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PAPERLESS PARTNERSHIP

Technology Tempts Halloran & Sage Partners To Break Off

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In the new offices of Raymond & Bennett, filing cabinets are conspicuously missing. “We have a rule here: no Rolodexes and no paper clips,” said Bruce Raymond, partner in the month-old firm.

That’s because the Glastonbury firm, launched by Raymond and Kane Bennett, former partners at Hartford’s Halloran & Sage, was built around the idea of a paperless office. In it, 3-ring binders, reams of files and mountains of paperwork have given way to dual-screen computer monitors, tablet laptops and automatic phone dialers.

“We have unique vision for the legal market, one which is emerging now, and that’s the emphasis on using technology,” Raymond said.

The idea of a paperless office has gained some traction in the legal industry over the last few years, but few have gone to the extreme of Raymond & Bennett.

Most law offices shed as much as one- to two-thirds of their paperwork, said Craig Schwartz, marketing director for San Diego, Cal.-based Abacus Data Technology, which makes software for paperless offices.

“Few are totally paperless,” Schwartz said. “I don’t even know if we can ever claim that.”

Although rare, the paperless law office is not unheard of.

Michael Day, a Meriden divorce lawyer, has been running a paperless office for almost two years. According to Day, every paper that comes into or out of the office is scanned or printed into a digital file.

He originally decided to make the transition after talking to another solo attorney in Colorado, who convinced him it was worth the switch.

“Lawyers feel like they are hostages to their office,” he said. “You need to be near the files, faxes and phones. This way you can be on a beach with your laptop and still be at work if need be.”

It’s great for a solo, he said, because at the end of the day, he takes his entire office home in a laptop.



Attorneys Kane Bennett, left, and Bruce Raymond.

The expense was marginal, he said. He needed a high end fax machine, some additional monitors and software. Most attorneys could go paperless for far less than \$10,000, he estimated.

Bennett said that smaller offices such as his are becoming early adopters of the technology because they can implement it on a small scale. And if there are mistakes in choosing technology or software, it’s easier to correct in a three-person office than a 100-person office.

While paperless offices can get rid of some of the tedious and time-consuming aspects of lawyering, what’s more important is the savings for customers.

Technology trims costs, said Raymond. Clients spend less money paying for high-salary lawyers to scan hundreds of pages of documents.

Raymond said that advanced software and computers allow the firm to explore alternative fee-based arrangements, rather than more traditional contingency or hourly-based fees for legal services.

That’s where technology and business strategy give best: when both help make money. Having a set or partially set fee can inspire trust in new clients — and keep them coming back. And Raymond and Bennett feel that if they can better estimate up front how much a particular service will cost a client, that client will be more inclined to use their firm.

The technology, he said, is not a gimmick, but a sound strategy to build a firm around.

After all, he said, “time is money, when you’re billing by the hour.”

And nobody likes to waste either one, he said. ■