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INTRODUCTION

To say that the COVID-19 crisis has changed the way that businesses operate is an understatement. While a large number of legal professionals have been working remotely for years, social distancing restrictions had forced many law firms to suddenly pivot to remote work in an extremely short period of time.

While some businesses have fully re-opened, there are many who have adopted the remote work standard as their new norm. That's why we wrote this eBook!

This eBook will serve as a foundation for running a successful remote law firm. It covers:

- Essential technology
- Cloud-based legal practice management solutions
- Remote team management
- Communication tools
- Cybersecurity
- Mental health tips
- And much more!

Our goal with this eBook is to ensure that your law firm is able to operate remotely during these uncertain times and well into the future. Prioritize your firm's particular needs and take small steps, one day at a time.

And don't forget: Rocket Matter is here to help! Feel free to reach out to us at 888.432.1529 or info@rocketmatter.com to get more information about running a remote law firm.
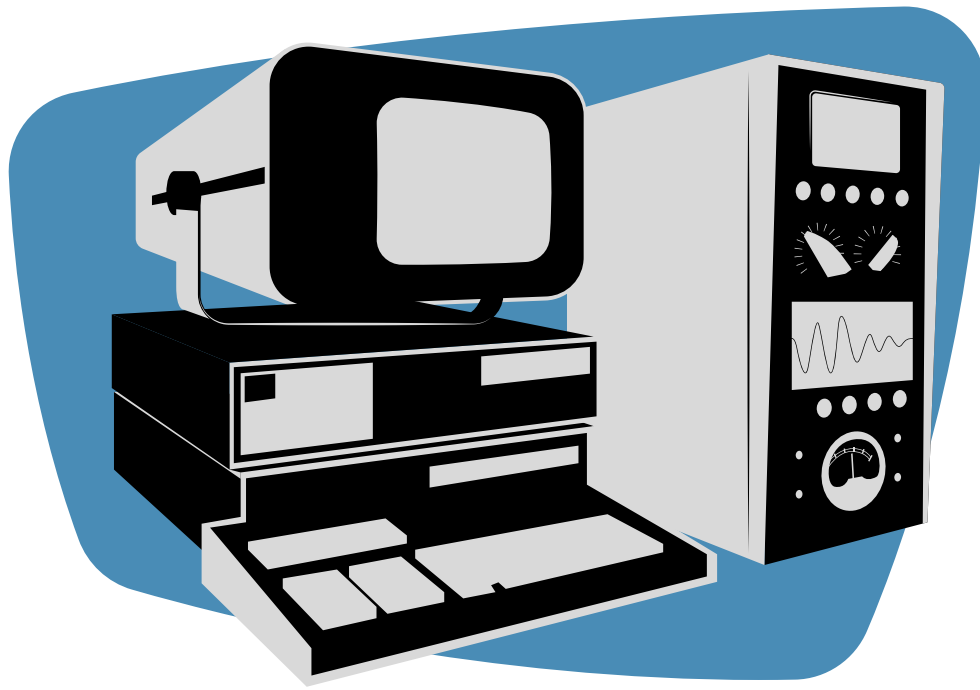
TOOLS, MANAGEMENT TIPS, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR RUNNING A REMOTE LAW FIRM

Based on our Rocket Aid virtual session entitled "Remote Lawyering Overview: The Tools You Need," presented by Mark Palmer, Elizabeth Whitman, and Jared Correia.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has forced many law firms to go virtual in a short time frame—which, needless to say, is no easy feat. Firms are finding themselves tossed into the deep end, struggling to transition to a virtual office in a matter of weeks.

Regardless of where you are within the transition process (or if you haven't even started yet), here's a round-up of tools, management tips, and ethical considerations to keep in mind to ensure that your law firm is able to operate virtually during these uncertain times—and well into the future:

ESSENTIAL TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS

In addition to cloud-based legal practice management software and reliable communication tools (discussed later in this book), here are the essential tools you should use to run your virtual law firm:

Noise-Canceling Headphones with a Microphone
Not only do such headphones block out loud background noise if you work from home, but they also ensure that anyone around you can't hear the person on the other end of the call which, in turn, helps maintain client confidentiality. We're fans of the Jabra Evolve 75 headset since it has excellent noise-canceling abilities, can be used wirelessly, and is very comfortable.

Password Manager
Tons of online accounts mean tons of account passwords. Instead of writing down passwords in a notebook that could get lost or stolen, invest in a digital password manager such as 1Password or Dashlane to store them all so you can recall them at a moment's notice.

Pro tip: The more important the account (i.e. your legal practice management software or anything else that includes confidential client information), the more complicated your account password should be.

VPNs
A virtual private network (VPN) encrypts your internet activity. VPNs keep you from becoming the victim of a cyberattack and prevents hackers from accessing your confidential information. Make sure to do your research before choosing a VPN since budgets and required features may vary from one firm to the next. We highly recommend IPVanish VPN.

Extra Chargers and Battery Packs

Technology is not infallible: Chargers can blow a fuse, batteries can drain quickly, and you might experience a short power outage. For this reason, it's imperative to always have some spare laptop/device chargers and external battery packs on hand. There are great options out there for any type of device. Better to be safe than sorry!

Backup Internet

Just as random power surges are completely possible in your home or office, you need to be prepared if your phone or internet service experiences a hiccup. Add a personal hotspot option to your cell phone plan or purchase a separate mobile hotspot device if you primarily use your phone to make calls. Here is a detailed breakdown of the best options for each carrier.

eSignature Application

You need to be able to sign and send the digital documents that you (or others) create quickly and easily. Look for applications that have deadline tracking and added security features. We recommend DocuSign and RightSignature.

