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Review of CosmoLex

By Edward J. Zohn

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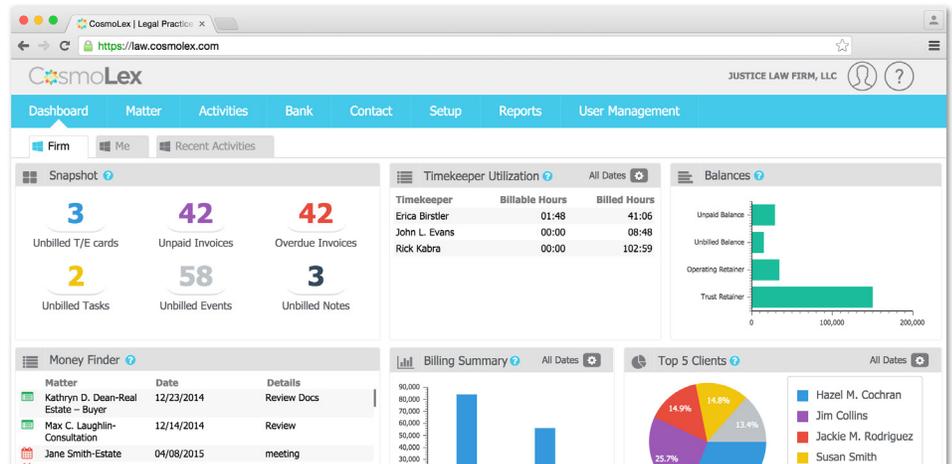
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CosmoLex has a bold mission — a single login for law firms that covers their accounting, billing, and practice management needs. New Jersey lawyer Ed Zohn spent six months evaluating CosmoLex, including some undercover work. The result is this comprehensive review that covers installation, user experience, bang for the buck, and of course major features such as the Dashboard, Calendar and Event Tracking, Billing and Collection, and Trust Management.

A practice management system skeptic, I published an article in this newsletter's predecessor almost five years ago entitled *How Your Law Firm Can Build Its Own (DIY) Practice Management System Using Off-The-Shelf Software*. However, much has changed since I wrote that article. So reviewing [CosmoLex](#), a cloud-based financial and practice management system designed for small law firms, could not have come at a better time. (Disclosure: I received a complimentary CosmoLex subscription via [SmallLaw](#) for purposes of this review.)

Time to Ditch the DIY?

In 2010 I wrote "I believe that you can create a more flexible and lower cost [practice management system] by using readily available off-the-shelf software applications." In the intervening five years, however, we have witnessed an explosion of cloud software of all types — backup, file synchronization, document



management, task management and collaboration, time and billing — and even comprehensive practice management systems combining these functions.

My DIY system is based on off-the-shelf software — Microsoft Office 365, hosted Exchange, cloud storage and file synchronization, cloud apps for timekeeping and task management, QuickBooks for billing, banking and accounting, etc.

Unlike some software products developed by coders and "architects" who know nothing about the business of law, CosmoLex follows a set of real-world principles.

Many of the recent practice management advancements have passed me by. Even technology-averse lawyers subscribe to cloud practice management systems; the

implementation is so much easier and the price is so much lower than the server-based systems of the past. Cloud practice management systems also enhance mobility by facilitating access from any computer, as well as from smartphones and tablets. While my DIY system was designed with mobility as its highest requirement, the functions are not integrated as well as they could be — and certainly not as well as within CosmoLex.

CosmoLex's Four Pillars of Legal Practice Management

Unlike some software products developed by coders and "architects" who know nothing about the business of law, CosmoLex follows a set of real-world principles that it calls the Four Pillars of Legal Practice Management.

"Calendar and Event Tracking" is necessary for coordination of firm schedules, collaboration with firm members, and management of all appointments and events associated with a client-matter. "Docket Control" minimizes the risk of missed court appearances,

filing deadlines etc. Without “Billing and Collection,” a law firm isn’t much of a business. And “Trust Management” is something that most law firms do, but not all law firms do well. Mismanagement of client trust accounts, even if merely negligent, drastically increases the risk of ethics charges and disciplinary action.

With all four pillars in the same software, you benefit even more. Docket control can populate your calendar. Calendaring can coordinate with time tracking and billing. Billing can work with trust account management. In short, you can access everything related to a client and matter quickly and easily from any location. This is the philosophy behind CosmoLex.

CosmoLex is clean with intuitive navigation....

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The Dashboard and Beyond

CosmoLex is clean with intuitive navigation. A bright blue menu bar extends horizontally across the top, with the main functions in large type: Dashboard, Matter, Activities, Bank, Contact, Setup, Reports, and User Management. Clicking on any of these main menu items brings up relevant sub-menus or tabs. For example, clicking on Activities will show you tabs for Time/Expense, Invoices, Calendar, Tasks, Documents and Notes.

