
THE PRACTICE MANAGER

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The Technology Roundup

Gerry Morris, J.D.

Remote Connections to Your Office Computer



This month's column draws upon some topics I've covered in previous months to address a specific situation. My good friend Debra Bruce, whose column runs along side this one in the Law Practice Management Newsletter, asked me how she could configure her home office network so that an associate at another location could access Debra's desktop

computer over the Internet not only to share files but to actually run programs. The ability to access an office computer over the Internet from a remote computer outside the office is extremely useful. I connect with my office desktop computer from my home computer just about every day. Although this can be accomplished through a fairly complicated VPN (virtual private network) setup like I've described in my previous columns it can be done with a fairly simple VPN setup for the

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The Coach's Corner

Debra Bruce, J.D.

Growing Your Firm Virtually



The Internet and a myriad of other technological advances have literally changed the face of the practice of law. In fact, sometimes we don't even see the faces of our client, the lawyer on the other side, or some of the co-workers in our own firm. While these developments have allowed the mega-firms to go global, they have also created competitive opportunities for small and medium-sized firms.

Without endorsing any particular service or resource, we'll share some information about a few virtual resources that smaller firms use to increase their flexibility and stay competitive.

In a companion column in this issue of *The Practice Manager*, Gerry Morris explains how a small firm can use technology to permit workers to contribute from home or other remote locations without additional expense if you have Windows XP Professional. If the method he describes will not work for your office, or you need remote access from anywhere, subscription services such as *Go to My PC* and *Log Me In* provide that capability for a monthly fee. In this column we'll take a look at other benefits and resources to consider as you decide whether to grow your firm virtually.

Why would your firm want to engage virtual or remote workers?

- To expand capacity without having to move offices or increase office rent
- To add contract lawyers or support staff without adding the cost of health insurance, workers comp, vacation and sick pay, furniture and equipment and other employee costs
- To benefit from experience and expertise that may be difficult to obtain locally in a small city
- To retain a talented worker moving to another city to accommodate a spouse's career
- To better serve an important client with facilities in multiple cities

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astonishing cost of nothing assuming the computer to be accessed is connected to a high speed always on Internet connection such as Roadrunner cable or SBC Yahoo DSL. Also, the computer at your office that you want to allow a remote user to access must be running Windows XP Professional. XP Home Edition doesn't have the components necessary to set up the type of connection I'm about to describe. The remote computer can be running Windows XP Home Edition or Professional.

I'm going to provide step by step setup instructions but I'm going to refer the reader to some of my previous columns for more detailed information on some of the steps where I've covered them before. That way I can stay within my column length limitations. You can see the links to all the previous newsletters at:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/LMNewsletters.asp>.

Step One. Subscribe to a Dynamic IP DNS Service.

Chances are your Internet provider assigns you a dynamic IP address. That means that the unique address on the Internet of your cable or DSL modem changes every so often. In order to find your network system on the Internet an outsider would have to know your current IP address. IP addresses for web sites are associated with alpha numerical names. To find the Microsoft web site, for instance, you type www.microsoft.com into your browser rather than <http://207.46.20.60>. Either will get you to Microsoft's web site but www.microsoft.com is easier to remember. Something called a DNS server contains a table that relates the alphanumeric web address to the numeric IP address. There are services that will relate a dynamic IP address to an alphanumeric address by utilizing a piece of software installed on your computer that transmits about every 10 minutes your current IP address to a DNS server where the new IP address is "mapped" to the alphanumeric name you've selected for your computer. The software should be installed on the computer that you want to access from outside your home or office. See my April 2005 column for a more detailed explanation of dynamic DNS services. You'll also find a discussion of a couple of specific dynamic DNS services including www.dyndns.org which is absolutely free. When you get to the Dyndns.org web page click the "Services" link and then "Dynamic DNS." On that page you'll find a "How to" document that will explain how to set up the service. You will need to download and install one of the third party clients that automatically send the current IP address to the Dyndns.org DNS server.