Scanner

Your documents should be digitized and stored in a centralized location that everyone in your firm can remotely access (more on this in the next section). Make sure you have a desktop scanner on hand like the powerful Fujitsu ScanSnap iX1500. Scanners such as this one even have the capability to scan documents directly into your legal practice management software to maximize efficiency.

MANAGING A DISTRIBUTED TEAM

How do you keep yourself (or an entire distributed team) on track while running a remote law office? The answer is simple: Develop a system of processes and workflows that everyone must follow. Here's how:

Create Workflows

There are usually similar processes your firm puts in place for each case type you handle, so why not standardize it? Legal practice management software such as Rocket Matter allows users to create matter templates and workflows that can be easily tracked. This makes it easy to monitor the status of each case and stay on track of remote attorneys.

Digitize Documents and Create Standardized File-Naming and Storage Conventions

What good are digital documents if no one can access or identify them? Make sure everyone on your team understands not only where digital files are stored, but how to name them. Here is a comprehensive list of suggested file structure and file-naming conventions. Regardless of how you choose to label and store your files, make sure everyone on your team is on the same page or the system will be pointless.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND OBLIGATIONS

When it comes to establishing a virtual law firm, there are many decisions and ethical considerations that should be made regarding both your clients *and* your colleagues:

Update Your Policies and Procedures—and Communicate Them to Colleagues and Clients

With a distributed team, you're going to have to update or create policies and procedures regarding working from home, data security, and the use of personal devices. On the client-facing side, you're also going to have to make your clients aware of what your firm can and cannot do. For example, virtual firms must still adhere to bar regulations and practice only within their state's jurisdictions.

Supervise Your Subordinates Appropriately

Lawyers are the gatekeepers to their clients' financial and personal information. It is therefore your responsibility to supervise your subordinates appropriately. This

means making sure they are trained in technology and such topics as cybersecurity to prevent confidential information from being lost or stolen.

Revisit Your Fee Structure

Last but not least, don't forget that we are in a global recession. Your clients will be price-sensitive and likely looking for lower-cost legal services. Consider moving away from hourly billing in favor of flat fees or other alternative fee arrangements. You also may want to create a standardized fee structure so that your team can be on the same page when it comes to charges, fees, and discounts.
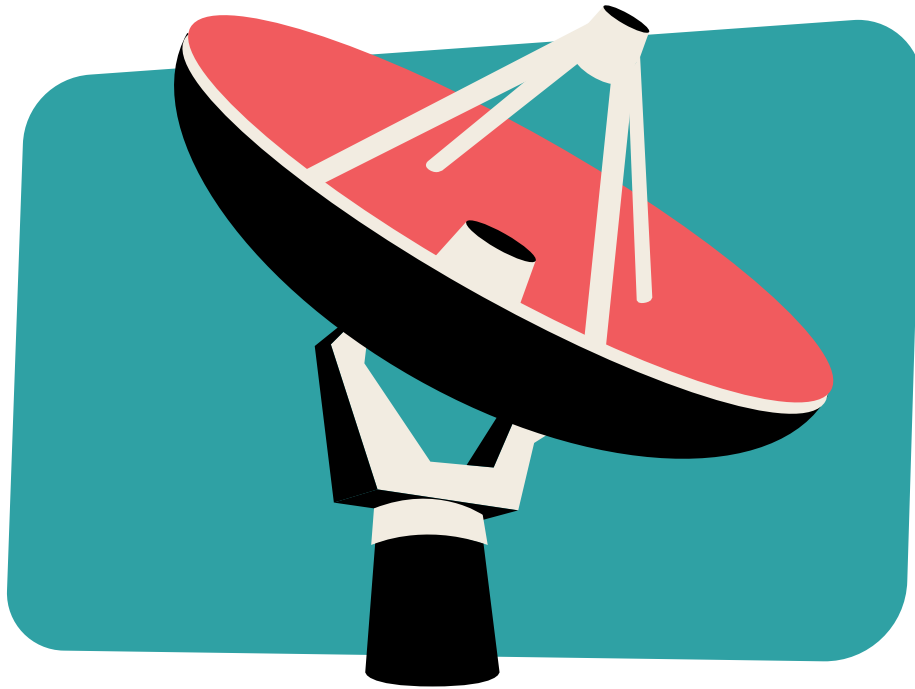
COMMUNICATE LIKE A BOSS WHILE REMOTE

By Larry Port, Rocket Matter CEO.

When Rocket Matter had to send its workers home because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was a non-event for us from a systems standpoint. Our employees closed their Mac laptops, brought them home, popped them back open, and didn't miss a beat.

We're set up for this partially because we operate out of three main locations, partially because we've had to scatter multiple times in the face of hurricanes (our HQ is located in South Florida), and partially because we're a software company that's an early adopter of any technology that makes our business easier and more efficient.

So what do we use?

DIALPAD: OUR PHONE SYSTEM
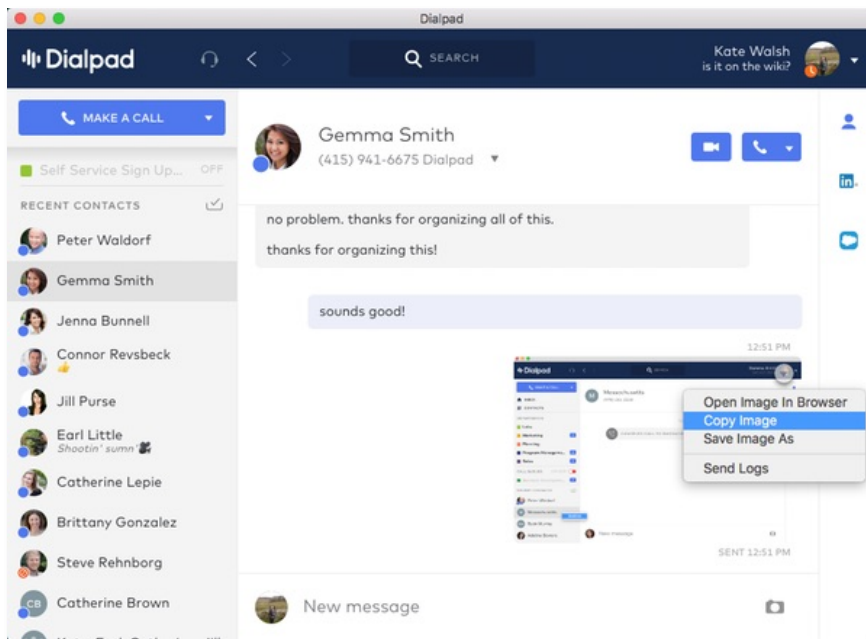
One thing that surprises people about my work habits is that I don't have a phone on my desk. Yes, I'm a CEO without a desk phone!

