

25 Benefits of Case Management in 40 Minutes

by Dave Bilinsky¹

Lawyers often ask about what software they can bring into their practices to assist them in running their practices better — more effectively, efficiently and with less time involvement as compared to a paper-based system. Paper-based systems have been with the practice of law for as long as there have been lawyers practicing law — and have done yeoman's duty during that time. Any argument to change to a different system must address real benefits to be achieved by the new system — and not simply how to do the same tasks faster.

Case management software draws together your desktop calendar, your list of contacts, your filing system, your to-do and deadline systems and your time-keeping systems and wraps them up into one package. In most cases each individual program goes much further when interconnected and adds additional functionality to the system. For example, the latest version of Amicus Attorney (version 5) extends the communication handling that draws together your telephone call slips and messages and your email and will link to Outlook and associate all these calls, messages and emails with your files in Amicus.

This paper addresses the benefits that can be realized by adopting an electronic case management system. It is based on the author's experience with Amicus Attorney and, except where noted, the benefits to be realized apply to most of the more popular legal case management systems available in the market today. Other well-known products include Time Matters, ProLaw and the Integra Office System. Some of these benefits may also be realized by adopting contact management software (Microsoft Outlook, for example) — but contact management does not offer the full potential of integration with other legal systems software (such as accounting software, document generation software or time and billing software) that case management developers have strived to develop. Nor does it have the ability to track and manage client file details or record billable time.

In the final analysis, the most effective tool is one that is actually used. The purpose of visiting the benefits of case management is to reflect on your own practice and weigh the advantages offered by case management against your own firm culture, its adaptability to change, its ways and means of doing things, the personalities involved and the willingness to unlearn old habits in favour of new approaches. It is a testament to the appeal of case management software that the three most popular case management systems easily have over a quarter of a million users among them — and this is growing rapidly.

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Benefit #1 — Case management can organize your day

Case management software replaces the lawyer's desktop calendar with an electronic calendar. The advantages of changing to a networked, electronic calendar are as follows:

- Calendar appointments — can be created by clicking on any time on any day and creating an appointment.
- If the appointment date or time changes — you can drag and drop or click and move the appointment to the new date or time.
- If you create a conflicting appointment — the software will warn you of the conflict — no accidental double-bookings.
- Your secretary (or anyone else in the firm if you wish) can see your schedule and make appointments for you — without having to knock on your door to ask for your calendar.
- Your case management software will warn you of upcoming appointments (alarms for meetings). Amicus Attorney has “Peggy” who is one of the most friendly and professional alarms available today.
- You can take an appointment entry from your calendar and by a few clicks, convert it into a time and billing entry.
- Your calendar appointments can be loaded onto a Palm organizer (a portable “personal digital assistant” or “PDA”) and carried with you — and any changes that you have made to your calendar — or changes that have been made by your office to your calendar in your absence — are shared (synchronized) on your return and both the computer calendar and your Palm organizer calendar will reflect all the changes. Moreover, alarms that you have created for meetings in your computer calendar will be transferred to the Palm organizer and — even if the Palm is turned off — it will wake up and warn you of an upcoming appointment.

Benefit #2 — Case management can organize your firm

- Often, trying to schedule a partners meeting can be a headache — trying to compare everyone's calendar for a common free time. Case management simplifies this — you can display the master schedule and select the people (and the room) that you wish to bring together and then search for the first 30 minute (or 3 hour or whatever time) period between 9-5 (or whatever hours are relevant to you) that is free for all concerned. Moreover, once you have found this free time, you can schedule one appointment that is shown on everyone's calendar — with just a few clicks. Amicus Attorney has this master schedule feature.

Benefit #3 — Case management can manage your deadlines

Lawyers rarely lack for things to do — most of the time it is a battle deciding which of the Hydra's heads to cut off just at the moment. Case management offers the ability to juggle deadlines and dates as follows:

- Your electronic calendar has a “to-do” area — which carries forward your “to-dos” until they are marked “done.” No need to continually rewrite lists of to-dos.
- Amicus Attorney will indicate how many days each to-do has been in your system and how many days remain until the deadline date (or days past deadline, if this is the case).
- Your to-dos can be converted to appointments — thereby carving out time in your schedule to do your tasks — usually by a “drag and drop.” This ability to carry to-dos and use them to block off time in your calendar allows you to quickly take your priority items and create time in your calendar to get them done!
- To-dos can be embedded in your calendar — indicating tasks that have to be done in the future but need not clutter up your present to-do list. Examples are limitation reminders, bring forward reminders, preparation reminders — anything for which you need a memory prompt. They will pop up on your to-do list when the requisite trigger date is reached.
- When you use the case manager to track and log your calls, you can create a follow up reminder for the business discussed during the call.

