

# DIAL TONE DEAF

## Why Law Firms Need to Shift to VoIP Phone Systems

by Jared Correia, Esq.



No one had 'global pandemic, crushing economic effects' on their 2020 radar. And, while this new decade is off to an inauspicious start, there is still plenty of time to right the ship.

In truth, a lot of what has changed about managing a business now was inevitable; the pandemic has only accelerated the full emergence of the convenience economy, which was destined to arrive sooner rather than later anyway. All of the things that consumers are doing more of now, they've been doing lots of for years.

The pandemic itself is likely to continue to drive shutdowns and restrictions through at the least the end of 2021, even while vaccine programs tick up. Law firms, still reeling from 2020, are likely to have to navigate another difficult year – and, that's before wrestling with the long-term changes that will percolate throughout the remainder of the 2020s. Traditionally, law firm managers have been hyper risk-averse and inflexible. Trying to get a law firm to change its business

management principles can be a lot like rolling a large stone up a hill... and then watching it roll back down over the top of you.

Of course, this chaotic situation presents opportunity for law firms that are willing to be innovative. Those law firms that can become flexible, like the willow tree in a storm, will be able to build modern sustainable businesses, as those law firms usher in new models to answer for recent challenges. Law firms that lean into the distributed workforce model will access better, more productive talent. Law firms that reduce reliance on traditional office spaces will save money, effort, and compliance expense. Law firms that build cloud technology stacks will access the extreme flexibility and mobility options offered by those technologies. Smart law firm owners can increase efficiency and reduce overhead, to become more profitable, even if revenues don't recover immediately. After all, efficiency is the chief driver for law firm profitability.



When traditional business norms are shattered, everything is called into question, tested, reviewed and reviewed again. And, at the crosshairs of office space management and cloud technology, a common issue has arisen, over and over again, for traditional law firms: What if no one there's to pick up the phone? It's a simple question that can turn an entire law firm upside down. The fact of the matter is that, even at this late juncture, most law firms rely on a traditional phone system, that requires someone to be at a specific physical space, to pick up calls on a single device. Now, does the tethered nature of that arrangement sound like anything else you would accept in your thoroughly modern life, in any other application? If not, why would you let that situation remain in your law firm?

If your staff is required to use in-office phones, without another viable option -- that's not, by the way, a jury-

rigged solution, like forcing individual staff to use their own smartphones or free services -- you're just doing it wrong. Your staff, attorneys, and administrators, must be able to make and accept calls via a business platform, wherever they happen to be: home, office, or even Sweden. If your law firm does not offer that functionality, it's long past time to implement it. Consider the damage done across your brand, if your staff can't pick up the phone: It effects your intake process -- as it stands, law firms are already failing to return 64% of voicemails. It eviscerates your ability to communicate in real-time on client emergencies. It piles further stress upon you and your team.

The good news is, that you don't have to run your business this way anymore. You can cut the (phone) cord, and be better off for it.

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## It's For You: VoIP is The Answer

VoIP stands for '**voice over internet protocol**' -- in plain language, what that means is that VoIP phone systems use the internet to route and manage calls, as opposed to hardline phone systems, which rely on traditional phone lines instead. That's a huge difference. It's like operating an old school switchboard versus gaining full access to the supercomputer you hold in your hand everyday: your smartphone. What you need to know about VoIP systems is that these tools put the full power of the cloud to work in your phone system, with benefits similar to those gained every time you move from premise-based (local, physical) systems to internet-based technology.



So, what would a switch to a VoIP phone system mean for your law firm?

**Cost Savings.** What's not new to the 2020s is that lawyers' #1 concern when it comes to business management is revenue generation. But, there's another way to look at this: through the lens of profitability. Even if law firm revenue stays the same, or increases at lower percentages over time (like, say, when a global pandemic or natural disaster strikes), the way to 'make more money' is to cut overhead, thereby increasing profitability. When it comes to VoIP, the best news for your revenue model is that it costs less than traditional phone systems. It costs less to set up, because there is no physical installation required; and, it costs less to maintain, because there is no ongoing physical maintenance to perform. Remember, VoIP piggybacks on your internet, just like other cloud software, which also costs less than traditional premise-based products and services.

**Interoperability.** Not only is VoIP cheaper, it's also a more flexible option than a traditional phone system. Premised-based law firm systems, including phone systems, are siloed. The data exists in a single place, and can't be shared. That leads to inefficiency, and the inability to make cogent, data-centric decisions about your business. What if you had to plan someone's birthday, and you were really busy? Would you pull out a recipe, gather ingredients from disparate places, mix them together in a bowl, and wait for all that to cook? Or, would you just go to the store to buy a cake? Probably the latter, right? Using the cloud is a similar construct. You're a busy law firm owner. It's cheaper, and also more effective, to connect cloud software to get the information where and when you need it, rather than pulling it together from various sources, and connecting the dots yourself. Using a VoIP phone system allows you to push phone call data (including

for text messages) into the tools you use everyday, like law practice management software. Having your phone data accessible via your case management systems offers a more holistic picture of the matters you work on, and is also a hedge against malpractice, since there is no longer a massive black hole in your data management protocols. With more information aggregated in one place, you can generate more accurate reports, and make better decisions -- not the ad hoc choices lawyers stumble through when case data is spread out, and too hard to access. Looks like you can have your cake and eat it, too.

**Mobility.** VoIP phone systems are the perfect solution for the distributed workforce environment. Probably the coolest thing about VoIP is that it can turn any internet-ready device into a phone. Using the VoIP app, you can make and receive calls via your desktop, laptop, tablet, smartphone... literally any device that can access a secure internet connection. Have a shoe phone like Don Adams in 'Get Smart'? -- If it has an internet connection, you can use it for business calls. The use of 'soft phones', like these means that you're no longer tethered to a physical device at an office. Plus, using the VoIP app means that you can make calls on your own smartphone without displaying your personal number; neither do you have to give that number out for business purposes. VoIP phone systems also offer the features of traditional office phone systems (like sophisticated call routing) in a mobile setting.

The convenience economy, distributed workforce, cloud technology: those all make up the 'new normal', and will be with us long after the coronavirus pandemic has been controlled. VoIP phone systems are the perfect complement to the modern law firm technology platform.

**This is one call you won't want to ignore.**

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Don't get further behind: Switch to a VoIP phone system, and move your law firm forward.



Jared D. Correia, Esq. is the founder and CEO of Red Cave Law Firm Consulting. Red Cave offers subscription-based law firm business management consulting services for law firms, bar associations and legal organizations. Red Cave also works with legal vendors to develop programming and content. Jared is also the COO of Gideon Software, Inc. Gideon offers chat and scheduling software built exclusively for law firms. A former practicing attorney, Jared has been providing services to lawyers and law firms for over a decade. He is a regular presenter at local, regional and national events. He regularly contributes to legal publications, including his column, 'Managing,' for Attorney at Work. Jared is the host of the award-winning Legal Toolkit podcast on Legal Talk Network. Jared has also taught for Concord Law School, Suffolk University Law School, Solo Practice University and Becker College. He loves James Taylor, but respects Ron Swanson; and, he tries to sneak Rolos when no one is looking

For more information about Jared, visit Red Cave's website and/or Gideon's website, his LinkedIn account, his Twitter account or contact him directly at [jared@redcavelegal.com](mailto:jared@redcavelegal.com).

#### EDUCATION

Suffolk University Law School - J.D.  
Saint Anselm College - Honors B.A. | English major,  
Classics minor

#### PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE

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