Instead, I use [Dialpad](), which runs on my computer and my iPhone. Technically, a phone that runs inside of a computer (as opposed to a physical device) is known as a "softphone."

Dialpad isn't just a phone. It's what's known as a virtual PBX (private branch exchange), which allows us a business to create extensions for everyone. We can set up queues for the support and sales teams so that customers can get routed to the right place. We can also offer phone trees to allow users to select the department they wish to speak with.

Over the years we've used three different systems, and Dialpad is the best of them all. The UI is clean and easy to use, but most importantly, the sound quality is consistently perfect. It comes built-in with a conferencing tool called

[Uberconference](#), which we typically don't use because we use Zoom (see below) instead.

For lawyers specifically, Dialpad has really incredible functionality called "Voice Intelligence." After a call, you can receive not only transcripts from that call but a summary of action items as well.

Dialpad is exciting for us because Rocket Matter will integrate with it as part of our 2020 road map. Imagine this: You'll be able to bill your phone calls to your matters without creating a time entry, and you'll have phone call transcriptions automatically associated with your matters.

ZOOM: OUR CONFERENCING AND VIDEO CHAT SYSTEM

We've been running videoconferences at Rocket Matter since 2009. We've used a variety of systems, including Skype, GoToMeeting, Appear.in, Google Hangouts, and more.

[Zoom](#) wins. The reason for this victory is that we no longer encounter what we call "remote follies." Remote follies happen when a meeting starts and invariably, someone has trouble connecting, their microphone doesn't work, they can't hear you, or in the middle of the conversation, the software starts glitching out.

Zoom also wins because it is easy to use and the video and audio quality is consistently great. In fact, I use it to record my two podcasts (*The 10 Minute Law Firm Podcast* and *The Lean Law Firm Podcast*), because it performs so consistently and can record the conversation with separate audio tracks for each participant.

Not everything requires a phone call or a videoconference, however. For small things, we prefer to use…

# SLACK: OUR TEXT MESSENGER AND PRINCIPAL COMMUNICATION TOOL
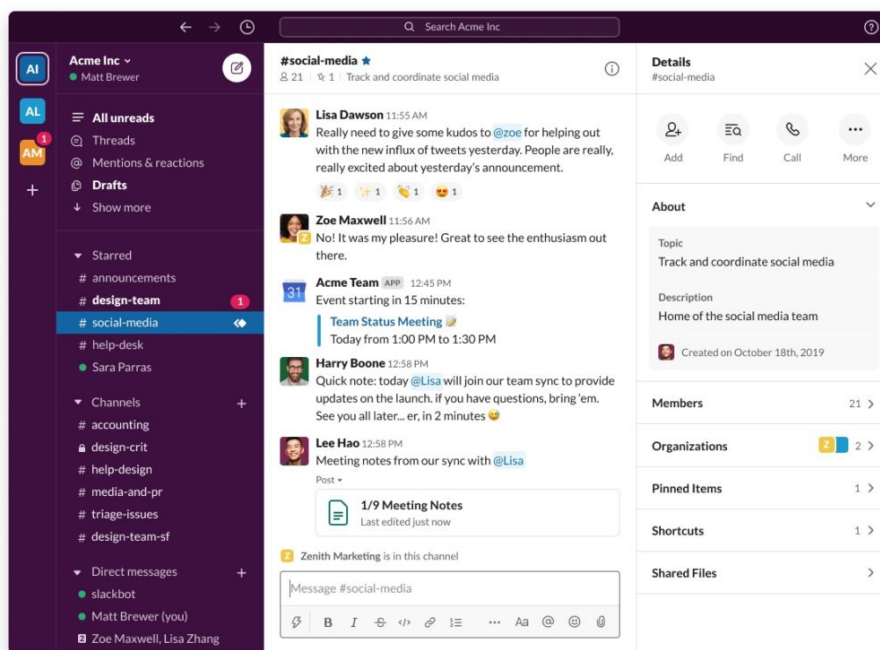
It might be fair to say that Rocket Matter runs on [Slack](). Slack competes with tools like Microsoft Teams. If you're not familiar with these tools, here's a quick breakdown of what they do: Click on a colleague's name and chat with them on your computer or your phone. Not interesting yet? I agree.

Now, add in the ability to form "channels"—or teams of people for specific purposes who can all chat together—the ability to share files among those people, and the ability to archive and easily search through all conversations. The result is a MASSIVE reduction in email because nearly all firm communication takes place on this platform.

To understand this in action, at Rocket Matter we have dedicated channels for engineering, management, customer support, marketing, and all other teams in the company. If we spin up a special project, such as our recent Rocket Aid virtual conference, a corresponding Slack channel is launched with it. All conversation is archivable and easily searchable.

Because we're in Slack all day long and because our client law firms are in Rocket Matter all day long as well, we thought it would be powerful for us to add a communication tool to our product. For this reason, we built Communicator, which allows lawyers to stay inside our application and send text messages to each other.

