Legal Calendaring Software
Cost Justification and Benefit Analysis

A cost/benefit analysis regarding the implementation of a professional
legal calendaring solution in a law firm.

For many law firms, a standard firm-wide approach to calendaring, docketing and task management remains unchartered territory. For the most part, calendaring remains the responsibility of individual attorneys or practice groups.

This is in contrast to other key areas of practice management like Time & Billing, Document Management and Litigation Support - all of which are more standardized and centrally administered. What makes firm-wide calendar management different?

Legal professionals and the IT professionals who support them often say that Microsoft Outlook makes calendaring so easy that there is no need to incur the expense of a legal calendar solution. Many attorneys simply rely on Outlook. (If you need more convincing that attorneys like Outlook, refer to the ILTA 2015 Technology Survey[1] in which 22% of firms polled say they use Outlook for docketing/rule-based calendaring and another 18% say they don't have any docketing/rule-based calendaring system at all, which most likely means they depend on Outlook calendars.)

The Outlook explanation seems reasonable, but is short-sighted when you consider the scheduling challenges and risks that are unique to the legal industry. When it comes to scheduling a single calendar appointment or task, Outlook certainly is convenient. But how effective is Outlook when you must schedule multiple events, each with multiple recipients and multiple reminders? Can Outlook simplify reporting, improve collaboration and reduce the risk of errors in scheduling?

The limitations of Outlook calendars are a concern. Still, Outlook is an indispensable productivity tool that many attorneys don't want to do without and needs to be an integrated part of a larger calendaring solution. Keep this in mind as you evaluate your options, some of which include Outlook calendar integration.

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[1] International Legal Technology Association's 2015 Tech Survey:
http://iltanet.org/MainMenuCategory/Publications/WhitePapersandSurveys/2015-Technology-Survey.html

Time Cost of Schedule-Related Data entry

In performing a cost/benefit analysis for legal calendaring software, it is important to consider all aspects of the calendar management process. A good starting point for the analysis is the data entry process, the *amount of time it takes to schedule a series of related dates*.

The key questions are 1)How much time is required to schedule multiple related activities and reminders using native Microsoft Outlook? and 2)How much time can be saved when entering the same activities and reminders using a professional legal calendar solution?

Shown here are two typical scheduling examples, both requiring the entry of 12 items, including appointments and reminders.

Example 1-Litigation: Deposition and related dates			Example 2- Corporate: Shareholders' Meeting and related dates		
Activity or Task	Offset Formula	Reminders	Activity or Task	Offset Formula	Reminders
Deposition		-1d, -3d, -10d	Shareholders' Mtg		-1w, -1m, -3m
Filing Deadline	-14d	-7d, -2d	Annual Minutes due	+10	-3d
Call Court Reporter	-7d	-1d	Annual Report	-30	-1d
Schedule Conference Room	-7d	-1d	Schedule Conference Room	-3	-1d
Conference call	+15d	-3d	Send Letter	-60	

These two examples were used for a timed data entry test comparing native Outlook with a comprehensive legal calendaring application. The legal calendar application was tested twice, once without using scheduling templates and the second time with scheduling templates. (Note: For this analysis, sample scheduling was completed by a BEC Legal Systems application specialist using BEC Docket Enterprise.[2])

Scheduling Results

As the chart below illustrates, data entry with a calendaring application is considerably faster than with native Outlook, and becomes even more efficient when a scheduling template is used.

Time spent entering a series of 12 activities and reminders:	
Microsoft Outlook (native)	12 minutes
Legal calendar application, no template	3 minutes
Legal calendar application, with template	1 ½ minutes

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[2] BEC Docket Enterprise™ is a complete solution for legal calendaring/docketing for all types of practice groups. It is one component of the BEC CoreRelate® Framework, a modular suite which relies on a SQL database and also includes matter management and document automation applications.

Assuming a similar type of calendar entry must be completed many times each year, the time savings is significant. The following chart assumes an attorney has 100 such matter-related series of dates (approximately two per week) on her calendar each year.

Time spent entering many calendar series of 12 or more annually:			
	Time Spent	**Entries per year**	**Time per person, each year**
Microsoft Outlook (native)	12 minutes	100	1200 minutes (20 hours)
Legal calendar application, no template	3 minutes	100	300 minutes (5 hours)
Legal calendar application, with template	1 ½ minutes	100	150 minutes (2.5 hours)

For reporting and risk management purposes, attorneys track important dates in their own calendars *and also in a second location* such as a group calendar in Outlook, a case information sheet in Word, or a list in the paper file. Because a comprehensive legal calendar solution is supported by a database and likely includes auditing and reporting tools, it should eliminate the need for redundant entry, making the time savings even more pronounced. The final chart illustrates the time savings when a legal calendaring application eliminates the need for a redundant entry.