Step Two. Configure the Desktop Computer to be Accessed Static IP Address.

If the computer you want to access from outside the office is connected to the cable or DSL modem and not a router you can skip this step. If there is more than one computer sharing the Internet connection via a router the computer that you want to access from outside has to be given a static IP address so it can be found "behind" the router. This is a different IP address than the one discussed above. That one is the Internet address

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of your cable or DSL modem. The one assigned to your desktop computer identifies it uniquely on your local network. Your network is probably configured so that each computer connected to the router gets a dynamic IP address from the router. However, you can assign a computer a specific IP address as long as it is within the range that would ordinarily be assigned by the router. Here's a simple way to figure out what IP address to assign your computer. Click the "Start" button and then click "Run." When the dialogue box appears, type in "cmd" without the quotes. Then click OK. A "DOS window" with a command prompt will appear. At the prompt, type "ipconfig" without the quotes and hit Enter. You'll see three IP addresses appear. The one that is designated "IP address" is the current IP address of your compute that has been assigned by the router. Write it down. Also write down the "Subnet Mask" and the "Default Gateway" IP addresses. Close the window.

Next, click the "Start" button again. Click "My Network Places" and when the window appears, choose the "View Network Connections" link on the left side. (If you don't see "My Network Places" click "Control Panel" and click the "Network Connections" icon. You'll see the same information described below.) Another window will open with icons visible. Right-click the icon that is labeled something like "Local Area Connection" and choose "Properties" from the drop-down menu. When the Properties box appears click on Internet Protocol (TCP/IP) to highlight it. Then click the "Properties" button. Finally, you'll be presented with a box that has something to do with IP addresses. Click on the button labeled "Use the Following IP address." Type in the addresses you

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copied down from the DOS box. The labels will be familiar. Also, it probably will work better if you type in the address for the default gateway as the DNS server address after clicking the button to allow manual entry. If you have trouble reaching web sites after making the changes, go back and choose the setting to find the DNS server address automatically. Close all the settings boxes by clicking OK. When you back to the box labeled "Network Connections" and again right-click the icon for the "Local Area Connection" and click "Disable" from the drop down menu. Wait a few seconds and right click it again. This time click "Enable." You should now start your web browser and see if you can reach a web site. If you can everything was done correctly. If not try again. You can always go back to the setting allowing your computer to be assigned a dynamic IP address if you want to start over.

Step Three. Direct VPN Traffic Through Your Router to The Desktop Computer.

If the computer you want to reach from outside is connected directly to the modem, you can skip this step. Otherwise, find your documentation for your router. Every router I've ever seen has a way to direct certain Internet traffic from the outside to a particular computer. The setup program of the router typically will have one screen that allows you to direct traffic aimed at a particular port (think of it as a door that a particular type of traffic can enter your system through) to one of the computers behind the router on your network. In this case we want to direct traffic entering through TCP Port 1723. That's the door through which VPN traffic enters. The setup screen will have some method of directing traffic entering through this port to a particular computer identified by its IP address. Direct the traffic from that port to the static IP address of the computer you want to access from outside the office. Unfortunately, since there are so many variations of routers I can't give a "one fits all" explanation of how to do this. If the router's manual doesn't help I would suggest calling the manufacturer's tech support. It is highly likely that there is a way to do this since it's a common configuration for VPN's.

Step Four. Set up Your Computer in Your Office to Accept VPN Connections.

Windows XP Professional has the built in capability to act as a VPN server for connections to the computer upon which it is running. Here's how you set that up. Again, click the Start menu chose "My Network Places" and then choose "View Network Connections." Then choose "Create a new connection" on the left side of the window. A setup wizard will appear. Click "Next." Then click "Set up an advanced connection." Click next and then choose "Accept incoming connections." Click "Next" again and choose "Allow virtual private connections." Go to the next screen and select the user that you want to allow to connect to your computer. If you haven't created a user account (user name and password) for the person you want to allow to connect to your computer, you have to do so before completing this process. Click next and choose the Internet protocol as the type of networking software

that will be enabled. Go to the next screen and click "Finish."

