



Amicus Attorney/PCLaw v. PracticeMaster/Tabs3

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TechnoLawyer member R. Max Best asks:

"Our small firm (2 attorneys) practice consists primarily of transactional work, including estate planning, probate, real property, business transactions and taxation. We have been using Tabs3 for time and billing and Amicus for case management software within the firm. We have tried to integrate the two software packages and links posted by both software packages are difficult to complete seamlessly. I am probably more satisfied with the customer support that we received from Tabs III than from Amicus. I notice that many subscribers seem to blend PCLaw with Amicus. How well do these two programs share information? I have looked at the PracticeMaster software from STI, but am not as impressed with its ease of use as compared to Amicus. Any suggestions?"

I. Joel Frockt responded:

"As a long time user of PCLaw, I cannot say enough good things about the product. Over 8 years of use it has never become unstable. They now have added calendar and document management features. They always answer the telephone AND solve the problem. We use a full networked version (on a peer to peer network) with general and trust accounting but you can buy only those modules required by your practice. For example, my wife is a sole practitioner and uses it only for time and billing, including court ordered split billing for her guardian ad litem cases. Check out <http://www.pclaw.com/>."

In response to the postings by Mr. Best and Mr. Frockt, I want to make a few comments about the differences between a PCLaw and Amicus installation, versus a Tabs3 and PracticeMaster installation. I will qualify all my remarks by telling you that I am a legal technology consultant and I represent all of these great products.

Mr. Best, while you reference your time & billing and practice management, what are you using for your accounting? Are you using the Tabs3 General Ledger System, Accounts Payable and Trust Accounting? Or are you using something else entirely? To me this is an important factor in the mix, and one I would certainly take into account when thinking about a switch and how all of these products will integrate.

The power behind the Tabs3 and PracticeMaster combination is that you get products that are made by the same company, which work flawlessly together upon installation. Their customer support is second to none and the products are extremely flexible. While many find Amicus to be "prettier" and therefore more user friendly out of the box, it is much less customizable by Area of Practice. That is one of PracticeMaster's biggest strengths. It is affordable and can be whatever you want it to be, with a little customization (which is quite easy to do).

In contrast, while PCLaw and Amicus are excellent products, they are much less customizable and you may find them limiting, depending on your eventual goals for document assembly, etc. If you are considering making a change, you may want to wait for PracticeMaster Version 12 before deciding, as I think you will find its ease of use perhaps closer to the graphically pleasing Amicus. I would also recommend this because I typically find it much easier to do conversions on practice management software, then to switch time & billing software. Conversions are not to be taken lightly, and involve a lot of careful planning, particularly when financial data is at risk, so make sure you choose wisely and thoroughly evaluate all avenues before making the jump.

That is not to say that PCLaw and Amicus do not have their strengths, because they do. You are already aware of the various strengths of Amicus, so I won't dwell on that product as much, because you seem very happy with it. There is no question it has some wonderful tools that other products don't have, and is easy to navigate and use. If you have not found the customizability limiting, then perhaps your practice is not one that requires this. Or perhaps you just have not explored the power of document assembly to its fullest. However, I would think that with the various AOPs that your firm handles, you would have a need for customizability, and/or would at least want to be aware of your options in that regard.

PCLaw is certainly becoming a force to be reckoned with, as they continue to add practice management features to their already impressive accounting system. But again, my question comes back to whether or not you need the full accounting of PCLaw or not. This is a question you need to ask yourself to get the big picture of where the technology in your firm is heading. Amicus and PCLaw have quite a good integration and most users find it very stable (though it really can never be as seamless as products made by one vendor), but PCLaw seems to be moving away from their tight bond with Amicus and developing their own features that will actually make them a competitor to Amicus in the future. They are looking to become a one stop shop and I think it will be very interesting to see what the next version has in store for us.

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