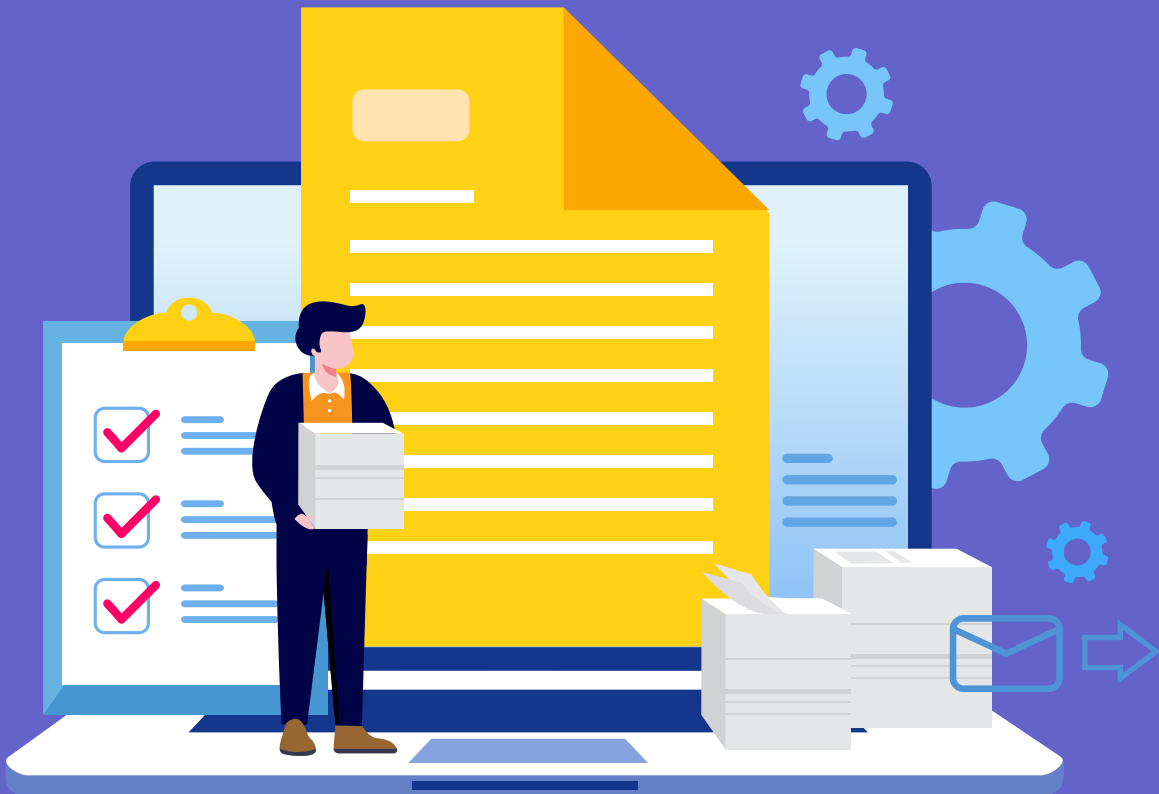
Establish Naming and Filing Conventions

Be sure to define your overall folder structure and file naming conventions separately from your overall paperless workflow. It will build momentum and make things simpler.

For a complete playbook on how to name your files and structure your folders, view our guide in the resources section of this eBook.

Get Desktop Scanners

It's time to buy hardware. The best move is to get desktop scanners and put them on everyone's desks. It doesn't make sense to have one central garbage can in your office, does it? Well, it also doesn't make sense to have one central scanning resource either.

You are a document professional, so get the best document tools. Do not get multi-function devices such as printer/copier/scanner/fax machines. These devices compromise functionality since they support so many tasks.

For specific scanner recommendations, see the <u>resources section of this eBook</u>.

Choose an Online Document Management System

Choosing an online document management system that syncs automatically with your desktop or laptop is a critical step in going paperless.

For this we recommend NetDocuments, one of our amazing integration partners. NetDocuments allows you to manage, collaborate, and share content in one secure location to improve your productivity. It also offers powerful integrations with Microsoft Office and Outlook!

