

What should legal IT leaders invest in now?



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During this uncertain economy, we should invest in keeping our current technology stable so our attorneys remain as productive as possible, while exploring initiatives that will give our firm a competitive edge and possibly reduce cost. A rollout such as Office 2007 may be inevitable but is not absolutely necessary at this time, would be disruptive to the firm, and almost certainly have your attorneys asking, "Why now?". However, implementing technologies such as WAN acceleration, where you can reduce the cost of bandwidth while providing the ability to make users more productive, seems to be a wise investment both from a competitive and cost efficiency standpoint. Lastly, I think it is always a good idea to invest in the professional development of your staff, and it's especially important this year. You want to retain your staff, so invest a little more in expanding their skill set for future projects — you can always send them to Office 2007 training to get ready for that inevitable widespread adoption!



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I believe our best investment right now is in our people. If you've assembled a good team, they can help your firm get through a difficult economic time; they will have good ideas about cost management and client and/or customer service. In our IT department, one of our business plan initiatives for 2009 is to continually think of ways we can add that extra bit of value to the organization. We will spend a few moments on that topic in each team meeting. As I worked with the managing partner through the budget process at the end of 2008, he said repeatedly, "We would rather keep people than things if the things can be sacrificed without adversely affecting the service we provide our clients." I agree with him.

I, for one, do not think conversion to Vista and Office 2007 falls into the essential category.



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From various conversations I've had recently with my CIO peers around the country, it seems clear that most of us are in a cost containment mode for 2009, and we will focus on only the most essential needs in terms of new or continuing projects, as well as ongoing maintenance activities. This is not a change of course, but rather a matter of emphasis and focus. For many of us, infrastructure consolidation and virtualization represent strategies aimed both at containing costs and increasing future flexibility. I, for one, do not think conversion to Vista and Office 2007 falls into the essential category, and we'll be moving slowly on that, keeping an eye on developments with Microsoft's Windows 7 operating system.