

MATTER MANAGEMENT CHECKLIST

1. The Key Decision: Should you take on the client matter?

- Check your past files for conflicts
- Is the client likely to have the means to pay? If your decision is on the fence, consider asking for a reasonable retainer before work begins.

2. Client Intake

- Enter (or update) client information in a centralized database, such as your legal [practice management](#) system. Correct entry now will save much drafting and accounting time later. If you don't have a centralized system, consider creating one now.
- Similarly, create Contacts for other parties and counsel involved in the matter. This will reduce much tedium later in the drafting process.
- Set up a Client Portal for quick and secure document exchange throughout the life of the matter.
- Create any new document folders within your [practice management](#) platform, and communicate any metadata tagging strategy among your staff.

3. Time and Billing

- Establish billing and time-tracking entries for the client. Note: You may want to track your time even if you do not bill hourly for the purpose of measuring overall profitability down the road. Allocating a percentage of your overhead costs to this client lets you determine the bottom-line profit from this matter.
- As you set up the account, add any applicable tags or metrics needed for future/final accounting.
- Communicate billing and payment schedule expectations with the client.
- If applicable, bill the retainer.

4. Know-How

- Read up on recent changes to law and regulations.
- Download and distribute any [know-how checklists](#) or legal checklists your staff may need throughout the matter. Doing this once at the outset of the matter will save time and self-doubt later.
- Confirm any procedural nuances. Are there any nuances to the law, or processes that you should be aware of? Update your team as well.

5. Project Management

- Set a budget. Although some aspects of time and tasks will be estimated, many are predictable. You'll need this budget in order to gauge whether or not it will be profitable.
- Set a timeline for your own work, including key strategy milestones, appointments and target negotiation dates, and (if applicable) court deadlines.
- Electronically connect those back-office deadlines with any [court/opposing party deadlines](#), using the "customized deadlines" feature of your practice management platform. If a court date changes, so does the filing deadline... and so do your office deadlines for transcribing an examination for discovery, conducting out-of-court negotiations, gathering public records, etc.
- Communicate workload and efficiency expectations. If your budget showed that it will be a close cut, discuss and implement back-office [efficiencies and technologies](#) now. And if you're working alone, establish a way to keep yourself on task – be it reminders, motivational quotes, or whatever works for you.

6. Document Management

- Reminder: Use the folders and tagging practices that you established at the outset of the matter.
- Digitize anything that came to you in hard copy such as handwritten notes. Use the shared digital Notes feature of your [practice management](#) platform instead.

7. Matter Management Aspects of Legal Research

- Make digital, shared Notes on key documents to memorialize why they are pivotal to your matter, and to ensure other team members are in step with your strategy.
- Set up shared research folders within WestlawNext Canada for use as the matter progresses.
- Set up KeyCite Alerts and Alerts to keep you apprised (via email) of any legal activity surrounding the parties, courts or issues in your matter.
- Ensure automated citation verification, so any changes to the status of "good law" in your documents will be red-flagged without effort from you.

8. Bottom Line Measurements

Determine matter profitability:

- Run a matter report showing time invested and actual payments received.
- Run a similar report of all firm time (across all matters) for the same beginning and ending time period.
- Gather the totals of your direct expenses for this matter, as well as a total report (across all matters) of your firm's overhead/back-office costs for the same beginning and ending time period.
- Determine the percentage of firm time that was dedicated to this matter. Using that percentage, determine the dollar amount of overhead/back-office cost that was actually allocated to this matter.
- Add the direct costs of this matter to the allocation of firm overhead/back-office costs. Subtract the result from your total payments received. This reveals the profitability of the specific matter.

Compare the profitability of this matter to other accounting measures that interest you. Examples:

- Legal issue: Is this type of matter typically profitable? How did this one compare to others?
- Client: Are this client's matters highly profitable? Did the client pay all or most of his or her bills?

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