You can also look at specialized document storage tools such as Dropbox, Box, iCloud, or OneDrive.

Automate Your Billing and Collections

One of the biggest forms of waste in a law firm is sending out paper bills and waiting for checks. Save precious time (and a LOT of money) by automating your billing and collections with online payment processing.

Instead of printing, folding, stuffing, stamping, addressing, and sending invoices, with paperless billing you click a button and invoices are emailed out to clients. They can then pay online with debit or credit cards, and you have your money the next day.

With solutions such as Rocket Matter Payments, you can even create automated recurring billing and payment plans. What's easier than that?

Automate Simple Documents with Document Assembly

Document assembly allows you to click a button and create a document from fields you've saved in a database. It sometimes scares attorneys (especially ones who are not very tech-savvy,) but the reality is it's not too tough to do and the benefits are amazing. July is usually one of the slower months for law firms, so use it to expand your knowledge and add this critical skill to your toolset.

There are many ways to begin – you are probably already using Microsoft Word, so learning about Mail Merge fields will help you get started. You can also take advantage of the powerful document assembly features we've built into our Rocket Matter software.

Use Downtime to Scan Backlog

You have a decision to make: Do you want to scan all of your documents or just your active cases?

There may be a lot to catch up on even if you're only scanning your active files. Start taking advantage of any downtime to really make a dent in your scanning backlog.

Embrace Mobile Paperless Tools

If you haven't done so already, start taking advantage of the tools you can use on smartphones and tablets.

Smartphones allow for scanning-on-the go functionality. You can even use your mobile phone's camera to upload documents directly into your Rocket Matter account!

There are also a ton of apps out there that can perform other important functions such as marking up PDFs and creating electronic signatures.

We've compiled a handy list of mobile paperless apps in the <u>resources section of this eBook</u>.

Automate Pleadings and More Complex Documents

Hopefully at this point, you've dipped your toes in the waters of document automation with your engagement letter and are happily and efficiently onboarding clients.

Now it's time to really ratchet up your efficiencies! Make a list of the top ten documents your law firm creates on a regular basis and convert those into document templates.

Spend some time learning what Microsoft Word can do with mail merge fields, such as if-then-else logic, prompting for questions, and special formatting. You can switch pronouns based on gender, swap paragraphs out based on conditions, and significantly reduce errors as well as time spent on document production.
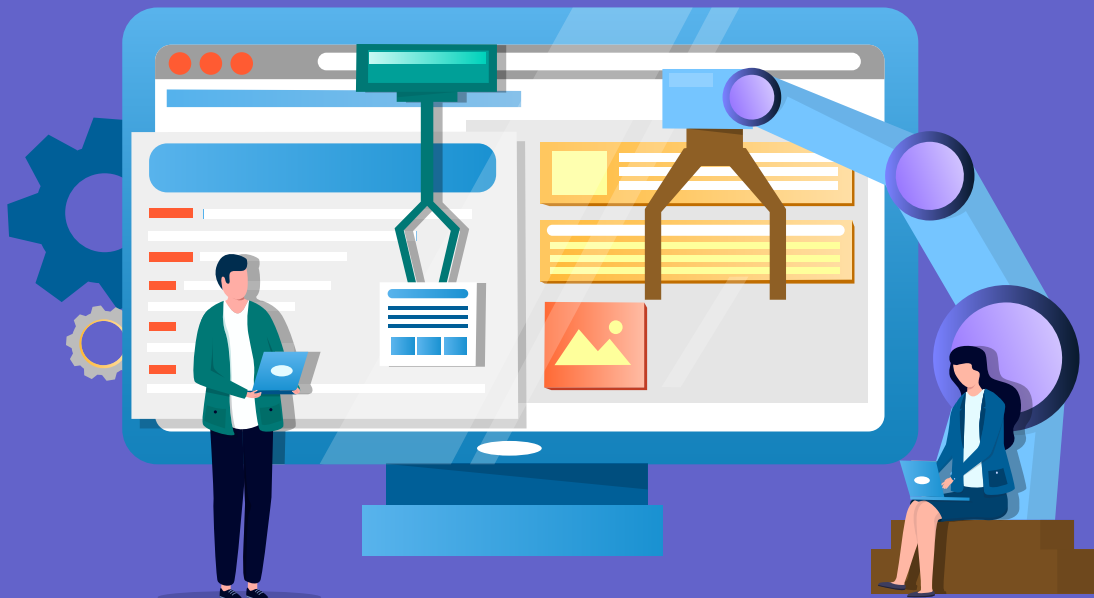
Realize it's Okay to Still Use Some Paper