Step Five. Enable Remote Desktop on the "Server Computer."

Windows XP Professional has an excellent remote desktop program that accepts a connection by a remote computer and allows the person at the remote computer to basically operate the server computer. To enable this feature on the desktop at your office click the Start menu and chose "Control Panel." From the Control Panel chose the "Performance and Maintenance" link if you are in the "Category View." Then click the "System" link. (If your control panel is configured for the "Classic View," double click on the "System" icon. When the System box appears choose the "Remote: tab." On that screen below "Remote Desktop" select "Allow users to connect remotely to this computer." If the user that you want to connect remotely does not have full access (administrative privileges) on your desktop, click the "Select remote users" button and follow the instructions to allow the user access. Close everything and your set to go on the office computer.

Step Six. Configure the Remote Computer to Connect to the Computer at Your Office.

Some of this will be familiar. On the computer outside of your office that will connect to the one inside your office click "Start," "My Network Places," "View network connections" and "Create new connection." Start the wizard, and this time at the second screen chose "Connect to the network at my workplace." At the next screen chose "Set up my connection manually." At the next screen choose the option for a broadband connection. (This assumes that the remote computer is also connected via a broadband connection that is always on. If not choose the appropriate setup routine in the wizard.) At the next screen type in the label you want to use to identify the icon that will eventually be associated with the connection. (A name for the icon you'll click on to start the connection.) At the next screen choose not to have windows dial a connection. At the next screen type in the Internet address of your office network that you've chosen on Dyndns.org or whatever service you've chosen. Go to the next screen and click "Finish." To test the connection click the "Start" menu and chose "Connect to." In the drop down menu you should see the name of the connection you just created. Click it and you should be prompted to enter a user name and password. Here enter the user name and password for the remote user and click "Connect." You should see the connection progress and finally see a message showing that the connection has been completed.

Step Seven. Configure the Remote Computer for Access.

On the computer that will be used to connect to the computer at your office you must configure the Remote Desktop client. On that computer click the "Start" menu, choose "All Programs" and then "Accessories." Under "Accessories" choose "Communications" and then "Remote Desktop Connection." When you start the application you'll be prompted for a computer name. Type in the static IP address you assigned to your desktop

computer at work. With the connection from Step Six above established click "Connect." You'll then be prompted for a user name and password. Enter the user name and password for the remote user. You should shortly see the desktop (screen) from the computer at your office appear on the remote computer. You'll be able to control the office computer from the remote computer and do anything you could do sitting at the computer in your office.

The above routine will work most of the time. However, if there is firewall software on the office computer it may interfere and prevent a connection. The built in Windows firewall should be configured automatically during the above routine to allow a remote connection. If you have another brand of firewall software consult the product documentation to allow VPN connections.

I've set up several systems to allow remote access using the above steps. Occasionally, I've encountered a problem I just couldn't solve. I've always suspected the problem was related to some type of firewall at the ISP level. I haven't run into a problem lately. Give it a try and hopefully, everything will work fine.

E. G. "Gerry" Morris is a solo practitioner and has practiced law for over 27 years in Austin, Texas. He is certified as a Criminal Law Specialist by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. His firm web site is at www.egmlaw.com. Email your comments and questions to Gerry at tech@egmlaw.com.

Law Practice Management Update

You will probably notice, if you haven't already, that our list of upcoming events has grown substantially from last month. Obviously, this is due to the fact that many of our summer courses have been finalized and have made their way to the calendar. That being said, if you're looking to fulfill a part or all of your annual MCLE requirements this summer, chances are we'll have something to satisfy your thirst for knowledge and CLE! Simply skip over to the last page of the newsletter to see the upcoming schedule or check the web site.