With [Communicator](), you can create your own channels. These can be associated with matters so that all correspondence associated with a matter gets consolidated in one place. You can share files. You can use natural language to schedule appointments. Communicator works inside the Rocket Matter application on computers and on iOS and Android devices as well.
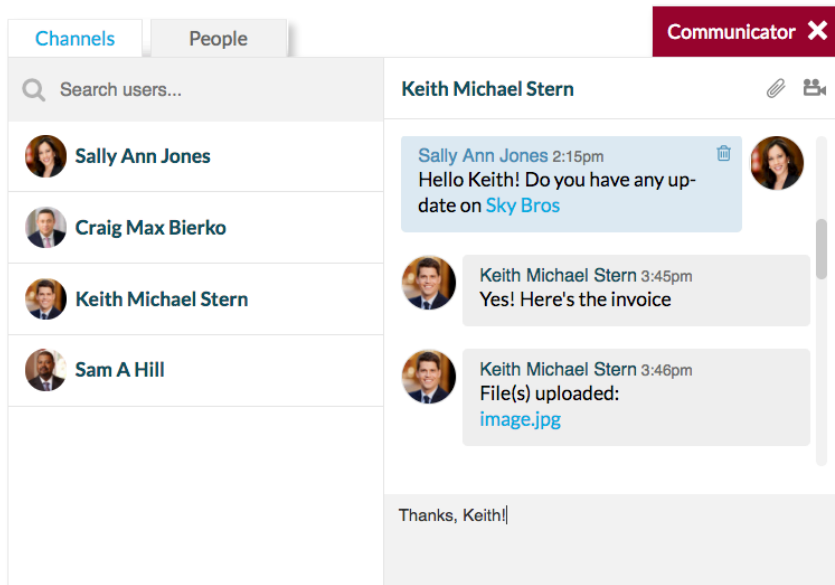
GETTING STARTED

The good news is that getting started with these systems is not only easy, but they're also economical. The days of hiring a consultant and paying 20k for a phone system are over. You can likely set up Dialpad on your own or with the help of a techie friend, and if you do have to get professional help it's not going to be as involved as it used to be. Zoom, in my opinion, is the easiest videoconferencing tool to use. And Slack and Communicator are as straightforward to use as any software out there: If you can text, you can use these tools, too. Before you know it, you'll be communicating like a boss— with your boss.
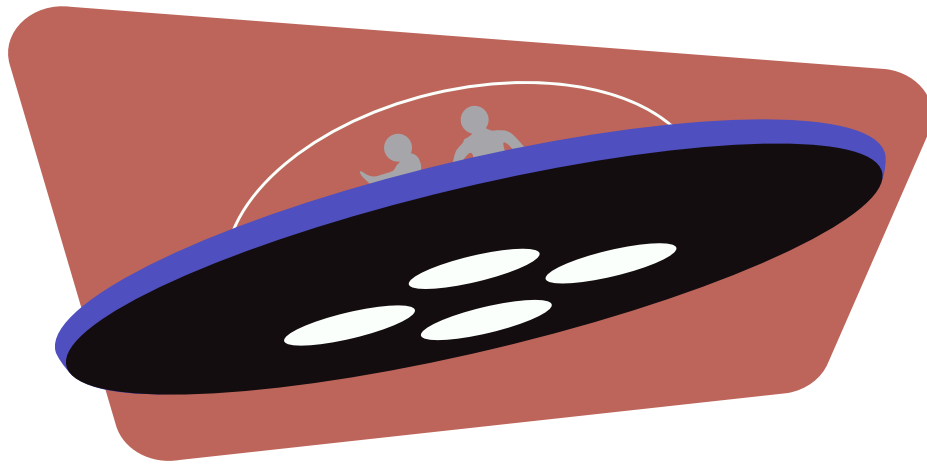
CLOUD-BASED LEGAL PRACTICE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE: A NECESSITY FOR RUNNING YOUR LAW FIRM REMOTELY

Many law firms have no ability to work on their case files remotely. So what are they supposed to do now that many (if not most) attorneys from home?

First of all, the firm needs flexible communication tools. But when it comes to everyday operations, law firms must utilize a trusted cloud-based legal practice management system that will enable them to work remotely, access important firm information, and continue on with business as usual.

There are also many long-term benefits of going to the cloud—reduced overhead costs, higher productivity, and automated time and billing and project management to name a few.

But what does "cloud-based" mean? Here's the simplest description: The cloud allows you to use computing resources that you don't have locally in your office.

This network (or remote server) offers the advantage of minimal to no equipment at your location.

Let's take a look at the benefits of using cloud-based legal practice management software, and how it can make a huge impact on your law firm during this crisis and beyond:

REMOTELY ACCESS ALL OF YOUR INFORMATION

Unlike on-premise systems which can only be accessed by those in a centralized location, cloud-based legal practice management software can be accessed from nearly any device by all team members regardless of where they are located. Whether scattered across town or across the world, you can continue to run your firm from nearly any device.

Sophisticated cloud-based legal practice management systems such as Rocket Matter enable law firms to have immediate access to the following features (plus so much more):

- Time and expense tracking
- Calendars and tasks
- Contact management
- Case management
- Online invoicing and payments
- Client intake
- Document assembly and storage

Firms with more than one attorney can also take advantage of communication and collaboration features that are found in many of today's cloud-based software, keeping everyone on the same page while apart.

STOP PAYING FOR I.T.

On-premise systems require servers, which are large (and usually very loud) machines that need to be installed in a physical location. The servers must be maintained with regular updates in order to run effectively. They'll also need to be protected against hackers, spyware, and ransomware, which requires constant vigilance. And what do you do if your server goes down? Maintaining these on-premise servers usually requires the help of an IT person who charges thousands of dollars per year.