Not everything needs to be digitized. Even the most paperless of law firms still use paper. Paper is still great for note-taking. And handwritten notes are still special, even more so in our noisy, social media-infected world.

Reflect on Success and Plan Improvements for the Following Year

Congratulations! You did it! It took twelve months, but you took it nice and slow, and now you don't have to spend 15 minutes looking for files. You can view them from anywhere you are. You can work from home more. You have more time on your hands because creating documents takes a single click. And you're collecting more money than ever because of your conversion to electronic payments.

Our work is not done here. Now that you've got the fundamentals down, it's time to look for more inefficiencies in your processes. What can you do better? How can you run an even better firm next year?

-Part 2-
Resources to Help You Go Paperless

Resources to Help You Go Paperless

We've put together a convenient list of hardware and software that will help your law firm go paperless. You'll also find a set of suggested protocols for structuring and naming your files once you've gone digital.

Legal Practice Management Software

A good legal practice management software will help your firm go paperless by digitally managing your cases and client records, time and billing, deadlines, files, and in some cases, online payments.

[Rocket Matter](#) - $69/user/month
Rocket Matter's best-of-breed cloud-based legal practice management has all the tools you'll need to boost your law firm's profits and productivity.

Scanning Apps

Gone are the days where you need to lug around receipts, business cards, and other documents. Scan your documents on the go with these popular apps:

[Scanner Pro](#) - Free (offers in-app purchases)
This app is one of the best but one of the most expensive. It can quickly scan multiple items such as PDFs or JPGs and save them as one document. It automatically detects the edge of the page and displays a grid overlay when taking pictures to ensure a clean scan. Your scans can also automatically upload to Dropbox.

[Genius Scan](#) - Free Basic Plan
Genius Scan is one of the most powerful free apps out there. The free version does have its drawbacks—the image quality is a bit lacking, it only allows email sharing, and it has advertisements. You can upgrade to Genius Scan+ for a $7.99 one-time fee, which includes OCR searching, enhanced document organization, and more.

Desktop Scanners

Digitize all those paper documents with these powerful desktop scanners:

[FUJITSU Document Scanner ScanSnap iX100](#) - $229.00
The ScanSnap iX100 is a fast battery-powered desktop scanner. It takes up minimal space on your desk and can scan documents directly to your Rocket Matter legal practice management system with the press of a button.

[SCANSNAP iX1500 Touchscreen Scanner](#) - $495.00
As the bigger brother of the iX100, the iX1500 is much larger and comes with a super-handy touchscreen for enhanced usability and functionality. The iX1500 also comes with software that combines all of the popular functions of business card, receipt, and document management apps into one interface for easier management and editing.

PDF Software

PDF documents are popular in the legal profession. There may be times when you need to highlight important sections, add explanations, or black out content. Here are some of the best apps that can help you do this:

[PDFelement for IOS](#) - Free (offers in-app purchases)
Add annotations to your PDFs with stamps, notes, strikeouts, comments, highlights, and more. This app also allows you to add text to forms and draw personal signatures on your PDFs. Your PDF files can also be exported into different formats such as Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

[Qiqqa for Windows and Android](#) - Free
Qiqqa software can analyze PDFs and organize them according to tags and metadata. Qiqqa is popular for its ability to sync documents to your android or windows devices and enable you to view them offline. It also supports reading, highlighting, and taking notes from PDF files.