The Dashboard — the left-most option on the blue menu bar — is what you first see. It contains a snapshot of your firm’s business,

including unbilled activities, billable hours, status of invoices, and your top five clients. Flipping from the “Firm” tab to the “Me” tab displays your upcoming events, pending tasks, unbilled activities, and billable hours. The “Recent Activities” tab shows you all recent CosmoLex actions (an audit trail).

With my test client-matter, I spent most of my time in the Matter and Activities sections. All functions are connected so you never enter information twice. For example, every meeting, event, and task can connect to a specific matter. When a meeting concludes or a task is completed, CosmoLex automatically adds them to the billing function. If a meeting or task is unbilled upon completion, CosmoLex flags it for your review in the “Money Finder” section of the Dashboard.

Because of this deep integration, the calendar and task functions make collaboration much easier than any other practice management system I have used or reviewed. I especially like being able to delegate tasks.

No Speed Bumps

Switching among my tasks, meetings and appointments, documents, and time entries was a snap. The tight integration of all of the major functions proved much simpler than switching among my current unconnected applications. In CosmoLex, billing, calendars, time and expense entry, document management, and task management are within one click of each other.

CosmoLex felt as fast and fluid as any server-based system. I didn’t experience any lags related to the cloud connection. My Internet connection is standard cable — approximately 20 Mbps down and 5 Mbps up. When it was time to generate a test invoice, it only took

a few minutes to choose my matter and billable items and generate a draft.

I accessed CosmoLex from my iPad too, which worked well. The mobile website has a cleanly-presented subset of CosmoLex functions, but you can access the desktop version if you need all the CosmoLex functions on your tablet. I didn’t.

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CosmoLex Doesn’t Rest

CosmoLex frequently gains new features and enhancements to existing features. The company pushed five releases since September 2014, each adding significant functionality. Release 2.0 added calendar synchronization with Google Calendar. Release 2.1 and 2.2 upgraded and enhanced many existing features. Release 2.3 added a complete document management system for document storage and integration with Dropbox.

Release 2.4 (the version I’m reviewing) added the Dashboard and enhanced the document management system by adding Box integration. Release 2.4 also enables you to drag and drop files from your desktop to the “add file” dialog box, and view PDF files within CosmoLex without downloading them to your desktop.

Later this month CosmoLex will add general ledger accounting. Next on the drawing board is

integration with Google Drive and NetDocuments. Again, all of these functions and more have been added in about six months. Whether CosmoLex can continue this pace remains to be seen — but the team is currently working at full tilt.

Wish List

The file management integration with Box and Dropbox is easy to setup and use, but like many cloud systems you can't edit documents directly from CosmoLex. You must download the document, edit it, and then upload it again.

CosmoLex would benefit from more integrations. For example, if you find CosmoLex's billing or trust accounting functions insufficient, you cannot integrate a more sophisticated accounting solution. Also, CosmoLex cannot connect with any email system (though perhaps that's a blessing in disguise).

My Undercover Experience With the CEO

On January 24, 2015, I attended the annual New Jersey State Bar Association Family Law Symposium hosted by the New Jersey State Bar Association. Over 600 attorneys attended. CosmoLex was among the many exhibitors in a breakout room. CosmoLex is a New Jersey company with its headquarters less than 10 miles away from the symposium's location.

I didn't identify myself because the CosmoLex folks already knew I was writing this review for *SmallLaw*. I started asking questions, which CosmoLex CEO Rick Kabra answered patiently and completely. All of the CosmoLex folks were enthusiastic and helpful. This positive attitude is evident throughout the company's website, and was evident during the telephone calls I had with company representatives.

Price and Value

CosmoLex's pricing is refreshingly simple. You pay \$50 per month per user or \$43 monthly if you're willing to pay for an entire year up front. Included with this price is unlimited technical support, free one-on-one web training, unlimited data storage for your files, and backups every four hours.

I really like that CosmoLex doesn't require a contract. Some of the big legal software providers require contracts we would not let our clients sign. Offering a discount for a prepaid year is reasonable since it lowers CosmoLex's cost of doing business. But a prepaid year is not the same as a dreaded contract.

TechnoScore

I would like to continue using CosmoLex, but I'm so vested in Outlook for calendar, contacts, and email that it will be hard to let go. I'm similarly vested in QuickBooks since it has addressed all my financial needs for 15 years. I worry

about converting to a proprietary system. But these are my hangups, not necessarily yours. And my DIY system has notable holes, which using CosmoLex made more evident.

CosmoLex does a fine job of integrating many of the most important law firm management functions. It's the only product that has made me consider giving up the comfort of my DIY system. It's an easy "A" for CosmoLex.

CosmoLex's Response

We invited CosmoLex to respond to this review. CosmoLex CEO Rick Kabra responds as follows:

"CosmoLex is releasing an "integrated legal accounting" update on April 16, 2015 at the ABA TECHSHOW, Chicago. With this release, we will realize our founding vision of offering single login system for small law firms that includes complete legal accounting and legal practice management."



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