Cloud computing means you no longer need a server to store and manage your data, which means no expensive IT costs for you. You'll also never have to worry about the cloud going down since it's internet-based: If you have problems connecting from one device, try a different Wi-Fi connection or a phone with cellular data. Plus, your data can't be held hostage by ransomware.

ENJOY DIGITAL DOCUMENT STORAGE

You will outgrow your server if your practice continues to grow. You will simply run out of storage space on it. Also your server will probably be obsolete after a few years as technology improves. All of this adds up to your having to get rid of the old server and migrate information from it to a new server which, in turn, can cost you thousands of dollars.

With cloud computing, you don't have to worry about running out of storage because you'll just pay for the storage you need. Cloud-based legal practice management software such as Rocket Matter even offers unlimited document storage for no extra cost! By digitizing and storing your documents online, you and your firm can collaborate and have instant access to those important files whenever you need.

DRIVE DOWN OVERHEAD

Cloud computing can be very affordable if you're a small practice. Consider this: If you're not using cloud-based software, then the cost will increase for servers, storage, and an IT person as your firm grows. Not to mention you'll still have the annoying overhead costs of office supplies such as paper, envelopes, and stamps. Cloud-based legal practice management is easily scalable, and in most cases you can just pay for the core features you really need.

Plus, cloud-based legal practice management software can save you time and money in the long run through automation features such as Rocket Matter's batch billing, online invoicing, and document assembly. Some Rocket Matter firms have reported profit boosts of up to 30% thanks to our powerful tools.

WHY ONLINE LEGAL PAYMENT PROCESSING IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY

There's no doubt about it: COVID-19 has upended nearly every aspect of normal life. For the first time ever, each state has simultaneously declared a state of emergency. Also unemployment rates are at their highest since the Great Depression. Many "non-essential" businesses remain closed, resulting in pay cuts and layoffs.

While law firms can still operate—in fact, there has been a surge in demand for certain types of legal services involving lost jobs, evictions, insurance claims, estate planning, and obtaining government benefits—collecting payments has been an issue for some because of their reliance on paper checks. Some clients are simply not able to access their check books, creating an accounts receivable problem.

For firms that have continued to work through this pandemic, and even for those who have decided to start their own firms during this time, here's a key to keeping your business afloat: Start accepting online payments. Not only will it make your clients happier, but it also ensures that you get paid faster.

Let's take a closer look at why online payment processing is an absolute necessity for your law firm in these uncertain times:

PAPER IS DIRTY

It seems like there is so much we don't know about the coronavirus. Research has shown [how long it lives on surfaces](#) like copper, plastic, and cardboard. But what about paper? It's fairly common knowledge that cash is dirty enough as it is. Some stores that have remained open are even flat-out refusing to accept cash as a form of payment. No one wants to be handling physical payments right now, not even in the form of a mailed check. Think about it: How many people handle your money and your mail before you touch it? Limit your risk of exposure. Go paperless.

YOU'LL SAVE TIME AND GET PAID FASTER

Just think about all the time it takes to print, stuff, stamp, and mail invoices to your clients. Not to mention all the time it could possibly take for your clients to mail back their payments (if at all!) Integrated payment processing combines all of this work into an effortless click of a button. Your clients receive invoices via email and can pay instantly via credit card or eCheck. What once took hours now takes minutes.

Also, clients will pay their invoices sooner if they are given the option to pay online since it's easier and more secure than traditional payment methods such as mailing a check and hoping it arrives. Plus, if you're using an integrated payment processor like Rocket Matter Payments, the funds will hit your account in as few as 12 hours.

YOU CAN OFFER PAYMENT PLANS AND RECURRING BILLING

With the status of today's economic climate, it comes as no surprise that many legal clients may find themselves unable to pay their invoices in full or in a timely manner. Give your clients peace of mind by offering them alternative fee arrangements such as regular payment plans. Set-it-and-forget-it-type recurring billing can also help collect payments because it automatically deducts from your client's credit card or bank account. And the best part? With legal payment processors such as Rocket Matter Payments, you can set up these plans in a matter of minutes. What's not to love?

If you're curious about implementing payment processing in your law firm or if you want to know if you're getting the best deal, our payment processing experts can analyze your current statements for free and see where you can start saving money! [Click here to learn more](#).

CYBERSECURITY FOR THE REMOTE LAW FIRM

You don't want to be the lawyer who loses a laptop or phone full of sensitive information.

Picture what would happen in that scenario: Would you lose any confidential client information? What would the conversations with your clients, partners, or boss be like?

Sure, most of us are stuck at home now during this pandemic. But eventually, as we slowly return to our offices, one of the anticipated side effects of this time of social distancing is a widespread increase in remote work. Some law firms might, for example, give employees the option of working remote certain days of the week since it worked well during this time. However, the more you move around and the more you work remote, the more you need to be aware of new security risks (i.e. ones that don't exist if you're simply planted in your office or in your home.)

The good news is that the rules are simple:

MAKE SURE ALL DEVICES ARE PROTECTED WITH A PASSWORD OR PASSCODE

At a minimum, your phone needs a passcode to access it. Additionally, I recommend setting the screen to lock after a minute or two of inactivity. Likewise, any laptop must be protected with a password and should similarly have a timeout session.

We're not really fans of those Android "drag a pattern with your finger" passcodes. If a malicious actor were to hold your screen up to the light at a certain angle, the path traced over and over again by your finger can be visible.

USE GOOD PASSWORDS

The two most common passwords in America, year in and year out, are "123456" or "password." Every year they jockey for first and second place. Between those two and a user's birth or anniversary date, you have a solid shot of guessing someone's password.