If you don't see something there that interests you, don't forget about our online classroom. There are new courses added periodically, so be sure to check back from time to time.

One last note, Gisela Bradley, the longtime director of Law Practice Management, retired at the end of April. She will be missed greatly but we are all very happy for her and are quite envious! The staff of Law Practice Management would like to thank her for years of leadership and friendship as she enjoys her new found freedom!

- To retain a lawyer who desires to work from home or on flex-time to accommodate child care, elder care or personal disability needs
- To have the flexibility to expand and shrink the work force with contract workers as needed
- To use contract engagements to reduce administrative burdens of payroll taxes and other filings
- To try out new workers on a contract basis without committing to use them again

How do you find contract lawyers?

Many legal recruiting firms also offer temporary or contract lawyer services. An ad in the bar journal, an inquiry on legal listservs and blogs, or a posting at a nearby law school can also produce a number of candidates. Some solo attorneys still building their practices may be willing to offer contract services to your firm. The grapevine may be your best resource, because candidates are more likely to come with a recommendation from a source you trust. If you are looking for part-time help, consider asking for recommendations from lawyers in their 30's. They may know lawyers with young children who are seeking to work reduced or flexible hours.

How do you find part-time or temporary support staff that can work remotely?

To find additional support staff, make similar searches using the above suggested resources and supplement them by running Internet searches on terms like "virtual legal assistant" and "virtual paralegal." Although a virtual assistant can be in another city or another time zone, if you want to engage someone close to home, include the name of your city among the search terms.

What kinds of services can virtual assistants offer to your firm?

Although skills and experience vary, virtual assistants are used for many services, including

- Legal/Dictation Transcription
- Preparation of Documents
- Word Processing
- Desktop Publishing
- Secretarial Services
- Data Entry
- Database Design
- Spreadsheet Design
- Bookkeeping
- Travel Arrangements
- Internet Research
- Event Planning

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- Phone Answering Service
- Proofreading and Editing

A few websites to check out for dictation transcription are

<http://www.iavoa.com/dictation.html>

www.The24HourSecretary.com

<http://www.legaltypist.com/>.

Some sites that offer other virtual services lawyers use are

<http://www.eliteofficesupport.com/>

<http://www.va4u.com/>

www.virtualparalegalservices.com

To read about another lawyer's experience in trying out virtual legal assistance, visit this blog site:

http://greatestamericanlawyer.typepad.com/greatest_american_lawyer/virtual_clerks_paralegals/index.html.

What do I need to provide to my virtual workers?

If you hire contract workers experienced at working virtually, they will most likely have all the equipment they need, including high speed internet connection, computer and supplies. They may invoice you for supplies used in doing your work, such as mailing envelopes and file folders, and you may need to supply them with some of your letterhead. Contract lawyers may want to verify that you have malpractice insurance that covers their work on your projects.

To protect client confidentiality, you will probably want each worker to sign an independent contractor agreement that mandates confidentiality and requires that they delete files from their hard drives at the conclusion of the assignment. If your virtual workers also work for other firms, you will also need a good conflict checking mechanism.

What should you expect to pay for virtual services?

In general, contract lawyers that you hire directly (rather than through a legal recruiting agency) tend to be quite a bargain. You should probably expect to pay about 50% of what you will charge out for the services, but rates may run for as little as \$50 per hour. Of course, rates vary widely based on experience, the type of expertise required, the amount of work contracted, length of contract and location of the lawyer. Rates for virtual assistants range from \$15 to \$75 per hour, with the rates being influenced primarily by the level of expertise required and the volume of work contracted. Discounts are given for commitments to larger monthly blocks of time, and one-time projects cost a premium.

What does a virtual firm really look like?

The availability of virtual services has spawned a new breed of law firm based on flexibility and low overhead. If you are wondering what such new firms look like and how they operate on a day-to-day basis, you can read articles about two such successful firms at

<http://www.smartmoney.com/smallbiz/inthetrenches/index.cfm?story=20050929>

<http://starbulletin.com/2005/10/23/business/story01.html>.