Benefit #4 — Case management can make you more \$\$ by doing automatic time and billing entries

- We have already mentioned the ability to take an appointment from your calendar and by a few clicks convert it into a time and billing entry. This feature is available in other components of case management.
- You can take a to-do and click on it to indicate that it is done — case management software will then prompt you to create a time and billing entry from the entry.
- Amicus Attorney has a Communication Center that records all your incoming phone calls. When you click on a phone message indicating that you have returned the call — Amicus Attorney will prompt you to make an automatic time and billing entry from the phone slip or email. You can also record a note regarding the call and put it on your file in Amicus, thereby giving you fingertip access to your communications record on a file or with a particular contact.

Benefit #5 — Case management can do some of your work for you

- Most case managers have the ability to generate documents using the contacts in your database. Amicus Attorney has a feature called the “DO” button. Click on the DO button within a “to-do” to call someone. Amicus Attorney will then time your call, make a reminder to follow up the call, and make a time and billing entry.
- Case management systems will generate documents — retainer letters and agreements, fax cover sheets and the like — using the information in your contact database. Moreover, Amicus Attorney will time this task and create a time and billing entry for you for this work.
- The DO button can do virtually anything your computer can. Call it “Intelligence Assistance.”
- Amicus has announced “Amicus Assembly” — a sophisticated document assembly package that will automate the production of standard documents.

Benefit #6 — Organizes your information on each client file

- Open the File Information Module/Section in any case management software — in there you will see a description of the case, the parties in the case and all contact information, notes on the case, things to be done, logs of the calls and lists of the documents generated for the file — in other words, an up to date index of the file — without having to locate the paper version. Great to get an update on the file when your client or the lawyer on the other side calls — you can pull this information up on your screen while making small talk and be up to speed on the details lickety-split.

Benefit #7 — Keeps track of all the people in each file

- In an Amicus client file, click the “add person” button and see how you can add someone who is already in your database (such as another lawyer), a client, an expert — and note how all their contact information is now associated with the new file — without having to rekey in any information.
- Contact information changed on someone? Make the update once and — since all contacts are in a common database — this update is immediately reflected on all files involving this person.
- This “file-oriented” approach is the major difference between a contact manager (such as Microsoft Outlook) and a legal case manager.

Benefit #8 — Coordinates your communications with all the people in each file

- Open an Amicus client file and see the people associated with that file. Click on the telephone call icon for any of them — your call on that file is now being logged, your billable time is being recorded, and your notes of the conversation are being associated with the file. In Amicus Attorney you can click on the “show calls” button and review the calls with that person — or within any of the modules in Amicus Attorney you can click on the “i” info button beside a contact name and see the contact card for that person. You can then create a time and billing entry (through a few clicks), print up a memo for the paper file (using the print memo button in Amicus Attorney), create a follow-up reminder (again unique to Amicus Attorney), print up a fax cover sheet to the person with whom you have just talked, create an email to that person instead — and have all this information associated with your file.

Benefit #9 — Organizes linked events according to defined schedules

- OK, so you have to create a pleading and the response must be filed within X days — how can you use your case manager to manage this? By using linked events.
- Create a to-do with a deadline to file a pleading.
- Next create a to-do to check if a Reply is filed 14 days after the original pleading is served.
- Link the second to-do to start clocking days once the first to-do is clicked as being “Done.”
- Now you don’t have to worry about changing the date for checking on the Reply since the two events are linked — if the first date changes, the second date will change accordingly.
- The “chaining of events” for particular kinds of files can be saved as a precedent — for example, you can create a chained check-list of to-dos of all your usual pre-trial checks and production deadlines including expert evidence production dates for a personal injury file — and once created, you can reuse that precedent on every personal injury file.
- This “linked events” power can be used to create precedents. I know of an intellectual property lawyer who has established a 200 event “claim” that tracks a patent filing and all steps that must be taken along the way, using the initial filing date as the start. This was done with ProLaw.

Benefit #10 — Lets you keep all the documents on each file at your fingertips

- You have a case starting that will involve pleadings, transcripts, memos, telephone call memos, photographs, written evidence, tapes of telephone calls — in other words, diverse

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forms of information that will become integral to the file. Ordinarily this evidence must be stored in the paper file or in “buckets” or otherwise physically organized to be accessible to the lawyers and their experts in the case.

