

Red Paper

The PCLaw[®] Annual Maintenance Plan:
**Maximizing Your Firm's Investment
in Its Business Software**

By Chris Young

Some maintenance programs are crucial in order for a law firm to maximize the value of its software investment. The PCLaw AMP is one such plan.

“A lot of Canadian law firms are resistant to change when it comes to technology, so many of them still use dated hardware and software,” said Chris Young, a Certified Independent Consultant and principal of TTLC Consulting Ltd. “As these firms move to take advantage of newer technologies, they often need to make significant new investments in both computer systems and software applications.”

Young works with Canadian law firms of all sizes and in all provinces, as well as with firms in the United States, and he has observed an all-too-familiar pattern. Many law firms neglect their “time, billing and accounting” business software systems because they tend to view finance issues very differently than how they view issues related to the practice of law. The truth is that most law firms want to have the minimum amount of involvement in back-office matters – including the software systems needed to efficiently run the business operations of the firm.

About PCLaw

PCLaw software is an all-in-one solution for the business operations of a law firm, including matter, billing and accounting management. The product was developed with a focus on taking the headaches out of running the business of law by creating software that enables firms to easily manage matter information; track time, expenses, calendar appointments and tasks; bill and collect payments from clients; pay vendors; reconcile bank statements; and manage trust accounts – all from a single source.

Some of the key PCLaw features include the following:

- **Contact and Client Management** – PCLaw helps law firms centrally manage relationships with clients, other parties involved in a matter, prospective clients and vendors.
- **Case and Matter Management** – The software allows firms to organize and store all information important to a case or matter, including deadlines, events, documents, emails, phone calls, notes, contacts, to-do lists, billing and payments.
- **Multiple Time-Tracking Options** – PCLaw allows billable staff to track time the way they want to, by creating entries using a traditional time sheet through PCLaw, directly within Microsoft® Office, or by using the PCLaw® Mobility service from their web-enabled mobile devices or smartphones.
- **Billing** – PCLaw supports flat-fee, task-based, split, contingency, retainer and electronic bills, and also delivers the flexibility to customize bill appearance, detail, wording, frequency and use of retainers and trust funds.
- **Accounting and Trust** – The software takes the anxiety out of fulfilling trust accounting requirements by offering easy-to-use tools to manage a firm’s disbursements and receipts for clients and trust accounts.
- **Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable and Banking** – Integrated accounts payable and banking capabilities in PCLaw help a law firm eliminate the headache of managing vendor payments, including the ability to write and print cheques from trust or general bank accounts, while PCLaw bank reconciliation tools keep all of the firm’s accounts in balance.

PCLaw software also provides support for a law firm’s payroll requirements (in partnership with ADP), credit card processing (in partnership with Payment Processing Inc. (PPI)), billing and accounting reporting, mobile access, integrations with other practice management software and data conversion.

Designed specifically for small and mid-sized law firms, PCLaw is the most widely used legal billing and accounting system in North America and is trusted by more than 30,000 customers worldwide, including more than 9,000 loyal customers in Canada. The comprehensive collection of powerful yet easy-to-use tools – all in one integrated package – helps keep a law firm financially organized and fiscally healthy.

The PCLaw Annual Maintenance Plan (AMP)

Customers who purchase the AMP are provided with up-to-date software, the latest features and functionality, and direct access to the high-quality, reliable support to ensure their software is operating smoothly.

The initial purchase of the software includes the first year's AMP. After a law firm's first year as a PCLaw customer, LexisNexis offers the firm the opportunity to subscribe to the PCLaw AMP on an annual basis.

According to Young, the PCLaw AMP consists of several valuable benefits:

1. Live Technical Support

LexisNexis provides the service of world-class technical specialists Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET (excluding holidays), to resolve issues quickly.

“This benefit by itself is worth the cost of subscribing to the AMP because it helps ensure PCLaw users can get a product expert on the phone with them in a timely fashion so they can troubleshoot an issue immediately and get to work on a solution,” said Young. “In a profession that revolves around so many time-sensitive requirements, this is critical support for PCLaw users to have available to them.”

2. Access to Latest Version of Software

AMP subscribers also have automatic access to both major and minor PCLaw software upgrades. This allows those customers to take advantage of the newest product features and enhancements to improve client service, shrink billing cycles and maintain compliance with trust accounting requirements.

“Having real-time access to the most current version of PCLaw is more important than many law firms realize,” explained Young. “For example, recent taxation rules and regulation changes in British Columbia and Ontario forced a quick update to the software. Other Law Society changes, such as the ‘Client ID and Verification’ regulation as well as the electronic audit functionality for Alberta, were also the subject of speedy updates to PCLaw.”

3. Mobile Support

The PCLaw Mobility service (available only for users of PCLaw 11, the latest version of the software) provides secure access to critical matter information, time and expense entry, and contacts from web-enabled mobile devices, such as the Apple® iPad® and iPhone®, BlackBerry®, and various Google™ Android™ devices.

“Subscribers to the AMP will really enjoy the new PCLaw Mobility service, which LexisNexis has developed to ensure that law firms are able to easily capture all of their billable time and expenses while away from the office,” said Young. “It also allows lawyers to access critical matter information on the go, which makes them more productive.”

4. Online Resources and FAQ for Upgrades

The online documentation available to AMP subscribers is a crucial resource for firms to have the capability of dealing with the wide range of technical issues that arise any time they attempt to upgrade computers or network components. The online resource includes access to a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) library, which is especially useful.

5. Web-Based Training

AMP subscribers receive special pricing on PCLaw web-based training sessions. These are live, instructor-based sessions tailored to specific PCLaw functions and areas to better meet the user's needs and schedule. These web-based sessions can be joined from anywhere if the user has an Internet connection and access to a telephone.

Maximizing Your Investment

The value of software maintenance plans has been difficult to define over the years. Indeed, a recent intensified focus on improving the reliability of software products across the technology industry has put maintenance under an unfamiliar spotlight: if this product is so great, then why does one need to pay annual maintenance fees?

The truth is that some maintenance programs are crucial in order for a law firm to maximize the value of its software investment. The PCLaw AMP is one such plan.

“My clients frequently ask me whether their firm should continue to renew their subscription for the PCLaw AMP when it approaches expiration every year,” said Young. “My answer is always an unqualified ‘Yes.’ Any law firm that wants to make the most of their investment in PCLaw should absolutely continue on as an AMP subscriber.”

To learn more about PCLaw software and the AMP, visit www.lexisnexis.ca/pclaw or call 1-800-328-2898.

About Chris Young

Chris Young has more than 13 years' experience with PCLaw billing and accounting software. He has extensive software training experience, from curriculum design to implementation, and uses his expertise and in-depth product knowledge to consult, support and implement PCLaw software into law firms. For more information about TTLC Consulting, please go to www.ttlcconsulting.ca. To search for a LexisNexis certified solution provider in your area, visit <http://law.lexisnexis.com/spn/findcic>.

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