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NAVIGATING THE INTERNET ... FOR THE LEGAL PROFESSION

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## Web Portals: Taking Court Calendars on the Road

Save time, money staying in touch via the 'Net

By David J. Kalmick

**W**eb portal calendar access is far more than a mere convenience for busy litigators. It gives you up-to-the-minute information, greatly reducing an attorney's chances of missing a date. As a litigator, you can focus your attention on the substantive issues in the case rather than worry about scheduling errors.

Web portals give attorneys access to their court calendars through a laptop or desktop PC anyplace, any time, day or night, 24 hours a day. If you are a lawyer working at home or traveling, a Web portal software program allows you to view your calendar via the Internet.

Some companies that specialize in creating court rules-based calendar/docket systems offer this type of software, which must be installed on your firm's in-house server, equipped with IIS (Microsoft's Internet Information Services, which comes with certain versions of Windows).

From time to time, it will be necessary to communicate changes to your office via the Web Portal. This is best handled through a "calendar request submittal form," an electronic form that communicates with your docket department or assistant via e-mail. This will ensure that your audit trails are properly maintained at your office.

For safety reasons, requests should automatically be sent to two e-mail locations — one as an "audit receipt" (perhaps to your own e-mail address) and the other should go directly to the docket department or whoever is managing your calendar dates. Under this system, you can view your updated calendar as soon as the changes (or additions) have been made.

### NOTHING BUT A BROWSER

The best Web portal software requires no client software other than a Web browser. In other words, you should not have to load software onto every machine that will be used to access your calendar. The actual portal software should reside on your firm's server. This will save your IT personnel a great deal of time and make implementation a "snap."

For best results, a separate module should handle administration of the Web portal software with security that restricts all but the system administrator(s) from access. This ensures that certain features and menu options are presented only to those who need them.

For example, you may wish to give certain clients access to specific calendar information (pertaining to their cases only). Managing partners may have access to all data, while associates and other firm members may have access only to their own calendars (or a small number of attorneys' calendars).

A well-designed Web portal will have an administrative module that allows the firm to grant access to specific docket information to only those individuals identified by the administrator.

### KEEPING IT SIMPLE

As a lawyer, you want your Web portal user interface to be clear and easy to use. It should be intuitive and graphical in its presentation. The output should adjust for various screen resolutions, and condense text according to the number of pixels for easy viewing and printing. How many times have we all tried to print a

### The Benefits of Using a Docket Calendar Web Portal

- *Access to your schedule 24/7.*
- *Up to the minute, "real time" accurate data.*
- *Ability to print your calendar.*
- *Send schedule changes to your firm to update calendars.*
- *View calendars for a group of litigators working together at depositions or trials.*
- *Reduce the possibility of a calendar or deadline error that could lead to a malpractice suit.*
- *Provides convenience and peace of mind.*

page in our browser only to have the right margin cut off or appear on another page (or pages)?

You should have the ability to personalize reports to suit your needs — easily. The program should intuitively guide you through report creation, a task that is often quite difficult in many conventional software packages. The report writer module should give you the ability to create both graphical and textual (columnar) reports that allow you to control the layout.

When viewing your calendar data, it is use-

ful to have the ability to “drill down” from a monthly calendar view to a daily view and to individual calendar items. You should be able to easily navigate from day to day, and week to week. Small “tri-calendar” displays with links from day to day and week to week are especially handy.

A critical thing to look for in choosing your calendar/portal software provider is the frequency of updates the company makes to their rules databases. If a rule for any jurisdiction has changed, that information must be revised and in your hands as close to the effective date designated by the court for that particular jurisdiction. Since calendar or deadline errors are the leading cause of legal malpractice claims (“Profile of Legal

Malpractice Claims, 1996-1999,” ABA Committee for Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility, published March 2001), it is imperative that you have access to the timeliest information available.

### COMPREHENSIVE DATABASES

Your firm also must choose a court calendaring company that covers all of the jurisdictions and areas of practice that your firm requires — from state, district, and appellate courts, to federal courts, to special practice areas such as bankruptcy, family law, and arbitration. To do this, the vendor must have a staff of dedicated attorneys who exclusively write and update the rules databases and are in daily contact with courts throughout the

jurisdictions that their rules cover. When rules changes are issued for a court, the vendor must make timely changes relevant to the rules databases you are using.

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*David J. Kalmick is president and CEO of CompuLaw, a court calendar database and software company (www.compulaw.com). He can be reached at dkalmick@compulaw.com. TIL articles and features do not necessarily represent the views of the TIL staff or its owner, nor should they be regarded as individual legal advice from the authors.*

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