



**Focus**  **Law**

## Law Firms Battle Information Technology Issues

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The Daily News

A personal e-mail directory is an invaluable tool for anyone in business these days. But that trusty contact list can do some serious damage, especially at the modern law firm.

Computer viruses prey on e-mail, and when an address is attacked, the virus can in turn be sent to every address in the user's directory.

A particular instance of this stands out in Edward Rothman's mind. Rothman is chief consultant with The Rothman Co., a firm that works with businesses – including several area law firms – to address information technology issues.

"The first time I came across this problem I was a (chief information officer) for a large corporation," he said. "We received a virus directed to the chairman and CEO of the company because his e-mail address was in the phone book of the lawyer who had received the virus and got infected."

A virus that infected one attorney's e-mail caused the IT departments at both the law firm and the corporation to devote considerable time and resources to investigating the problem.

**Dependent on technology.** And that instance is not isolated, as many companies experience problems with computer viruses and e-mail spam. Law firms are particularly vulnerable, because countless documents change hands via e-mail on a daily basis.

"Law firms, as a general rule, are very dependent on technology," said Mark Giannini, chief executive officer of Service Assurance, a Memphis-based firm that provides technology support. "All of their documents and their work product are computer-based

these days."

And attorneys have been known to have an occasional enemy, which doesn't help.

"There have been some cases where some have been targeted by a disgruntled client," Giannini said. "Or in many cases, law firms that represent certain cases that certain sympathetic groups don't like, they will be targeted."

The e-mail intruders are sometimes brought in by attorneys trying to save time.

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chief consultant, The Rothman Co.

Rothman said. "They say, 'Oh, I never get a virus and if I leave it switched on, it takes me too long to open the documents I need to open and read.'"

**Advanced solutions.** The simple solution is for the computer user to allow the software to do its job. And virus scan technology is continuing to advance, allowing firms to put in place greater services than have ever been used to combat e-mail intruders.

Larger law firms, including Armstrong Allen PLLC, Glankler Brown PLLC and Baker, Donelson, Bearman, Caldwell & Berkowitz PC, are able to employ individuals or departments that focus solely on IT issues. Baker Donelson has offices in 10 locations, meaning the firm heavily relies on its network.

"We've certainly had our share of chal-

lenges," said John Green, CIO for the firm. "I think we do a very good job of keeping up with what's going on out there and putting in place the best systems we can possibly have to prevent viruses and worms from getting inside the firm. We spend a tremendous amount of time dealing with the spam issue."

That time includes implementing a three-part process being used in many businesses today. Starting with a third-party vendor, all of Baker Donelson's incoming e-mail is scanned before arriving at the firm's firewall, the second level of defense. If any unwanted

mail gets through there, a mail sweeper goes to work.

The system must be working, as Green said more than 30,000 spam e-mails are filtered out per day.

**Need for consulting.** But not every firm is able to dedicate a department or even one employee to focus on the task. Plus, many com-

puter users probably only know the basics – how to turn the computer on and how to send e-mail – and probably aren't interested in learning more.

So for many lawyers and law firms, even more so than in many other types of businesses, outsourcing IT work is necessary.

"You tend to find there isn't the same degree of protection and uniformity within a law firm that you might find in a business, largely because law firms tend to have smaller numbers of personnel," Rothman said. "A number of people have left senior-level positions inside IT departments (to serve as consultants) because they see this

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sort of hole with service that needs to be provided.”

**Improving productivity.**

While not all viruses and spam can be stopped, technology has come a long way to help firms improve productivity.

“It used to be a tremendous issue for lawyers,” Green said. “It’s been significantly better over the last two or so years since we’ve had those systems in place. Moving the first level of defense outside the firm has been a significant improvement, because when your system has to reject or filter those first 20,000 e-mails a day, it takes up a lot of your bandwidth. That brings the rest of your network to a crawl.”


Spam that gets through also means

wasted time. Employees receive an average of 13-plus spam e-mails a day, Giannini said.

“If you have a user that spends a fair amount of time on the Internet, they can receive hundreds of spam messages a day,” he

ity down isn’t the only drawback for a firm – its image and credibility also can be threatened.

“About a year ago at a law firm in California, they not only got infected once, but they got infected with the same virus five times in the space of a month,” Rothman said. “It’s not only a problem for the law firm in terms of being virus-ridden. It’s also a huge problem in terms of their image with their clients. Law firms are part of the protective establishment. You hire a law firm to protect you from problems. You don’t hire them to bombard you with more problems.”



**Unsolicited commercial e-mail is estimated to account for more than half of all e-mail traffic, up from an estimated 7 percent in 2001.**  
Source: the CAN-SPAM Act of 2003

said. “If you just look at 15 spam messages a day, it will take about six minutes to process it. The average cost per employee per year of spam is almost \$1,000. So for those big law firms, when they’ve got a spam problem, it becomes a substantial cost.”

**A dual threat.** But bringing productiv-

problems. You don’t hire them to bombard you with more problems.”

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