Time spent entering many calendar series of 12 or more annually, with duplicate entry:					
	Time Spent	**Time to duplicate**	**Total time spent scheduling**	**Entries per year**	**Time per person, each year**
Microsoft Outlook (native)	12 minutes	12 minutes	24 minutes	100	2400 minutes (40 hours)
Legal calendar application, no template	3 minutes	None	3 minutes	100	300 minutes (5 hours)
Legal calendar application, w/ template	1 ½ minutes	None	1 ½ minutes	100	150 minutes (2.5 hours)

When evaluating the time savings involved in scheduling <u>on a per person per year basis</u>, it is clear that a legal-specific calendaring/docketing solution will easily pay for itself over time.

How do Date Changes factor into the analysis?

Inevitably, dates change and calendars must be updated. In many cases, changing one date requires re-scheduling others too. This is especially true in a legal environment.

A legal calendaring solution is able to link related activities, tasks and reminders; when one activity's date is changed, postponed or cancelled, its dependents' dates are updated accordingly. (This is based on the original date offset and can be handled automatically or with a prompt for user approval.) Outlook is simply not designed to do this.

This leads to two more questions: 1) How much time is needed to *re-schedule* the same series of dates in Outlook? and 2) How much time can be saved when using a legal calendar solution to automatically and *accurately* shift dates?

In Outlook, the original twelve calendar items have to be individually located and re-scheduled. **(There is no mechanism in Outlook to locate and update related dates with a single search.)** This often takes more time than the original scheduling, not to mention that the process is prone to mistakes.

Using a legal calendar solution, all the related dates can be located with a single search. Following that, the rescheduling task would require updating the date on one activity and allowing the automation to move related dates accordingly. Quick and accurate!

As an activity date is changed, a user option to move dependent dates by the same date offset. Shown in BEC Docket Enterprise.™

This chart, which estimates the time needed to re-schedule a series of dates, is probably skewed in Outlook's favor:

Time spent RE-SCHEDULING a series of 12 activities and reminders:	
Microsoft Outlook (native)	More than 12 minutes
Legal calendar application	Less than 2 minutes

Even if re-scheduling is only necessary 20% of the time, it should be factored into your financial analysis.

Other Important Considerations

While the time savings from improved data entry is certainly a major benefit of any professional legal calendaring application, and justifies the financial investment on its own, other factors might be even more compelling, particularly from an attorney's perspective.

Consider the improved efficiency which might be gained from features which are part of many calendaring/docketing applications (and look for these features when evaluating solutions):

Legal Calendar/Docket Application Advantages
✓ **Legal Specific features**   Legal calendaring is unique and requires legal-specific functionality. Look for integration with an electronic matter file, centralized workgroup calendars, scheduling templates, date offset calculation, optional court rules, distribution management and document management integration.
✓ **Access to Information/Reports/Audits**   Assuming an efficient database structure, a calendaring application will provide easy access to schedule information per matter, per client, per attorney, per practice group (and perhaps more.) In addition, built-in reporting and easy-to-access audit history should be part of the package.
✓ **Automatic Email Notifications and Reminders**   Schedule summaries and reminders must be dependable and easy to set during scheduling.
✓ **Recipient Management**   Shifts in case load among personnel should be easy to handle. Good recipient management will let you add a new attorney to all previously scheduled matter activities at once. When someone is unexpectedly out of the office, the central calendar should be sortable by user to quickly show what activities and tasks needs to be covered.
✓ **Risk Management**   A legal calendaring application offers protection in various ways: First, calendar items should be in a secure database, subject to audit. (Have you ever thought about how easy it is to accidentally delete an Outlook appointment – how it is gone without a trace?) Also, a legal calendar application should provide a scheduling workflow which ensures scheduling details are not overlooked. This, in turn, provides matter security, by sending calendar details to appropriate matter recipients only.
✓ **Outlook Integration**   Since we know attorneys rely on Outlook, solid Outlook integration leads to a smooth implementation and quick user acceptance of a legal calendar application, which might be the most important consideration of all. Look for access to the legal calendar application from the Outlook ribbon, the ability to schedule to the legal calendar application directly from the Outlook calendar, and synchronization of calendar application activities to Outlook.

Conclusion:

While your financial investment will be recouped in data entry efficiency and accuracy, a professional legal calendaring solution also provides a wide range of advantages including improved collaboration and workflow, risk management benefits, and improved access to matter information.