- Case management offers a different method. First, convert all this information into digital form — the paper documents can be scanned, and image and OCR (optical character recognition) files created. Audio and video evidence can also be converted to digital forms. Photographs can be scanned. In fact, virtually all information today can be converted to digital form.
- Second, go into your case manager and open the file in question. Every case manager will allow you to associate a document on a CD-ROM or on your hard-drive with a file in your File Manager. Once you have done this, you need not cart around any of the physical evidence with you again. You can call up the file, scan the documents and double-click on any particular entry to view, hear or see the evidence directly on your computer screen. Beats carting around boxes of documents with you where ever you go.
- Amicus Attorney also works with PaperPort software to scan and then store images of documents on the “brad” for a file (the area on each file that is akin to information typically held together in a physical file by a pin or clip).
- Amicus Attorney V has “the Library” — where you can store legal opinions, memos and precedents among other things, and place them together with lists of web sites that you find useful in your practice — in effect a one-stop shop for finding knowledge at your fingertips.

Benefit #11 — Automatically generates documents using information from files

- Case management software can create a fax cover sheet, a retainer agreement, a letter — even a pleading — by sharing information with your word processor (or with software such as Hot-Docs).
- You can create your own set of precedents to work in this way.

Benefit #12 — Provides you with customization ability and reports tailored for your practice

- All case management software packages can be configured or customized. Amicus Attorney comes with the Administrator which allows you to create custom fields, precedent forms for automatic document generation and custom information on the “brad.”
- Amicus Attorney has been programmed with many of the actions done for you — no need to customize (i.e., the DO button or the Print Memo button or the “i” button).

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- Amicus Attorney allows 50 custom fields, and custom layouts, per area of law (file type), enabling you to store different custom information for each different type of file you have.
- You can also set up 20 custom fields for contacts.
- Amicus Attorney allows you to customize your lists and categories — your list of file types or areas of law, contact types (i.e., judges, expert witnesses, etc.), appointment categories (i.e., court, mediation, etc.).
- Amicus Attorney allows customization of documents. All the information stored in the custom fields that you have set up by file type can be used when generating documents — thereby allowing you to create a custom set of ‘templates’ for specific areas of law.
- Amicus Attorney allows customizable reports.
- All other case management software has the customization ability.

Benefit #13 — Ensures that you NEVER forget to return a telephone call or email

- All case and contact managers will log calls. All case management software programs will allow you to create a time and billing entry and a reminder from a logged call. Amicus goes a few steps further by incorporating the Communication Center module into the system. The Communication Center is currently unique to Amicus Attorney.
- The Communication Center organizes all your phone calls and emails. New telephone messages are taken and appear in your Unreturned Calls tab in Amicus. They contain the caller, the file information and whether or not the call is urgent (if it is, then it appears on top of whatever else is on your desktop and an audible phone alarm is triggered on your desktop).
- From your call slip you can return the call, make notes about the call, create a call-back reminder, convert the phone message to a to-do, create a time and billing entry and print a memo about the call.
- All your phone messages remain under your unreturned calls tab until you click “Returned.” In this way you never miss or lose a phone message.
- Since all calls are logged and timed, you can say to someone “yes, I returned your call at 11:07 on the 14th and spoke to your secretary — I left word for you to call after 4 pm that day.”
- You can retrieve a list of all calls, all messages and all emails for a particular client or for a particular day, directly from your desktop. No running for the physical file!

Benefit #14 — Case management makes it easy to keep track of all your billable time

- Some case managers will track and log your time. This makes the task of keeping and logging billable time easier. Studies have shown that people who track their time contemporaneously with completing tasks log 20% more time than those who log their time at the end of each day. Amicus Attorney takes this task a bit further by prompting you to do a time and billing entry whenever you complete a task — such as making a telephone call, completing a “to-do,” etc.
- Amicus Attorney is unique in having a full Time Sheet module — which further enhances your time keeping.
- The Time Sheet shows a continual updated total of your billable time as you progress through your day.
- Furthermore, the Time Sheet keeps statistics on how close you are coming to your targets for billable hours per day, per week, per month and per year. This statistical analysis of your time is unique to Amicus Attorney and allows you to keep on top of your billable goals — and those of your associates as well.
- Case management software packages that record time will export your time directly into various accounting systems. Amicus Attorney interfaces with 24 preset systems and has a client and file link with Timeslips, Quickbooks, PCLaw, and Tabs III — which eliminates the need to enter your client information twice.
- In the File Manager you can set a warning trigger — to notify you if the billable time on a file exceeds a user-defined preset. This means that you can determine to be notified if the total billable time on a file hits a certain number — necessitating a file review or decision. In this way you can prevent files from becoming unwieldy monsters.

