

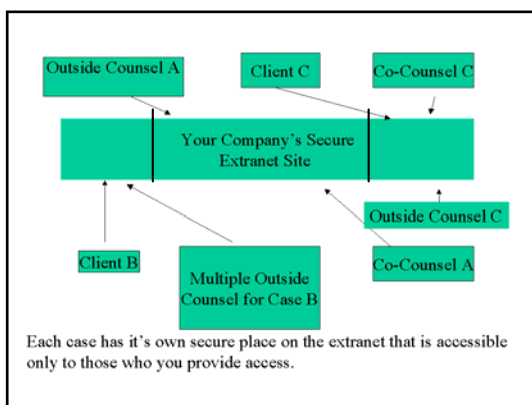
Extranets: How Lawyers Can Maximize The Internet

By Gayle R. Absi

Let's take a look at how an in-house lawyer can efficiently manage outside counsel and cases with a web browser.

Electronic Communication Tools

Today people are conducting more of their business, whether it is personal or professional, on-line. E-commerce is all the rage. People want their service providers to make it easier for them. How can lawyers leverage that interactivity on-line? **Extranets** allow in-house counsel to extend the interactivity outside their department and company to those who need to access company information. An extranet is similar to an Intranet but it provides secure access to people outside the organization. Users access the Extranet via their web browser. Therefore users, regardless of physical location, have access to case information.



Benefits of an Extranet Site

Knowledge Management. Extranets offer lawyers the ability to manage information and share it effectively. Improved productivity, reduction in duplicate work and simplified computer usage are benefits of effective knowledge management. Many companies suffer from a loss of "institutional memory" today. Implementing electronic tools to effectively manage the data can significantly reduce this phenomenon.

Document Sharing. An extranet is a secure place, where members can post documents to be reviewed or edited by others. This posting system also provides better control of comments made by reviewers and eliminates sending sensitive documents via email. Further, this process can significantly reduce the need to fax or (overnight) mail documents. In addition to sharability, using an extranet also provides users with information on the document status. Many

extranets provide links to Document Management products that aid in their usability. Most services also provide notifications to users in their regular e-mail account (a new document is posted, changes are made etc.).

Shared Calendar. This feature provides a shared electronic calendar that is case specific. Conference calls, meetings, depositions, and court appearances can be recorded once and available to all parties with access. E-mail notifications are sent to users when events are added to the calendar. This feature reduces or eliminates miscommunications on events.

Question Posting/Bulletin Board. This provides attorneys and clients with a secure place to broadcast information out to all participants and to allow all participants the benefit of the response. This can be particularly useful where factual or specific case related items are available for all members of the team. Rather than each person saving many email messages in a folder with the case title, all information is stored, shared and organized in a way specifically related to the matter. This can preserve institutional memory, reduce duplicate work process and improve communications.

Types of Extranet Sites

Extranet sites can be **custom designed** in-house or by third party vendors, purchased as a **turn key product** (off the shelf) with desired features, or **purchased as a customizable product** that is managed by a third party. When an organization hosts an extranet site at their own location, designers concern themselves with security and accessibility to ensure that the integrity of the internal firm's computing environment is maintained. When providing an extranet site from a third party vendor, secured access to your organization's computing environment is not a concern because the extranet is physically located elsewhere. In all cases, extranets offer secure environments on the web today.

If your company is looking to improve the way it manages its matters, reduce outside counsel costs and streamline communications consider maximizing the Internet. The use of an Extranet can help **Manage the Knowledge, Improve Communication, and Reduce Costs.**

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