

“Groupware is a core technology that enables users to manage and exploit an organization’s knowledge and expertise. Groupware can be used to preserve knowledge, develop knowledge, share knowledge and to apply expertise where – and exactly when – needed”

Jim Feurstein, developer of JFS Litigator’s Notebook

III – NETWORKING & INFRASTRUCTURE

CONTENTS

- A. Introduction – Why Network?**
- B. Peer to Peer Network**
- C. Client – Server Network**
- D. Advantages of a Client-Server Network**
- E. Server Software**
- F. Legal Technology Applications**

ANNEXURES & HANDOUTS

- 1. Networking & Infrastructure – Glossary of Terms**
- 2. Networking & Infrastructure – Price Table**

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Time to Network Your Law Office?

A. Introduction

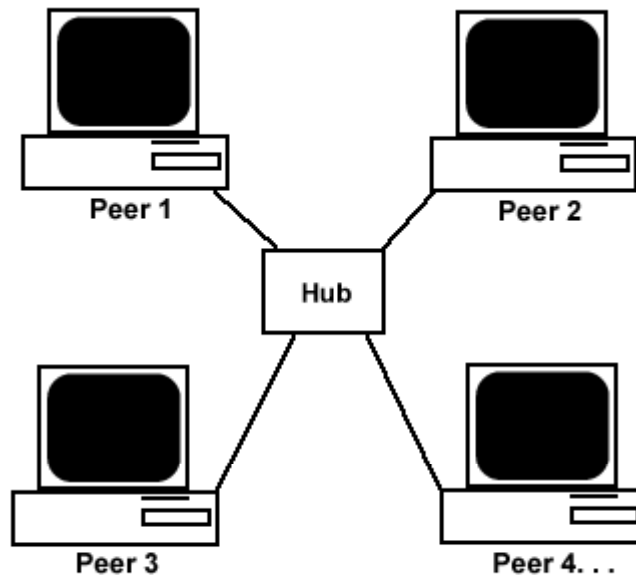
This seminar paper will help you to decide which IT infrastructure best serves your needs. In any dynamic and progressive law firm that is growing in size and influence, the question is no longer whether or not you should network your office, but whether or not it is time to upgrade the network to make it work more efficiently.

The immediate and obvious benefits of networking your computers are –

- immediate access to shared files
- enables several workstations to share office equipment such as printers and scanners
- enables several workstations to have access to a single internet connection.

As this paper may contain technical terms relating to Computer Networks, we have prepared a glossary of technical terms. [Click here to access the Glossary of Terms](#)

B. Peer-to-Peer Networks

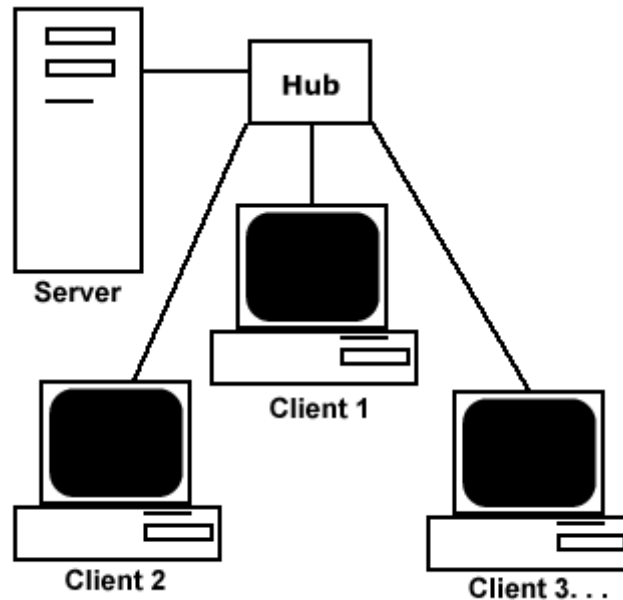


The components of a peer-to-peer network are –

1. A hub or switch which acts as the “exchange” and directs communication between terminals in a network;
2. Network cards installed in each workstation that enables the PCs to communicate with each other; and
3. Network cables are the glue that holds it all together.

The primary feature of a peer-to-peer network is the absence of a central dedicated server or hierarchy. Each PC on the network must handle the security and administration by itself.

C. Client – Server Networks



1. Introduction

This is a system of desktop computers or workstations (in computer network terminology, these are called the “client”) connected to a central computer (the “server”) that performs several important functions –

1. Acts as a central depository for data files (often called the “S” or “shared” Drive”);
2. Serves specific requests from the clients; for eg, a file server stores and services requests for specific data from the client; and a print server submits print requests from the clients to the printer; and
3. Runs applications for the network.

2. Server Components – Hardware & Software

Any PC can operate as a server but you will want a PC that is more robust, including

- hot swappable drives (referring to one or more hard disk drives that is easily removed)
- ability to support more than one processor
- support large amounts of RAM
- faster input and output
- fast network cards

Server Software is software that enables the server to process request from the clients and directs commands between the clients and applications. Standard network operating systems are Microsoft NT / 2000, LINUX and Novell.

There are also server applications for specific purposes; such as Web Servers enables Internet users to view and maintain webpages; Fax Servers enables you to send and receive faxes at your PC without a fax machine; Print Servers sends printing instructions directly from your PC to the printer.

[In terms of costs, click here to view the Costs Table](#)

4. Advantages of a Client-Server Network

The principle advantages that a client-server network has over a peer-to-peer network –

1. Centralisation of Data. This means that you can automate your daily backups, and restrict access rights to specific groups of people. Document management systems that operate on the central database will enable you to search and retrieve specific documents, restrict access and thereby maintain integrity in your “master” precedents; better control and management with “check in – check out” features and audit trails.
2. Security. Firewalls and proxy servers act as intermediaries between the office network and the world wide web; enabling you to enforce an access/deny policy to your office network.
3. Backup. Servers are a centralized depository for data. This facilitates backing up of that data. There are several different types of removable back up media available in the market today; including software that can automate a back-up of your data at a fixed time each day.
4. Intranet Email and Remote Access. Mail Servers enable internal email and messaging without going through the Internet. Most mail server applications (eg, MS Exchange) also has groupware applications that facilitate shared calendars and collaboration tools.
5. Software Applications. See below.

D. Legal Technology Applications

The creation of one “true” data repository is fundamental to the establishment of a quality practice management system that provides the real productivity benefits that technology can offer.

There are legal technology applications that address specific practice management needs –

Groupware is designed to facilitate collaboration among users (eg, MS Exchange, LOTUS Notes, NOVELL Groupwise)

Document Collaboration & Management (eg, Worldox, iManage, Workshare Synergy)

Case Management (eg, Open Practice, Amicus Attorney)

Financial Management & Controls (eg, Open Practice, Elite)

Remote Access

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