Benefit #15 — Case management — no double-entry of information

- Computerized case management software benefits from integration — meaning that information once entered into the system need not be rekeyed. Information that is entered once is re-used whenever it is needed. Amicus Attorney is a very ‘pro-active’ system, completing much of the information for you.
- An example of this is marking a task such as returning a phone call, or clicking a “to-do” as being done — which generates a time and billing entry in Amicus.
- Furthermore, since all information is shared, corrections are made once — and are immediately reflected elsewhere in the system — e.g., phone number changes. This saves

staff time, it ensures consistent information across the firm and saves embarrassing moments when mail is sent to an old address.

Benefit #16 — Provides you with pro-active advice about managing your practice

- Case management software will provide you with feedback on how you are progressing.
- Amicus Attorney will prompt you if you haven't opened a file in a user-selected time period — to ensure that you are continually bringing in new business.
- Amicus Attorney will remind you to call a client according to a user-defined time period — ensuring that you keep in touch with all of your clients.
- Amicus Attorney will prompt you if you haven't looked at your "To Do Someday" list — reminding you that there is a bigger forest if you get lost in the trees...
- Amicus will remind you if your regular "to-do" list is getting too long — you need help or you need to delegate some of your work to others.
- Amicus will also remind you if you have missed any deadline dates or have gone over-budget in terms of billable time on a file.

Benefit #17 — Pro-actively reminds you about business development activities and helps you keep in touch with clients

- Amicus Attorney's Dailies will remind you if you have not opened any new files lately.
- Furthermore, Amicus Attorney will prompt you to keep in touch with your contacts.
- Amicus Attorney will remind you if you have not posted any entries within a certain time on a file, reminding you not to allow files to go stale and unworked.

Benefit #18 — Helps you avoid malpractice claims/conflicts

- Case management software allows you to search your Contacts list to determine if you have a conflict regarding a new potential client.
- In Amicus Attorney you can check for conflicts while making small talk with the potential client by searching your Contacts — for example for "Smith" — and then asking the caller her full name and address: if it matches the Catherine Smith on Elm Drive in your system you can politely decline to speak to her further. Furthermore, you can then view the "All Files" option when viewing the contact — if they are attached to any file it will also show you the 'role' they play (party, lawyer, consultant, witness, etc.).

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- You can also file away limitation reminders in the Calendar “to-do” section — to remind you of upcoming limitation dates.
- Furthermore, Amicus Attorney will warn you if no time entries have been made on a file within a set period of time.
- You can set up a precedent to include a “report to client” as one of the steps to be taken after an appropriate period of time has passed or step has been taken on the file. This will create a to-do on your calendar to keep the particular client informed and avoid one of the main complaints of clients — namely of their lawyer not keeping in touch.

Benefit #19 — Lets you work from anywhere

- Amicus Attorney allows you to disconnect your Notebook from the office network, work independently, and then synchronize your data on reconnecting.
- All case management software packages come with a version that is networkable or a client-server edition.
- Most case management packages can be accessed remotely — either with dial-up access or via the Internet.
- Most of the case management software packages are now capable of transferring their contact, to-do and calendar information to your Palm organizers (or Palm OS devices such as the Handspring Visor). Amicus Attorney allows you to synchronize your data between your desktop and your Palm organizer on reconnecting.
- AAI — Anywhere, Anytime Intelligence — Amicus can email you information anywhere you are — even if the office is closed — provided your server is connected to the Internet. You can receive this information on a wireless PDA (personal digital assistant) such as a Palm Pilot or RIM Blackberry.

Benefit #20 — Lets you manage your intellectual assets

- Amicus Attorney has “the Library” — a knowledge management resource built into the software.
- You can organize your firm’s precedents, your firm’s research (memoranda and opinions), and other “unshelved” materials. This allows you a uniform and consistent method of building up your firm’s intellectual property and making it available to others in the firm for greater effectiveness, efficiency and increased billings.
- You can use the Library to serve as a “jump-off” point to your on-line research services such as Quicklaw, e-carswell, WestLaw or Lexis-Nexis. Amicus has info-at-your-

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fingertips about the services available within Westlaw, for example, such as KeyCite, WestDoc, West Legal Directory and provides insight on how to access these services and what you can expect by way of what they provide. The Library facilitates the capture of disbursements for such services, and generates a usage log for your librarian. As is expected with Amicus, billable time entries can be automatically generated for the time spent on the research. Connecting to the on-line services can be simplified by automatic provision of passwords and billing details for selected services.