We all get nagged about passwords and are familiar with the basic rules: use upper and lowercase characters, numbers, and punctuation. However, there are ways you can make a password even stronger: For instance, you can have a "base" password that you extend uniquely for each site you visit. For example, perhaps your passwords always start with M@ry4, but for your bank it's M@ry4Bank! and for your email it's M@ry4Email!.

And don't worry about complicated passwords—a password manager like [LastPass] or [1Password] will help you keep track of things.

KEEP YOUR OPERATING SYSTEM UPDATED

The reason Windows, iOS, Mac OS, and Android are constantly nagging you to update your systems is that they've found a vulnerability that bad guys could use to find a way in. As sci-fi as it sounds, these vulnerabilities are often bought and sold on the dark web.

For these reasons, it's absolutely imperative that you update your operating systems as soon as you can. Many of the major ransomware attacks that have been affecting municipalities and other large bureaucracies in recent years are a direct result of those organizations failing to update their systems in time.

USE ENCRYPTION HTTPS OR VPN

If you're using software over the web, make sure you're using a secure connection with HTTPS.

If you're using remote desktop software, such as a copy of Time Matters on a hosted server somewhere (if this is the case you really need to get in touch with Rocket Matter today!), you should only access that software over a VPN connection.

With both HTTPS and VPN, your information is sent back and forth over an encrypted channel, so if someone were to snoop on your network (via a technique called "[packet sniffing](#),") they wouldn't be able to read your data.

YOUR PERSONAL HOTSPOT IS YOUR FRIEND

At our recent Rocket Aid conference, [John Simek, a security expert from Sensei Enterprises](#), strongly suggested against using the public WiFi at a coffee shop or a hotel (that is, when we can actually go to coffee shops and hotels again!)

Instead, he suggests connecting to your phone's own personal hotspot, which essentially turns your phone into a router for your laptop.

It's a great idea. Cellular hotspot data transmission is much more secure than public Wi-Fi. You just don't want other people connecting to your phone, so make sure you password protect the hotspot (see comments about good passwords above).

If you are really paranoid, name your phone something like "hacker" so no one nearby thinks it's a good idea to try to connect to your phone. NOTE: If you are going to use public WiFi, you must take other precautions: namely, an up-to-date operating system and, again, the use of HTTPS or VPN for sensitive information.

CONSIDER A PRIVACY SCREEN

The reality is most digital theft occurs in decidedly unglamorous and mundane ways. It's not what you see in the movies and is more often than not physical in nature.

When working on sensitive information in public (again, when we can do so in the future), I would be just as aware if not more so about people looking at your screen (or eavesdropping on your conversations) than people scanning the WiFi network. Fortunately, you can protect neighbors from snooping on you inexpensively. Devices known as privacy filters prevent your screens from being viewed by anyone other than the person directly in front of it. They cost less than $20.

[This privacy filter](#)for a 15" Macbook Pro clocks in at $19.99 (and is available in multiple sizes.)

KNOW HOW TO AVOID PHISHING SCAMS

"Phishing" is when a perpetrator sends you an email that looks to be legitimate from an institution you trust such as your bank or insurance company. You click a link in the email, go to an imposter site that looks identical to the institution's site, and hand over your username, password, and other authentication information to a bad actor. Those people now have all your login information to that site. Another danger of phishing attacks: The link can take you to a site that infects your computer with malware.

So how do you prevent this? First, make it a rule to never click on links in emails unless you're expecting the email. For instance, if your friend texts you and says, "I'm emailing you the funniest cat video!" then, by all means, open the email.

If you are not expecting the email, however, then type the internet address directly into the address bar of the browser instead of clicking on it. So, if you receive an email from, say, Chase bank, don't click on the link. Do this instead: Type chase.com into your address bar yourself and log in from there. It'll only take a few seconds, but it can protect you from hackers looking to steal all of your financial information (or worse.)

CONCLUSION

Cybersecurity isn't that complicated. Taking just a few steps will ensure that you and your clients can sleep well at night.

MENTAL HEALTH TIPS FOR LAWYERS WORKING REMOTELY

COVID-19 has forced lawyers to work remotely. And, of course, working from home definitely has its advantages: You save time and money by removing your daily commute, have more autonomy over your schedule, and get more done with fewer distractions (most of the time, anyway.) Plus, you can hang out with your pet all day!

There is, however, a darker side to this working arrangement: Working remotely has been known to cause a number of negative psychological effects, including feelings of isolation, stress, and depression. That's why it's imperative to learn how to spot the signs of declining mental health so that you can take steps to get the help that you need.

Here are the most commonly reported issues facing today's remote workers—and how to combat them:

LONELINESS AND ISOLATION

Without a physical office to visit each day, social interaction tends to go out the window. It's difficult to engage in casual water cooler-type chats and sling witty jokes over Slack (they often just don't translate well.)

For those who thrive on social interaction, the feeling of being disconnected from your coworkers (or from any group in general) may cause feelings of loneliness and isolation. These feelings can also be compounded if you live alone.

So how can you overcome this?

One way is to rely more heavily on frequent video communications. While it's quick and easy to converse via text, live video meetings will ultimately be more effective. Just make sure you look presentable.

Not only will you enjoy the visual (albeit virtual) presence of your colleagues, you'll find that it's just easier to communicate when you can see a person's face and read their body language. By physically seeing your team (not just hearing them), it will help foster a sense of trust and help nurture working relationships.

Pro Tip: Try to engage in some conversations that aren't work-related. This can take the place of the metaphorical water cooler discussions that can also help foster working relationships. You do it when you're in the office, so why not do it when you're home? Just do your best to be mindful of your time and your colleagues' time, and know when to end the conversation. This is key to maintaining productivity.

STRESS AND ANXIETY

In a general office setting, it's easy to manage your time. You clock in, clock out, and then head home. But when you work from your house, the line between work and home can begin to blur.

