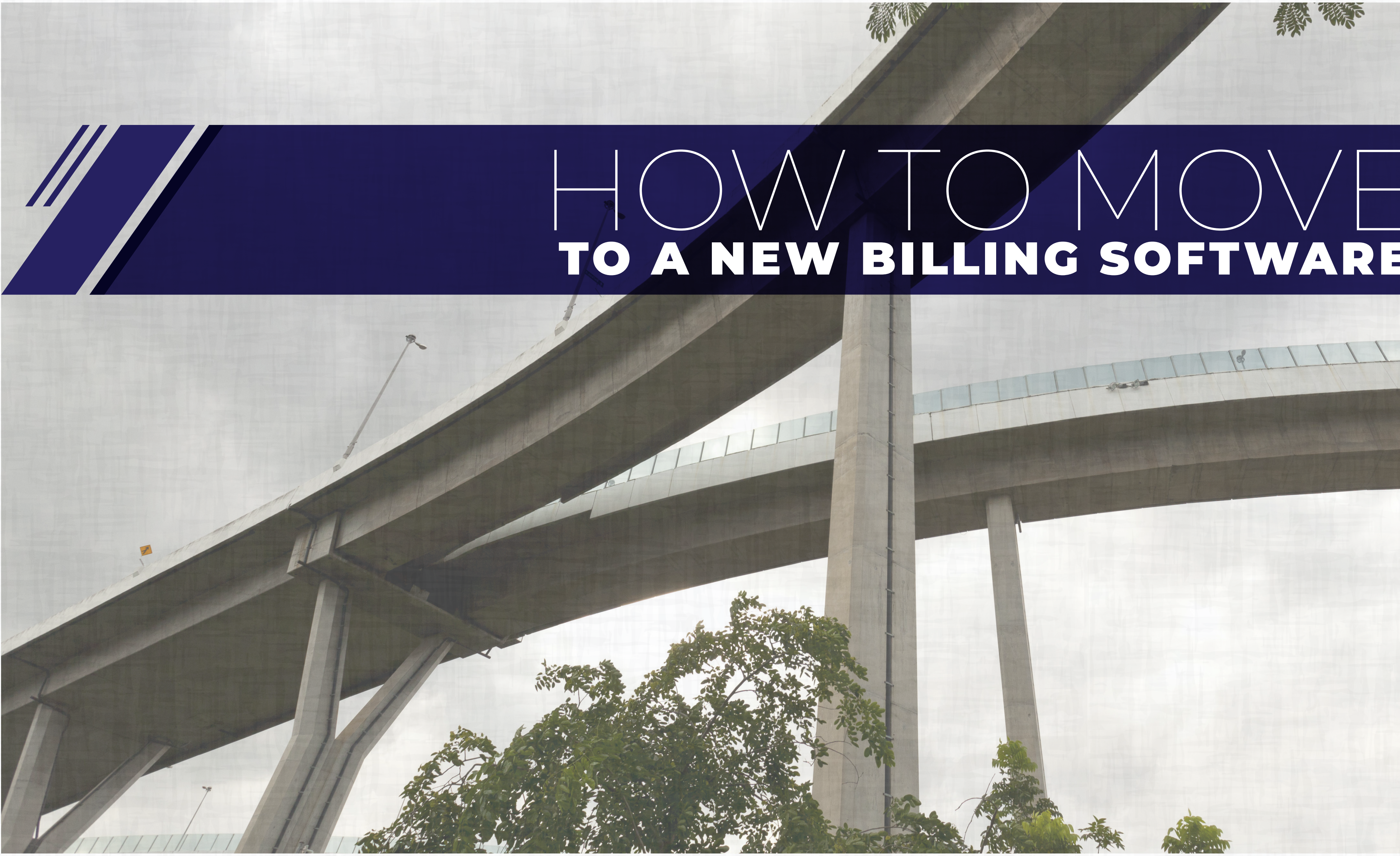
HOW TO MOVE TO A NEW BILLING SOFTWARE



TimeSolv

Why Do You Need A New Billing Software?

The story is as simple as that. You can't shake it off whether you are billing flat fee, hourly or value billing.

But WHY billing is important will bring you to the sad part of this simple story. Even though your clients won't pay you for all the hassle and time you invest in billing, you can't stop doing that because that's the lifeblood for your firm.

The worst happens when you don't even have a competent billing software to assist you, which consequently makes you lose either hundreds of billable hours or your own competence in front of a client because your infrastructure is the reflection of how good a firm or solo lawyer you are.

