The Importance of Legal Docketing for Law Firms Explained

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In many industries, deadlines are flexible and calendaring is an informal process—but not in the legal industry. As legal professionals know, any missed deadline or event could sink a legal matter—not to mention the legal practice that makes the mistake.

This is why legal docketing is top priority for any law firm that wants to succeed and avoid malpractice claims.

Ready to streamline your legal docketing process? Book a demo of Clio Manage's Court Rules feature and automate court deadline reminders with ease!

What is legal docketing?

Legal docketing is the tracking and management of deadlines and events related to legal work. It involves entering key dates, like hearings, filing deadlines, and other events, into a centralized system to ensure that they are not missed. Docketing helps law firms stay organized and compliant with legal deadlines, ultimately supporting the efficient management of cases.

The process of legal docketing has evolved to cater to the more specific needs of different fields of law. For instance, it is most commonly used in both civil and criminal litigation for tracking court appearances, deadlines, and other time constraints.

How does docketing work?

The docketing process at a law firm can involve a variety of key players, including lawyers, paralegals, and other legal support staff, such as legal secretaries.

For any legal matter, firms can also generate deadlines and events based on documents received from the court or opposing counsel. The attorneys themselves can also create deadlines and events through their own actions, such as setting a deposition or sending written discovery.

What is a legal docketing system?

A legal docketing system is the law firm's system for organization and management of deadlines and calendar items in legal proceedings. The docketing system will partly be based on the firm's internal processes for handling these tasks. In addition, software has become essential for legal docketing and, in fact, might be the central component of the overall system.

Why legal docketing is essential for law firms

Legal docketing is essential for reducing the chance of missed deadlines and other errors, which also helps reduce the risk of malpractice claims. It can also help increase productivity, since legal professionals can spend more time and energy on legal work instead of scheduling and calendaring.

A good docketing system can also enhance collaboration and communication within the firm's legal team, as well as organization and time management.

Key elements of legal docketing

While calendaring may be the first thing that comes to mind with legal docketing, an effective docketing system has other key elements.

Calendar and deadline management

Legal docketing includes scheduling and tracking the numerous deadlines that arise in legal matters. In fact, the right docketing software will calculate deadlines based on the type of case and applicable jurisdiction. Just as importantly, the platform can adjust deadlines based on a change of status, such as a trial date being moved.

Court rules and statutory compliance

To accurately calculate deadlines, docketing software must also incorporate the applicable statutes and court rules. This can save an immense amount of time for busy legal professionals while minimizing the chance of mistakes.

Reminders and alerts

While it is important to have all court dates and deadlines calendared, a busy law firm will have a difficult time tracking dates and deadlines for numerous legal matters. Here, alerts and reminders can help ensure tasks are completed and deadlines met without the need for constant calendar checking.

Case management

A centralized docketing system also enhances case management by providing a hub to view all deadlines and calendar items for each case. The docketing software should also allow for swift navigation between different cases.

What are some common challenges in legal docketing?

In the realm of legal docketing, the most common hurdles legal professionals need to navigate are:

- **Complexity and variability:** Legal docketing has evolved into a labyrinth of complexities and variations, spurred on by the ever-expanding landscape of prosecution options and the emergence of new post-grant review avenues.
- **Deadline management:** The push to cut costs brings the peril of missed critical deadlines and overlooked key opportunities. This underscores the critical need for steadfast docketing practices.
- **High-volume dockets:** Managing high-volume cases poses its own set of obstacles, with recurring factual and legal intricacies in the pleadings. Attorneys representing plaintiffs in numerous similar cases face the challenge of keeping everything on track.

With the advent of modern legal software, the greatest docketing mistake may simply be the failure to use these tech tools. Docketing software can automate calendaring while providing alerts and reminders to ensure legal professionals do not overlook any court dates or deadlines.

By re-calculating deadlines when necessary, the right software can ease the burden on legal professionals while minimizing or eliminating calamitous mistakes.

Types of legal docketing

While there are overlaps between the different methods of legal docketing, the various forms of docketing can be divided into several main categories.

Manual docketing

Manual docketing involves the manual calculation and entry of events and deadlines. While manual docketing has traditionally been done on paper calendars, now it is more likely to be performed with digital calendars. Nonetheless, if your firm is entering these dates one by one onto an Outlook calendar or other digital platform, you are still engaged in manual docketing.

Calendaring software

The use of legal calendaring software is a step up from manual calendaring. This software can automate calendar-related tasks, including reminders and updates for any event changes. The right calendaring tool can also centralize all events and deadlines in one calendar, so the firm ensures the entire legal team is coordinating effectively and avoiding double booking.

Automated docketing software

The most comprehensive solution to a firm's docketing woes is automated docketing software. The best software in this category can handle tasks beyond calendaring, such as document management, task management, and even court filings. For this reason, automated docketing solutions often work best when they integrate with a firm's practice management software.

Automate legal docketing and key processes with one solution

Efficient legal docketing is an absolute must for any law firm that wants to provide top-notch legal services and avoid malpractice suits. Assess your law firm docketing processes to ensure your practice is performing at its best. If you find any shortfalls in your docketing, research the right legal docketing software for your firm's needs.

Clio is a comprehensive solution for legal practices that will handle your firm's legal docketing needs and much more. Not only will you be able to manage your legal calendar based on up-to-date court rules, the platform also includes functions for document

management, task management, and even electronic court filing. Legal timekeeping and billing are additional features that streamline your firm. Want to go the extra mile and add AI capabilities for task management? Clio Manage can serve your practice well.

Be sure to use the latest technology to ensure your law firm's docketing practices meet the needs of you and your clients. Book a live demo of Clio Manage to see how this legal practice management software can handle your legal docketing and so much more.

Frequently asked questions

What is legal calendaring?

Legal calendaring involves calendaring of events and deadlines associated with a legal matter. Unlike legal docketing, legal calendaring does not necessarily include task management, reminders, or any other function that ensures the calendared items are completed or complied with.

What types of deadlines are tracked in a legal docketing system?

Any type of legal deadline can be tracked in a legal docketing system, such as filing deadlines. A docketing system can also provide reminders to complete critical tasks, even if such tasks do not have court-imposed deadlines. The Court Rules feature of Clio's legal calendaring system allows a legal professional to automatically create events and deadlines based on the rules of hundreds of different U.S. courts.

Can QuickBooks perform legal docketing?

While QuickBooks provides many useful functions for law firms, including time tracking, vendor management, and accounting, it does not include legal docketing functions. Clio Manage, with its Court Rules function, will provide superior service in this area.

How can I improve my law firm's docketing process?

If your firm is relying on manual docketing, look to upgrade to digital solutions, such as calendaring software at the minimum. You may also opt for more comprehensive docketing software with automated functions.

What tools are recommended for legal docketing?

The best tools for legal docketing are calendaring software or automated docketing software, with more specialized tools available for IP docketing.

About Clio

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