Document Management

A good document management system lets you do more than just store documents: You can also organize, digitize, tag, approve, store, access, and complete tasks involving your business files and documents. Here is our top recommendation:

[NetDocuments](#) - Inquire for Pricing
NetDocuments is a highly secure cloud-based document management and storage system. It also offers powerful integrations with Microsoft Office, allowing for smart editing, drafting, searching, and version control.

[DropBox](#)- Starts at $12.50/user/month
Organize and share your team's content in a central location and take advantage of collaboration tools like Slack and Zoom. You can also sign up for a free Dropbox Basic account, but you're limited to only 2GB of storage.

eSignature Apps

In order to be truly paperless, you need to be able to sign and send the digital documents that you (or others) create. Here are the best electronic signature apps we've found:

[DocuSign](#)- Starts at $10/user/month
This is one of the most popular eSignature apps available. You can easily track the status of each document, including which ones require action, which are waiting on other people, which are complete, and which are expiring soon. This is great for busy lawyers with tons of deadlines!

[RightSignature](#) - Starts at $12/user/month
Like most eSignature apps, RightSignature allows you to upload, prepare, and send documents for signature—as well as receive them, sign them, and return them to another sender. But where this app really shines is its security: Documents can be password protected, canceled, or voided from a central toolbar, and you can also specify the order in which others sign off.

Paperless Law Office: File Structure and File Naming Conventions

After deciding to go paperless, or to get everyone at your firm on board, you'll need to create a set of procedures or protocols. Here is a guide to help with this. Note: These are merely suggestions.

File Structure Protocols

The Dropbox (or other file storage unit such as your [legal practice management system](#)) file structure protocol is as follows:

1. CLIENT FILES
   - [client name]
     - [matter name]
       1. ADMIN
          - Anything that BKC and ASK will probably never need to see or use goes here
          - Examples: labels, etc.
       2. ATTY NOTES AND RESEARCH
          - Handwritten notes from client consults
          - Westlaw research (statutes, cases, etc.)
       3. CLIENT DOCS
          - Any documents that we obtain from the client, including electronic copies of original client documents
       4. CORRESPONDENCE
          - All letters, faxes, emails, phone transcriptions/logs
       5. COSTS
          - All costs that may be recoverable by our client
       6. DISCOVERY
          - One separate folder for each independently represented party(ies)
          - Within each party's folder is the discovery <u>propounded by that party</u> and the responses thereto
          - There is a separate folder for each <u>deposition</u>, containing the notice/subpoena, correspondence regarding the depo, examination outlines, exhibits, etc.
       7. DRAFTS
          - All draft documents remain here
          - Final documents, whether created electronically, or printed and scanned, go elsewhere
          - Mostly MS Word docs

8. PLEADINGS
    - All documents that are filed with the court
    - Should all be in PDF format
    - Should not be any MS Word docs
9. TRIAL PREP
    - Copies of all documents that will be used as evidence at trial

A matter is a new issue to be resolved for a new or existing client. A matter may be any of the following: (a) a legal issue that needs to be researched and a memorandum drafted for the client; (b) a new case filed for or against the client in Federal or State Court or before an administrative agency (i.e., Department of Fair Employment and Housing or the Bureau of Real Estate); (c) drafting a contract or some other legal document; (d) drafting or responding to a demand letter; or (e) etc.

All new matters should be saved in Dropbox in the "Client Files" architecture. The matter should be saved in the file naming the client (for example Client Files/Shawn Patty). The matter should be saved/named as the name of the lawsuit or the property address. For example, the Shawn Patty matter is a lawsuit versus Robert Radtke and others. Therefore, the matter would be saved in a sub-file and named "Patty v Radtke." To maintain consistency, the Client Name and the Matter Name should match exactly what is entered into Rocket Matter.

On matters that are going to be litigated, each matter folder should have at least the following sub-folders: (a) Pleadings; (b) Correspondence; (c) Drafts; (d) Client Documents; (e) Discovery; (f) Attorney Notes and Research; (g) Costs; and (h) Admin.

