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A trends update for NALS members

## **Central Docket Department and Court-Rules Program Ensure Data Integrity and Reduce Risk**

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When I came to Alschuler Grossman Stein & Kahan (AGSK) in 1998 as executive director, the firm's calendaring system was already in place. Headquartered in Los Angeles, AGSK is nationally known for complex business litigation. With 73 litigators appearing in numerous jurisdictions, the firm's docket calendar is extremely complex. Our litigators appear in California Superior and Appellate Courts, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, US Bankruptcy Courts and US District Court for the Southern District of New York, and more.

ASGK management has always believed the docket information for each litigator in the firm must be maintained centrally by a qualified docket clerk. Our lawyers send all items to be calendared to the docket clerk. A central department assures that we have control over the integrity of the data for each lawyer as well as the firm as a whole.

Calendaring software is extremely critical to our firm. AGSK is meticulous about ensuring that no dates required by a specific court jurisdiction are missed, that date changes are updated immediately, and that we are working with court rules data that is completely up to date. Also, having a court calendaring software approved by our insurance company lowers our professional liability premiums.

In 1992, AGSK's IT administration selected and installed a calendaring software

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**July 23 - General Committee Brainstorming**

**July 30 - General Committee Brainstorming**

**August 6 - Ethics (1 CLE)**

**August 13 - Retention: Are you that got away?**

**August 20 - Word Usage (1 CLE)**

**August 27 - General Committee Brainstorming**

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called Advanced Network Docket™ (DOS-based), produced by CompuLaw, Los Angeles. At that time, CompuLaw had one of the few court-rules based calendaring system, and since then it has maintained its leadership position. CompuLaw has replaced its calendaring software with a new program, Vision™ SQL, CompuLaw's 32-bit calendar/docket software that we run on Windows NT. Vision SQL has a Web portal module for access to the Internet, which we will be testing shortly.

One of the greatest strengths of using Vision is that CompuLaw has a comprehensive set of rules databases. New sets are being issued all the time. CompuLaw has a department of lawyers whose total function is to update and issue court rules-based databases for jurisdictions across the nation, special courts like bankruptcy, and the rules of the American Arbitration Association.

The AGSK docket clerk can contact the CompuLaw rules department for clarification about how a certain rule is applied.

A central department also allows uniform reporting across the firm. The docket clerk has the responsibility to issue daily, weekly and monthly reports by client, matter, event and other variables for each attorney. The docket clerk runs the weekly reports each Friday, and runs reports for individual attorneys on an "as needed" basis. We are planning to set up all timekeepers to be able to see their calendared events from the desktop computers and print them as necessary. When that is complete, the central docket department will not need to print and issue reports. It is possible for us to export calendaring items to our word-processing systems, Microsoft Word and WordPerfect, but we do not need to do so because Vision has a robust reporting function.

We are currently converting from Novell GroupWise® to Microsoft Outlook®,

for email. Vision is integrated with both Outlook and GroupWise, so converting from the old system to the new will pose no problem. We are waiting to fully integrate all timekeepers once Outlook is up and running. There is some frustration among our attorneys because they cannot view their own individual calendars electronically under the current Vision configuration. This is about to change. As I mentioned earlier, AGSK will be testing the Vision SQL Web portal module so our lawyers can access their court calendar electronically from remote locations.

I would like to see Vision integrated with our accounting/ time and billing system, CMS Open, so that when a new client/matter is created, the accounting reference would automatically appear in Vision and link the two programs. Right now, we are required to enter this information manually, which is time consuming. CompuLaw is currently working on integration of Vision with CMS.

The flexibility to integrate our court calendar system with new software programs as we integrate them into our firm-wide system, is very important, but by far the most important feature of our docket system is accuracy. The litigators entrust this responsibility to administration, and I am confident that our central docket department is providing completely reliable calendars to them using the CompuLaw court rules databases and Vision SQL. Calendaring is one area in our busy firm that I can rest assured is being done correctly.