So when it comes to billing efficiently without losing your cool or money, it all comes down to the type of billing software you're using for your firm. That's why we say that having an innovative billing software is just as important as billing itself. But in most instances, lawyers feel stuck with an old software or a server just because they have all the important historical data of their clients there and shifting it all to a new system actually is more of a trouble than using the antique software, so they keep losing leaking money month after month.

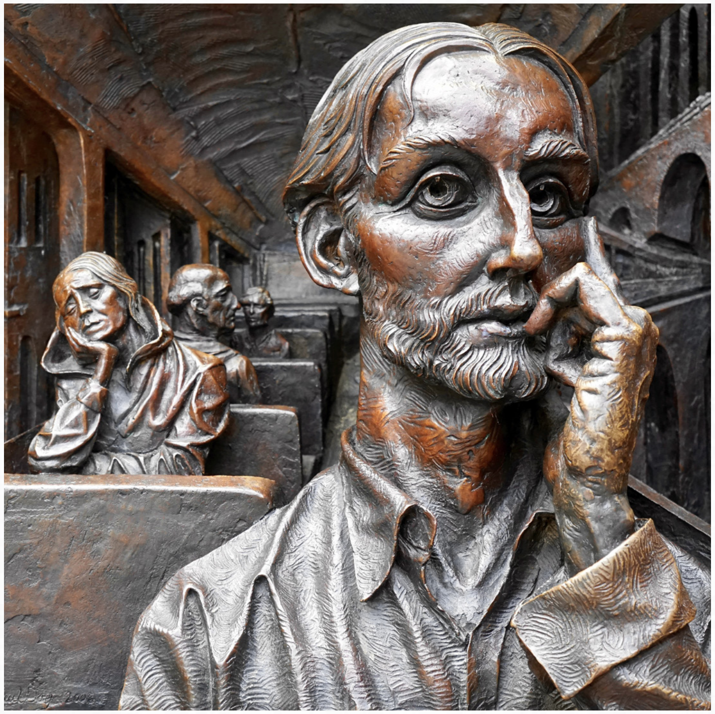
The fear of converting to new software is natural. It all lies in the rhythm that you already have established for invoicing. Changing that rhythm can doubtlessly slow down the overall speed of operations as well as increase the frustrations involved with billing and invoicing. Nonetheless, the change can help you save many billable hours, money and your sanity.

This guide is designed to walk you through the process of not only selecting the best software for your firm, but also the to-do's before moving to ensure a seamless transition.

BILLING IS A NECESSARY EVIL FOR ALMOST ALL LAW FIRMS.

YOU DON'T BILL, YOU DON'T GET PAID.

What Should You Ask Yourself before the Selection of a New Software?



So we all agree now that living with an ancient software is just as troublesome as communicating via a broken screen on your device. The next inevitable step should be fixing the screen or the move itself. Nonetheless, this move is always scarier than the troublesome software you might already have.

So the most important question here is: “what should you do to make this shift as seamless and hassle-free as possible”?

Before you actually make a decision, take some time to ask yourself the questions below about your entire billing process. Putting some time into answering these questions can prevent a lot of headaches down the road..

What is Your Billing Intent?

While for most law firms, the only billing goal is 'getting paid', it must NOT be the only one. Try seeing your bill as a means to strengthen your relationship with the client. When the invoice shows the value you give to a client free of charge, it instantly scales up from being just an ordinary bill. That is one of the things that can make a one-time client a lifetime client.

When a software gives you ease to do just that to a bill (listing value-added services, all the paid and free work), you won't find it hard to see how badly you want it.

Where Will Your Billing Software Be Hosted?

Based on the locations your employees work from and the infrastructure you have, you must first decide if you want a desktop-based or a cloud-based solution. Sometimes a billing software may need to share information with other programs of a firm i.e. accounting software. Therefore a solution that enables you to make a single entry for all the synchronizing software in the firm would be your best bet.

So while you are out eyeballing new options, keep these requirements in your mind to finally bag a solution better than you already own.

How Do You Send Bills to Clients?

If e-invoicing is the preferred medium of billing for you, look for a solution that can work with your email. For instance, some software can only synchronize with MAPI-compliant email systems whereas others can send emails directly via any email system. Making sure the e-bill looks exactly the same at clients' interface and is easy to open for them is very important too. For instance, if you require LEDES billing format for legal billing, make sure the software you are going for can handle it. Likewise, the software must be in compliance with the format the firm of your client deals in.

Do You Require Custom Bills for Separate Clients?

When running bills, you want a software to automatically fill in the information required by a specific client in their bill. Therefore look for a solution that can save you of the hassle of manual additions or subtractions for every client.

What is Your Billing Workflow?