On matters that are not going to be litigated, each matter folder should have at least the following sub-folders: (a) Correspondence; (b) Drafts; (c) Client Documents; (d) Attorney Notes and Research; and (e) Admin.

Thus, when entering a new litigated matter for a new client, one would: (1) create a new client folder in Client Files; (2) create a new matter folder in the new client folder; and (3) create five to eight folders in the new matter folder.

File Naming Protocol

Explanations:

DATE:
- The above date format cause all files within a folder to be sorted chronologically, by default
- Use the following date, in order:
  - The date filed, if the document is stamped filed, or otherwise known to have been filed with the court or another entity
  - The date on the Proof of Service, if there is a POS attached
  - The date executed, if the document is executed by a person
  - The date identified in the document as the date of the document, if so identified
  - The date created, if none of the above apply (usually for documents drafted by us)
  - The date received, if none of the above apply (usually for documents received by us)

DESCRIPTION:
- Use the following abbreviations:
  - Addl for Additional
  - Amend for Amended
  - Atty for Attorney
  - CMC for Case Management Conference
  - Dec for Declaration
  - Dem for Demurrer
  - Depo for Deposition
  - Disco for Discovery
  - Doc for Document(s)
  - Evid for Evidence or Evidentiary
  - FAC for First Amended Complaint
  - SAC for Second Amended Complaint
  - TAC for Third Amended Complaint
  - 4AC for Fourth Amended Complaint (5AC, 6AC, etc.)
  - FACC for First Amended Cross-Complaint
  - SACC for Second Amended Cross-Complaint (TACC, 4ACC, 5ACC, etc.)
  - Frogs for Form Interrogatories
  - "iso" for In Support Of
  - Jmt for Judgment
  - LMMO for Law & Motion Minute Order
  - LF for Letter From
  - LT for Letter To
  - Memo for Memorandum
  - MSA for Motion for Summary Adjudication
  - MSC for Mandatory Settlement Conference

- o MSJ for Motion for Summary Judgment
- o Mtn for Motion
- o Obj for Objection(s)
- o Opp for Opposition
- o P&A for Points and Authorities
- o PDC for Pretrial Discovery Conference
- o POS for Proof of Service
- o "re" for Regarding
- o Req for Request(s)Cross-Complaint
- o RFAs for Requests for Admissions
- o RFJN for Request for Judicial Notice
- o RFPs for Requests for Production of Documents
- o Sprogs for Special Interrogatories
- o Tent for Tentative
- o "w" for With
- o XC for Cross-Compliant
- Do not abbreviate the following:
  - o Notice, Order, Reply, Compel, Trial, Complaint, Answer, Strike, Set

AUTHOR/RECIPIENT
- Use "by" for author of <u>drafts</u> and <u>pleadings</u>; "from" and "to" are not necessary
- Use "from" and "to" for <u>correspondence</u>
  - o Always omit our firm, so a letter from us to Paul Franco is "LT Franco" and a letter from Paul Franco to us is "LF Franco"

REGARDING
- Include, if necessary, a VERY SHORT description of the subject matter of the document
- Usually only necessary for correspondence

SUFFIX
- If the document is stamped, use the nature of the stamp to identify the document in capital letters
  - o For conformed copies of court filed documents, use "FILED"
  - o For documents issued by court such as writs, use "ISSUED"
  - o For documents received-stamped by sheriff and others, use "RECEIVED"

About Rocket Matter

Rocket Matter helps law firms offer better client service and also increase revenues by more than 20%. The company was the first cloud-based legal practice management software on the market, landing its first client in 2007. It has been a leader ever since.

Rocket Matter has the most powerful, easy-to-use time and billing software in the industry. Also, when law firms want to make more money, go paperless, or increase confidence in their trust accounting, Rocket Matter helps them achieve those goals. With award-winning customer service based in the United States, it's no wonder thousands of law firms swear by Rocket Matter.

Enjoy this book and become part of our cutting edge community on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter. Also, check out our Legal Productivity blog.