- Amicus comes with many on-line resources already included — and you can build and add to the list.
- The Library can also be used as an Intranet resource by your office librarian, who can use the Library to provide information to everyone on how to best use each on-line resource.
- Once you have conducted your research, you can save the results to the client's file — ensuring that it is also available “at your fingertips.”

Benefit #21 — Case management works with your document management software

- If you're looking for a document, Amicus Attorney's built-in document management capabilities allow you to search for documents on a particular file, on all files or on all files for a particular client. Find any document attached to your files by searching on its full text or on a document summary profile.
- For those with Worldox, Amicus Attorney has a dynamic link with WORLDOX, the most popular document management software (Technolawyer @ award, 2001).
- This integration ability allows you to attach Worldox documents to the file “brad” (the Amicus Attorney electronic file) so that Amicus organizes all the relevant information on your file (along with telephone messages, telephone calls, emails and documents).
- If you create, modify or delete a Worldox profile when offline in Amicus Attorney, then the changes are updated automatically when back online.

Benefit #22 — Case management calculates dates for you

- You need to calculate forward dates constantly as a lawyer — from limitation dates to dates dependent on trial schedules and the like.
- The Date Calculator built into Amicus Attorney allows you to calculate the number of business days, calendar days, weeks, months and years before, after or between any day or set of dates.

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- If a reminder falls on a weekend or statutory holiday, then you can pre-select if you want to see the reminder before, during or after the weekend or holiday — so that you never miss an important deadline.

Benefit #23 — Case management works with CompuLaw to calculate deadlines (this will be of particular interest when CompuLaw releases Court Rules Databases for Canadian jurisdictions)

- Amicus now integrates with CompuLaw's Court Rules Databases. This allows Amicus Attorney customers to schedule court dockets automatically according to State and Federal court rules. Users can schedule dozens of related dates in just seconds. Appropriate deadlines are entered instantly into the user's calendar.
- Further, CompuLaw/Amicus Attorney Version V users have the ability to take advantage of CompuLaw's Jurisdiction Selection Experts™. This feature allows users to schedule the correct deadlines for any jurisdiction, by accessing Windows "Explorer-style" trees, eliminating the need to learn cryptic codes.
- The Verify CompuLaw Events feature has been replaced with the CompuLaw Date Maintenance feature. Now, when CompuLaw's rule sets change, the user's calendar in Amicus Attorney will be automatically updated, saving even more time.

Benefit #24 — Case management software can give you the "30,000" foot view on your practice

- The Dailies feature allows you to take a moment and answer the question: "What's going on today?" This feature provides you with an overview of your practice, your firm, the legal community and the world around you.
- At the start of your day Amicus Attorney goes through your system and prepares a report on things to which you need to pay attention. These practice reminders include items such as:
 - today's critical events (those items tagged as "critical" in your calendar),
 - advice on managing your to-do list (if items are becoming a little stale),
 - reminders to make or post time entries (so your accounting system has an accurate snapshot of your billable time),
 - suggestions for business development and internal announcements from your system administrator.
- You can go back to the "Dailies" at any time of the day to regain your perspective and gain a quick appreciation of your outstanding to-dos, unreturned telephone calls and emails and

your daily appointments. This ensures that you don't end the day without at least being reminded that you had to do something before you left!!

Benefit #25 — Case management helps you sleep at night

- Case management software can help you avoid those wake-up-in-the-middle-of-the-night-did-I-remember-to-file-the-action-on-the-Smith-matter-in-time nightmares.
- Once you have implemented case management, you can allow the software to look after those features that once kept you up, such as:
 - limitation reminders,
 - conflict checks,
 - exceeding a billing limit on a file,
 - failing to keep on top of deadlines on files,
 - failing to call someone back, or
 - failing to recall to call someone back,
 - failing to return an email,because they are monitored for you.
- In conclusion, case management software offers to you:
 - ease of use,
 - shared information,
 - integration into your office systems, in particular accounting, and
 - the ability to think and work the way you do as a lawyer.

As a lawyer you are not a data entry clerk — any system you adopt should allow you to record tasks as you complete them — in an effortless manner. It should allow you to forget the background part of managing a case by taking that over for you.

This is really practice management — and I think it is invaluable.

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