You may pressure yourself into being "always online and available" in order to maintain the appearance that you're staying busy and productive. This can lead to you working more hours that can cut into your family or personal time.

You may also feel guilty about taking much-needed breaks during your workday. This guilt, in addition to the feeling of always needing to appear "on," can become overwhelming, causing stress, anxiety, and mental burnout.

So how can you overcome these feelings?

Create a daily "heading to work" routine for yourself: Wake up at the same time each day, jump in the shower, get dressed, etc. This routine should include clearly-defined work hours to prevent procrastination and over-scheduling. Stick to this schedule as much as possible— no matter how tempting it might be to respond to a client's email at 11 p.m.

It's important to have a dedicated space in your house that is for work only. It could be an entire room, or a specific space within one room, like an office desk or a small corner of your living room. Your couch may be super comfortable, but distractions like watching the news or Netflix may be too tempting to keep you productive. You want an area that you can leave or walk away from when your workday is done to help clearly define your work and personal spaces both physically and mentally.

Also, make sure to take frequent breaks as you would if you were in an office setting. You may want to engage in household chores to help break up the day, like taking out the trash or emptying the dishwasher. If you need a nudge, set alarms on your phone to remind you to step away from your computer or phone. If you can,

try to go for a walk outside and get some fresh air. And don't feel guilty— consider breaks like these to be the at-home equivalent of taking a short walk to a colleague's office or cubicle for a chat.

DEPRESSION

If you're feeling stuck in your at-home working situation or experiencing the stress and anxiety mentioned earlier, it may lead to depression. Of course, it's important to understand the symptoms of depression since it's not just classified as a feeling of "sadness."

According to the Mayo Clinic, depression symptoms can include:

- Angry outbursts, irritability, or frustration (even over small matters)
- Loss of interest or happiness in activities such as sex or hobbies
- Sleep disturbances, including insomnia and sleeping too much
- Tiredness and lack of energy, so even small tasks take extra effort
- Increased cravings for food
- Anxiety, agitation, and restlessness
- Trouble thinking, concentrating, making decisions, and remembering things
- Unexplained physical problems, such as back pain or headaches
- Often wanting to stay at home rather than going out to socialize or do new activities

If you feel that you're suffering from one or a few of these symptoms, first understand that it's okay not to be okay. The good news is, there are things you can do to combat feelings of depression.

What can be done to overcome feelings of depression?

Believe it or not, the simple act of getting dressed in the morning can do wonders for your mental health. It's easy to get excited about the idea of remaining in your

pajamas all day. But while our bodies enjoy the comfort of our jammies, our subconscious minds react to this by shutting down the practical parts of our brains.

Getting dressed to face the day does wonders to help keep you grounded in reality and limits the self-destructive behaviors of working from home. This small act of professionalism forces us into a mode of productivity and pushes us to get things done. Plus, if you work at home with a spouse, children, or other family members, your work attire can be a visual cue to let others know you're "off-limits."

Exercise, whether done in the morning or evening, can also work wonders to combat depression. You'll not only get a rush of happiness-boosting endorphins, but you'll give your brain a chance to recover from daily work issues. Bonus points if you can take your workout outside: Studies have shown that outdoor exercise has been associated with greater feelings of revitalization, increased energy, and decreases in tension, confusion, anger, and depression.

Last but not least, don't be afraid to say "No." It may seem enticing to take on as much work as you can if you're working remotely, but you must remember you're only human and there are only so many hours in the day. Understand your own limitations, respect the work schedule you have set for yourself, and don't go beyond it. Just be sure to be polite and assertive to maintain respect from your clients and colleagues.

IMPORTANT NOTE: If you're struggling with symptoms of depression, please remember there is always help available and you are not alone. If you need to talk, reach out to someone you trust or speak to a doctor. You can even receive online or virtual therapy sessions through certain healthcare providers or through services such as Talkspace. Also, the National Alliance of Mental Illness offers a hotline at 800-950-NAMI. If you're in crisis, text "NAMI" or to 741741. This article also offers many excellent resources for those who might be suffering. You are not alone.
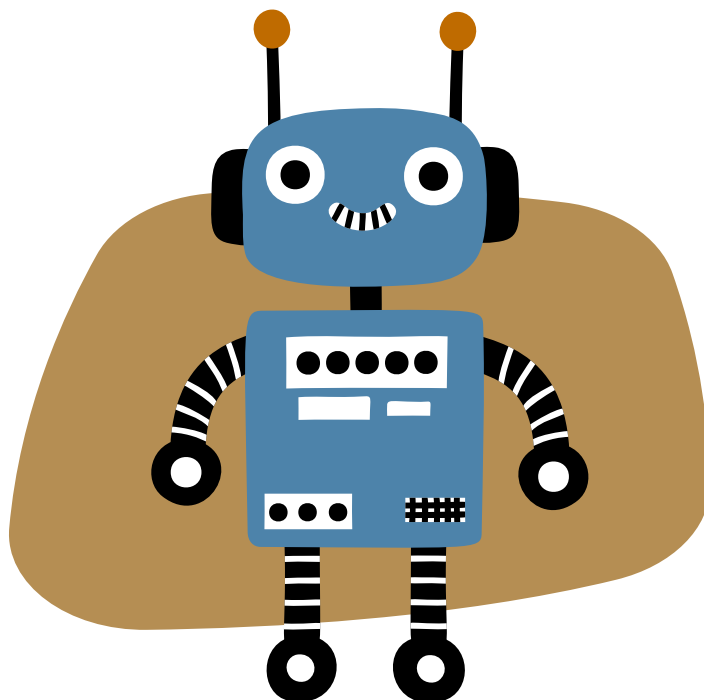
WORKING FROM HOME WITH KIDS: HOW TO HELP THEM SO YOU CAN ACTUALLY GET SOMETHING DONE

By Jodi B. Hammer, M. Ed., founder and director of Educate For Success, a tutoring company whose virtual tutoring provides direct instruction in an interactive platform.

