

ABOVE THE LAW

The Anywhere Law Office: Legal Workspace

BY SEAN DOHERTY

If you want to go anywhere and everywhere with your law office, it's time to look at infrastructure-as-a-service (IaaS) offerings. IaaS brings applications and data together in a centralized place and provides them from any Internet connection.

IaaS providers are not out to dominate your desktop user interface like Apple Inc., Google Inc. or Microsoft Corp. Infrastructure service providers are out to replace your desktop whether you use a PC or tablet computer. Take Legal Workspace, an IaaS provider dedicated to the legal space.

Legal Workspace (LWS) offers law firms virtual computing workspaces in the cloud designed to replicate on-premise computer infrastructure that delivers a desktop operating system with access to email, local and cloud-based storage, office suites (such as Microsoft Office or Corel Word Perfect Office), and practice management applications (such as time-keeping, accounting, and billing software). LWS moves the desktop, applications and storage to the cloud, where they can be accessed in one location.

Moving the desktop to the cloud accomplishes three things: It relieves law firms of managing local infrastructure, such as databases, servers, and PC workstations; it obviates the need to use high-end computers in the law office; and it supplies remote access to all computer resources whether users are in or out of the office.

VIRTUAL WORKSPACES

LWS subscribers use Microsoft's Remote Desktop Client (RDC) to access a desktop OS served up in the cloud by a Windows Server 2012 R2. RDC comes with the Windows operating system and may download and install on computers and devices running Apple OSX. There are also versions for Linux.

RDC uses the Remote Desktop Protocol (RDP) to connect to Remote Desktop Services (RDS), formerly Terminal Services, running on the Windows server. RDS sets up a desktop session designed by LWS to be familiar to the law firm subscriber with access to all his or her firm resources, e.g., Outlook, Microsoft Word and Excel, and practice management, accounting and time and billing software. See Figure 1.

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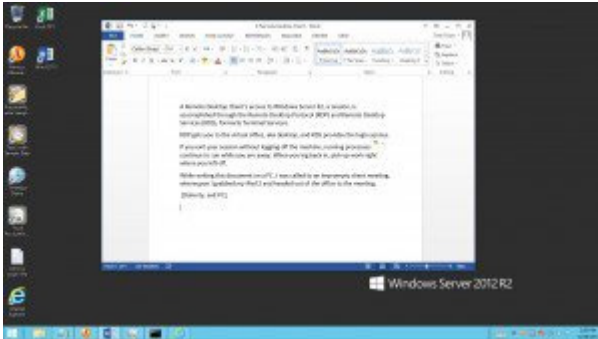


Figure 1. Legal Workspace desktop session with access to software to support the business and practice of law. Click image to enlarge.

Subscribers use local keyboard and mouse input to control their centralized desktop that runs applications and accesses databases, files and network resources in the cloud. Clients receive the results of their input in updates to the desktop graphical user interface and application output directed to local devices, such as printers and scanners. Otherwise, applications run entirely on remote computers—no local computing power is required. Hence the firm will not need servers to run applications and databases and will not require PCs with the latest multi-core processors — but a broadband Internet service would be de rigueur.

Remote desktop access is continuous, whether you are in or out of the office, and contiguous. Disconnect a session in progress without logging out of the desktop and applications continue to run, waiting for you to reconnect. See Figure 2.

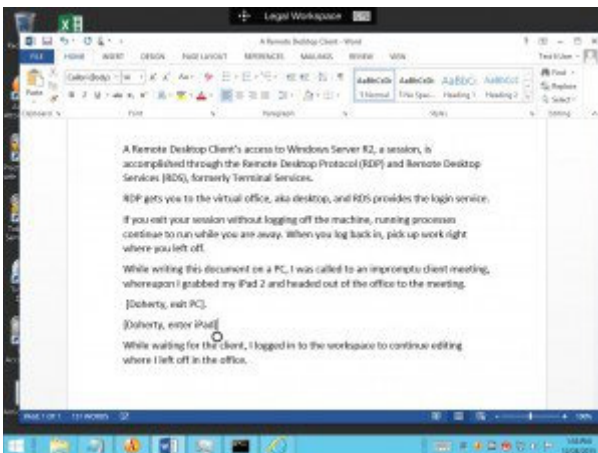


Figure 2. After disconnecting the editing session in Figure 1, above, I accessed the desktop from an iPad 2 and continued to edit the document where I left off. Click image to enlarge.

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Besides two-factor authentication, LWS workspaces include antivirus software, redundant firewalls and an intrusion detection system, which small to midsize firms can't afford to install and maintain. The Dallas-based company maintains its own infrastructure to install into virtual spaces any software licensed by the firm, such as Microsoft Office or Corel WordPerfect Office, and specific legal software, such as Amicus Attorney, Needles, Practice Master and Time Matters. Installing applications is a free service unless it requires special handling for an SQL database, said Joe Kelly, founder and CEO of Legal Workspace.

Unlike Amazon Web Services and Azure, the Microsoft Cloud, which price IaaS by the consumption of CPU and memory capacity, LWS's cloud offering has predictable costs starting at \$120 per user per month. Kelly said law firms will get the processing power they need at a predictable monthly subscription price, albeit they are charged for storage used over a minimum rate.

LWS's legal focus distinguishes the company from its competitors, such as Abacus Private Cloud and many local and regional IaaS providers. Kelly gained experience in setting up virtual computing environments at Business Network Consulting (BNC), LWS's parent company. Kelly found his BNC team was setting up similar virtual offices for lawyers and he decided to template a solution and brand it Legal Workspace in 2008.

What really sets LWS apart, said Kelly, is what goes on in the background and the people. The LWS Colorado data center backs up firm data nightly and a Dallas data center provides disaster recovery for the Mile-High City location. LWS streamlines patch management for servers and applications to avoid conflicts. LWS has more than 40 employees, said Kelly. "We hire people with previous law firm experience and get them trained and certified on all the legal applications we commonly see."

LWS had a slow start in 2008 because lawyers were hesitant to embrace cloud offerings. But as cloud offerings and network connections improve, more lawyers are adopting cloud services to centralize applications and storage. That's where LWS comes in, but with only service and support to distinguish the company, copycat competitors will likely follow suit.

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