For some firms, a pre-bill is essentially the copy of the invoice they send out to a client whereas others prefer viewing more details in the draft. Thus considering the workflow you prefer while looking for a billing product is vital. Some solutions might allow you to make changes at different billing stages and even undo the bill, others may not be that accommodating. The software you want must provide convenience to all billing stages as you need them.

What Security Restrictions Does Your Firm Require?

Security of invoice is such a multifaceted yet important aspect of the whole billing process that you can NOT avoid probing the prospect software really hard for it. Start with scrutinizing the software's ability to limit data visibility for different personnel. For instance, you may want some employees to only be able to view timekeeper's details or bill at the pilot stages or not at all, while others might need free access to all stages of all the information. You may also want restrictions on the addition of certain data as 'an entry from the previous week or month'. Also, the software should be able to provide security for time and expense data approval or bill approval. This product must come with restrictions on who can run reports.

How Simple and Efficient is it to Record Time in the New Software?

For a lawyer, the most important aspect of a billing software is the efficiency and simplicity to track time. When considering new software understanding all the actions to record time will help you determine if it will be the right solution. Also, look for a product that could help you with the automatic filling of information or automatic billing based on assigned rates.

Does the Software Allow You to Record Time on the go?

Do you need time tracking on the go? Then the solution you want to look for must provide a good mobile app to save you from the nuisance of recording the matter details or rates on your device before you proceed. To put it simply, this solution should enable you to track all the time you spent on the matter while on the move so you don't lose those hours to chance (i.e. to the idea that you'll record that time on your main device later).

How Much Time Investment Do You Need to Learn the New Software?

Never overlook 'time' factor of transitioning because time is money. The level of difficulty directly dictates how much time a new software would require for you to get the hang of it.

When probing a new software for feasibility, look at the list of all functions, options, settings, and types of entries it offers. You should see if this system makes invoices the way you want them, categorizes billing entries, attaches customary service descriptions alongside and handles all your accounting needs.

This won't only take time but probably help from outside too. Talking to another firm or a consultant who has dealt with this system could help you appraise all the time investment you need to put into setting this system up.

Every reputable billing software solution will also offer some sort of demo with a representative that allows you to see the software in action long before you have to make a decision.

Is this New Software Flexible About Using Different Billing Models?

Does this new software support alternative billing models other than the basic hourly, flat fee, retainer and contingent systems?

This aspect is particularly important to probe into if you want to change your billing model in the future. Also, see if this software is willing to allow ease of billing with fixed fees for specific services and hourly for others? Any software with such a flexible mode of automation is definitely a keeper.

Identify your most complicated billing scenario and make sure the solution you're looking at can handle it.

What Will Your Mode of Learning be?

Ascertaining the mode of learning before you start set-up will give you an insight into many things.

If you have decided to learn about your new solution via videos, make sure they are available (YouTube channel of the respective vendor). You can also ask the respective company if they provide customized training sessions and follow-up support. Make sure you go for a vendor who could cater you according to your needs with on-site or remote training.

While getting only one of your associates trained so he can train other employees of the firm later is a norm with many firms but this may add to time wasted, frustrations and probably a future delay in operations.

Verifying the support system of your vendor can help you finalize your choice too. You would need to check their support hours (so they match your work hours in case you are getting remote assistance). Also make sure that whichever mode of support is available (phone, email, video conferencing etc.) also is convenient for you.

How Much of Your Old Data Can Migrate To the New Software?

This question is probably one of the biggest for many firms considering a move to new time and billing software. Historical data is critical and you want to be sure you can take as much as you can into your new system.

If you have expansive client archives, there are two options to secure them.

Either keep them in the old system for reference or shifting as much of them as is possible to the new one. The data that can't be transferred can be printed out too. Invest some time into finding the best mode of securing your data with the new software.

At the very least, you should be able to import all your active clients, matters and contacts into your new software and update with current balances.

How Expensive is the New Software?

Perhaps the most decisive factor for conversion to a new billing system is the cost. First off, you may need to pay differently for the new product you are eyeing. Most cloud-based solutions will run on a monthly or yearly subscription model. While you do have to continually pay to use the product, you also don't have to worry about overhead costs of hosting on-site, upgrades costs, paying for support, etc.

No firm can allocate unlimited budget for billing software, which is a reason why you can't rule out the cost comparison.

Software vendors base the pricing options on various grounds i.e. number of timekeepers using it, number of computers in the firm to have it installed, number of real-time users or others. Knowing the exact pricing model offered is important to make an informed decision.

While you look at pricing details, don't forget to consider the following factors:

- Cost of the product for the first year
- Cost of conversion (the expense of shifting data from old to a new system) and the amount of convertible data
- Cost of training (including the cost of lost time during the transition)
- Cost of any upgrades or later support by the vendor
- Cost of labor and upgrades after the first year

Where to Get Recommendations From for Choosing the Software?