So this is the new normal: The kids are home all day, you are working remotely, and now you are also expected to be a teacher and manage virtual homeschooling. And you thought law school was challenging! While there's no road map for this journey, a little organization will go a long way. In other words, the more prepared your children are during this chaotic time, the easier it will be for you to get your own work done. As the founder of Educate for Success, which now offers tutoring, educational consulting, and test prep remotely, I wanted to offer my top tips on helping your children so that you have plenty of time for your own productivity:

Connect With Your Child's Teacher(s)

They are the captains of the ship, and they can help you and your child navigate these uncharted waters together. The more you understand what's expected of your son or daughter, the better you can help them.

Designate a Specific Workspace

Set up your child's work area with the basics including pens, pencils, highlighters, notebooks, and even a computer. Make sure the space is quiet and provides a desk, table, or other hard surface (and, no, your child's bed doesn't count.) Younger children might particularly enjoy designing the workspace so they have ownership over it.

Develop a Daily Routine

Begin with a wake up time that is consistent every day. Everyone should get dressed and eat breakfast before heading to their respective virtual school or work. Our brains are sharpest in the morning so prioritize the activities requiring more focus. Try to break at the same time for lunch and then make sure your child has a project or something to work on (even just coloring or doing a puzzle) while you continue to work through the afternoon. Instituting quiet time is another great option for the afternoon.

Set Up a Snack Basket

Make sure you have plenty of healthy and nutritious foods on hand such as apples, carrot sticks, yogurt, almonds, etc. Offering healthy options helps kids focus, boosts energy, and provides nutrients for growth and development. Try to stick to specific snack times to avoid your kids eating all day (same goes for you!)

Take Advantage of Online Resources

This pandemic has opened up a world of free resources including access to [concerts and Broadway shows](#), [virtual museum tours](#), [Disney rides](#), so many unique exercise classes, and more. And don't forget videos such as Baby

Einstein for really little ones. Take advantage of these outlets to entertain your children next time you have an important work call that can't be interrupted.

Maximize Outdoor Time

For the most part, the weather around the country is somewhat mild. It is spring after all! So take advantage of the great weather and go for nature walks, hike, bike, or even just toss around a baseball in front of the house. Work such exercise into your daily routine, ideally at the beginning of the day or at the end of it after your workday is complete. It's a great way to connect with family and unwind.

Remember, we're all in this together. Each of us is struggling right now, though our struggles may not be the same. It's important to just do your best and go easy on yourself.

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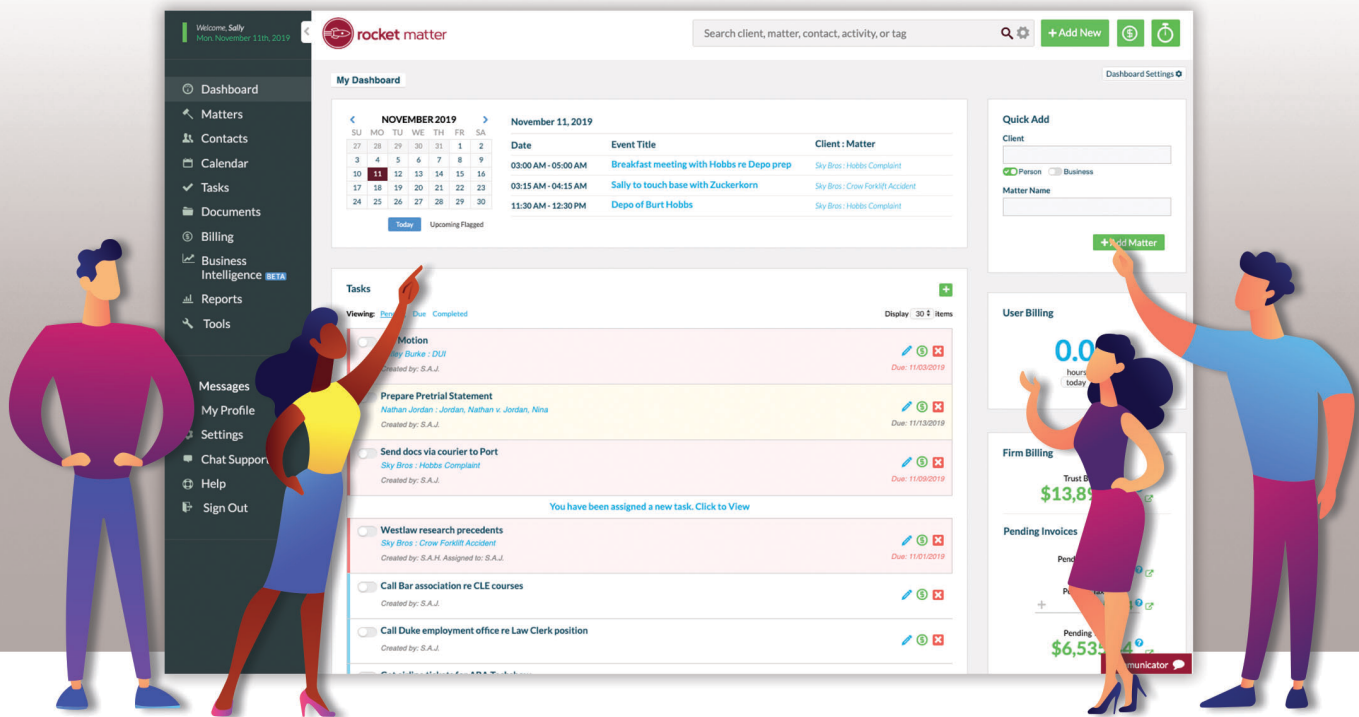
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