

Case Study

How Alternis IT Brought a Law Firm into the 21st Century

From managing private client information to vouchsafing their own internal practices, law firms face various IT challenges that can either make or break their company.

This equation includes the choices made regarding a law firm's IT solutions. Some IT companies will address the symptoms of a problem but not the cause. This "patch" approach is the hallmark of companies that aren't considering their clients' future needs, let alone their longevity.

We offer an alternative. Our solutions are designed to align with a firm's growth and goals — today, tomorrow, and into the future. Some IT companies survive by providing inexpensive "fixes" to problems that merely mask larger problems, which will cost your business much more in the long run. You may lose revenue due to downtime of your systems, or worse, your customers may turn to competitors with superior technology.

Like good attorneys, Alternis IT proactively keeps abreast of changes in legislation, evolutions in the marketplace, and newly discovered vulnerabilities that could affect the interests of our clients. As thought leaders in our industry, we consider it our duty to you to know both what's *now* and what's *next* for you and your business.

The Challenge

In the case of a recent client, these issues were compounded by the fact that the firm specialized in personal injury cases. The firm had to secure legal records and had the added responsibility of managing their clients' medical records. This is a daunting prospect for any business, let alone one entrusted with the safe management of confidential documents. If the firm lost the documents, they would lose more than the heart of their business. They would also lose the trust of their clients. Neither would be recoverable.

Complicating their issues was a server and file management system that had grown increasingly glitchy. The reason wasn't a mystery — their server was 15 years old, which is essentially Jurassic-era technology in the IT world. Moreover, it was running an antiquated operating system that had been discontinued by Microsoft years ago. The server was on a one-way road to failure. All of the company data was on that server. There was a sole backup they hoped they would never have to use, but each day brought that inevitability closer. Catastrophic failure was looming.

Another issue was looming—how the network was arranged for the nine-person team was rife with cyberattack vulnerabilities. With the uptick in ransomware and similar attacks, the law firm was a target on many levels.

This is not an atypical situation for law firms — information technology is not their business. Hence, many have a “set it and forget it” approach to their systems.

This client, however, decided to be proactive. A few glitches made them consider the possibility that the entire system would eventually fail, leaving their team unable to work and clients in a difficult position. It was high time to take action — what Alternis IT founder Art Katch calls the “last breath scenario.”

To keep the law firm from experiencing an IT crisis, the team visited their offices to assess their systems and particular configurations on-site. It’s as much a forensic process as it is technological. Likewise, the team queried the firm on its internal business processes and projections for the future.

“I have to know what their processes are — where they’re coming from and where they’re going,” explained Katch, who also conducted phone follow-ups to get a complete picture of how the firm operated. “I need to know what’s important to the client so we can put structures around how to accomplish those goals.”

In the law firm’s case, the fundamental aspects of their network and IT security needed help. As importantly, how could Alternis IT guide the firm toward decisions that would positively impact their business today and in the future?

The Solution

Perhaps the obvious solution would be to simply replace the original server, but Katch recommended against it. In-house servers came from an older model of doing business. Katch had learned that the attorneys in the firm often needed to access documents while on the road or working remotely. The team had grown frustrated with the firm’s old VPN, which functioned at a glacial pace and, worse, needed more security. To that end, the firm required industrial-level encryption. The solution quickly became evident for the Alternis IT team — the firm should implement a cloud-based system.

“We knew that in this case, replacing one server with another would ultimately just be limiting,” said Katch. “A new server would still be subject to the same inherent issues as the old. What would happen if *that* server went down? It was still too risky.”

Instead, the team designed an elegant, future-proof solution that was also redundant and never goes down. They leveraged the 99.97% uptime and ease of Dropbox for Business to create a system that was also secure enough to manage legal and medical records.

Though it was an elegant solution, it still meant that 15 years of the firm’s confidential client and business data would have to be migrated to the cloud. Adding to the problem was that the system was so old that early attempts to collect data through conventional means repeatedly failed. The team decided to physically remove the server’s hard drive, carefully extract the information, and transport it to another system so that it could be later implemented in Dropbox. The process was painstaking but necessary.

“They’re paying us to do the job right,” said Katch, who confirmed that all 15 years of the firm’s data had successfully been transferred — down to the last kilobyte. As Katch said, “We’re very thorough.”

The Result

With the new systems in place, the firm went through a period of transition as the team acclimated to the relative simplicity of the new interface. They were astonished that “Everything just worked!” The new technology eventually proved so fluid and second nature that the team was often lost in their work rather than grappling with the frequent tech irritations to which they had grown accustomed. At any point, the team was only a few taps on an iPad away from their documents. Productivity soared.

“This is a metric that a lot of companies don’t recognize until they get their new technology and see the ancillary benefits to their business in terms of how employees spend their time and what they can — and even enjoy — accomplishing when they’re alleviated from annoying tech problems that drain time and morale,” Katch observed, adding that the firm’s clients also benefit from the new system since the work is more efficient and their confidential information is safer.

Ultimately, the Alternis IT team takes pride that their client is satisfied and that the solution is operating as it should, which is to say, invisibly.

“That’s one of the ways that I know that companies are happy with their new technology — they forget about it,” said Katch. “That’s a good sign.”

From the Client

"Art Katch of Alternis IT helped us design an amazing system that allows my staff and me to be much more productive than we were with our prior setup. Art took the time to understand how my law office functions to recommend a plan that would allow us to work more efficiently. He established a system for us that allows me to work remotely and access my information from basically anywhere. Along the way, Art was patient with me (as I am not very tech-savvy) and ensured I understood how the new system would work. I highly recommend that others use Art and Alternis IT for their networking and all other IT service needs. We were very satisfied with not only the final product but the high-quality service that Art provided."

— Manuel Reynoso
Law Offices of Manuel Reynoso