Finally, you should NOT make the decision without a recommendation from colleagues, consultants, bar associations or trade publications. But for a recommendation to actually be practical for you, you would first need an evaluation of your requirements.

There are also many business software directories that have independently evaluated systems and are a repository of user reviews. These third-party directories also make it convenient to compare software features side-by-side.

Giving an appropriate amount of thought into the questions above will make your decision-making process easier and faster.

To-dos Before Finalizing the Move

Operations running aground with the new software, down time and a full workload with customers might be some of the many reservations you might still have after asking yourself all the relevant questions to narrow down to the perfect software choice.

Although your client might never even feel the tremors of this switch like you would, to make sure you don't run into any problems before, during and after the cutover, we compiled a list of most effective ways to make the transition go as smoothly (AND painlessly) as possible.

1- Establish Your Needs

It's the simplest prerequisite for almost anything you'll need at your office. Most of the questions you asked yourself in the first section clarified your needs already. So before you actually make the final decision on which billing solution to go for, identify your needs and make sure this solution caters to them.

Specifying your needs to your software provider may clarify what add-ons or offers of customizations you can get as part of your purchase (even though they might not be listed as such).

Apart from identifying your own needs, you should make sure you own the required infrastructure for the operation of the software in question. On-site solutions might require continuous server support while a cloud-based solution can rid you of worrying about that.

2- Identify the Differences

Knowing the differences between current versus prospect software is really important before making the final decision.

Documenting all the steps of your current operations (for both cloud-based solutions and simple spreadsheets) and comparing it with the process of the new solution will help you learn the differences and make the call of whether this move will be convenient for you at all.

Identification of differences between these two systems will help you be prepared as well. That will also enable you to learn as much as you can about the new software beforehand so you're ready for questions (of staff) once the new system is in place.

3- Choose an In-active Business Time for Transition

Deciding a suitable date for the changeover can help you avoid many disruptions in operations. Most firms operate on a cyclic pattern which means there is a somewhat inactive time every month when your firm deals with the minimum number of invoices. Dealing with fewer customers in the initial days of transition will help you make sure there are fewer mistakes and hence lesser impact on clients or operations.

Making the transition at a time when the regular number of invoices need to be sent out will not only make it harder at the part of employees but also increase chances of accidental blowups. Also, a busy working day with new software will surely slow down operations and bring in unwanted frustrations.

If however, your business is demanding throughout the month, you would want to choose a time for the transition that's least disruptive. This would mean avoiding any time you make or send invoices i.e. the end of the week or the start of the new one.

4- Pre-arrange Import Procedures

The most important step before making the transition is transferring customer data from the old to the new system. Establish a firm cutover date for when exactly you'll stopping using your old system and when everyone will start using the new system. If there needs to be a transition time when time is tracked manually, make sure everyone is aware of the process and fully on-board. Communication with your staff and with your new provider is crucial to ensure success.
Opting for software that features integration with other software can make the whole process even easier. To avoid wasting of several hours while updating and synchronizing chunks of information, you could take help from sites like Salesforce and Basecamp and setup procedures that enable the transfer of information in one chunk.

5- Learn, Learn, as Much as You Can

Putting the new system in place always requires a thorough understanding of it beforehand. Therefore learning all about the basics will not only smooth the transition but save time later when you wouldn't need to figure things out on a trial and error method.

The easiest way to go about it is setting up training sessions (likely provided free of cost by the new software provider) for yourself (if you're a solo attorney) or all the relevant personnel who would be directly affected by the transition. Remember! The more you know about the new system before the move, the smoother all later operations will be, so don't let go of any chance of learning more about the new system.

6- Test and Safeguard

Testing the new system before you cut the old system is just as important as making the move itself. Making sure it works with all of your databases and work in harmony with the old data (so you won't need to keep going back and forth as the operations resume) will save you of several future nuisances.

Remember! The more sweat you put into advance testing, the lesser chances there would be of encountering unseen crash-ups later.

Extending the cutover date way after the new software is in place will help you have a safe-house to return to case the operations with the new software run aground. Keeping options of temporary switch-back and backup of information available is the best you can do for your peace of mind- before you make the transition.

TimeSolv

The #1 Legal Time Tracking and Billing Software

For close to two decades, TimeSolv has been helping firms move to the ease and convenience of cloud-based legal time and billing. We've become experts at transitioning firms and are rooted to the principle that your success is our success.

Start a free 30-day trial to see how convenient we make the move for you and how smoothly the business runs afterward.

Sign up for a Free Trial here.
You can read reviews here, here, and here.
You can read all about the customer success stories here