The first link has a story in Smart Money magazine about a virtual law firm with 4 contract lawyers, 2 administrative assistants and a law clerk, all virtual. The founder of the firm pays a preset fee based on the amount of time a project should take. She does not provide any guaranteed hours or guaranteed pay to her workers, thus keeping overhead in line with the workload.

The second link above takes you to an October 23, 2005 article in the Honolulu Star Bulletin about a senior partner in a prestigious Honolulu firm who left a corporate and securities practice to form a virtual law firm. The firm had only virtual associates and a suite of conference rooms. One year out, the founder was making as much money as he did at the old firm.

So, if you are wondering how to expand your firm without significantly increasing your overhead or taking a long term risk, think virtually!

Debra Bruce (www.lawyer-coach.com) practiced law for 18 years, before becoming a professionally trained Executive Coach for lawyers. She is a member of the Law Practice Management Committee of the State Bar of Texas, and the co-

Law Practice Management Tip

This week's tip is provided by Nickie Freedman of LegallyLarge – www.legallylarge.com. The tips are neither meant as legal advice, nor binding on the State Bar of Texas.

Many solo and small-firm practitioners devise innovative approaches to billing. One approach is "unbundling." Unbundled cases are offered to a client as a cafeteria plan of options, with strict adherence to ethical requirements, allowing the client to pay per task. Clients are able, for example, to pay for drafting a legal brief or arguing a case in court or legal research, rather than paying a flat fee for the entire case. This increases the clients' sense of control over their cases and allows a greater number of low and middle-income individuals to afford legal services. For the solo and small-firm practitioner, there is increased access to a client base who might not otherwise be available and the satisfaction of providing legal services to clients who otherwise may have been left out of the legal picture altogether.

Upcoming Events

Planning to Conquer the Real World of Private Practice will take place live at Baylor University School of Law in Waco on June 3, 2006. To register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1518.

Perfecting Your Estate Planning and Probate Practice will take place live in Houston on June 6, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6153>

The Importance of Planning Ahead, breakfast discussion, will take place live in San Antonio on June 30, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6252>

Managing Your Personal Injury Practice with Legal Technology will take place live in Dallas on July 11, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6219>

Perfecting Your Criminal Law Practice will take place live in Dallas July 25, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=5631>

Perfecting Your Estate Planning and Probate Practice is scheduled for video replay in San Antonio on August 1, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6181>

Managing Your Personal Injury Practice with Legal Technology will take place live in San Antonio on August 1, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6237>

Managing Your Personal Injury Practice with Legal Technology is scheduled for video playback in Houston on August 22, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6238>

Perfecting Your Estate Planning and Probate Practice is scheduled for video replay in Dallas on August 29, 2006. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6182>

Law Practice Management Special Offers

Books of the Month

The Lawyer's Guide to Creating a Business Plan: A Step-by-Step Software Package

Retail - \$179.95

Sale Price - \$125.95

A business plan is the blueprint for your law firm's financial success. Without a business plan, a firm is essentially rudderless, and day-to-day decisions are likely to be haphazard and reactive, in stark contrast to those firms implementing a well thought out business plan. Designed for lawyers, *The Lawyer's Guide to Creating Your Business Plan* is a complete, easy-to-use customized Windows-based software package that is the fastest, easiest way to research and write a winning business plan for a law firm.

Leveraging with Legal Assistants: How to Maximize Team Performance, Improve Quality, and Boost Your Bottom Line

Retail - \$69.95

Sale Price - \$48.95

Learn how legal assistants can maximize team performance, improve work quality, and boost your bottom line. Focuses on specific practices, including litigation, appellate practice, domestic relations, real estate, corporate law, labor and employment, criminal, bankruptcy, and tax.

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Law Practice Management Webcasts

Rise to the Top with a Top Notch Legal Team will be webcast on June 21, 2006. To register, visit: <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=5982>