Building a Technology Budget

BUILDING YOUR BUDGET: Whenever you're going to spend a lot of money or buy a lot of different things (which may or may not add up to a lot of money), the best first step is to create a budget. For example, here's a screenshot of a sample budget.

Your Firm Budget				
Description	**Quantity**	**Unit Price**	**Subtotals**	**Grand Totals**
Computers				
Notebooks: Dell Latitude E6430 notebook computers - includes dual 23" monitors, docking station, 3 yr/next business day/on-site warranty and 3 yr accidental damage protection, DVD/RW, webcam, backlit keyboard, fingerprint reader for security, bluetooth, Microsoft Office and Adobe Acrobat XI	2	$2,319.58	$4,639.16	
Desktops: Dell OptiPlex 7010 desktop computers - includes dual 23" monitors, 3 yr/next business day/on-site warranty , DVD/RW. Do not include MS Office because they won't leave the office.	1	$1,458.02	$1,458.02	
Services: Computer set up & configuration - fix defaults with Windows 7 and MS Office, download all updates to Windows & Office, install antivirus software - go through 8 page checklist on each computer.	3	$300.00	$900.00	
Delivery & Installation: Deliver all new computers and hardware at your office, setup & install everything (computers, scanners, VOIP phones, and iPads); answer any questions; make sure everything works properly. FLAT FEE PER DAY	1	$1,650.00	$1,650.00	
Computers Total:			$8,647.18	$8,647.18
Tablets				
iPad w/ Retina Display 64 GB Black - Wi-Fi only (www.amazon.com)	2	$672.95	$1,345.90	
Anker® Ultrathin iPad Bluetooth Wireless Keyboard Aluminum Cover with Stand for iPad	2	$35.99	$71.98	
Tablet Total:			$1,417.88	$1,417.88

If you build your budget in a spreadsheet (Excel, for example), it gives you the flexibility to play with the quantities and prices to see how it impacts the total. This process also helps you think of every possible thing you're going to need. Surprises are what can ruin budgets so writing it all down helps avoid them which giving you a realistic idea of what it's all going to cost.

SAVE MONEY BUT DON'T BE CHEAP:

Some Things Are Worth Spending More On: There are some things worth spending a little more money on to ensure that you're getting the quality and performance you need. For example, if you spend 10+ hours a day in front of a computer, then it makes sense to buy one that will be enjoyable to use. Faster processors, lighter laptops, bigger monitors and nicer keyboards all cost a little more. If you're talking about something you use constantly, every day, then remove it as a cost-cutting target. Getting the best

deal you can on high-quality technology is always better than buying under-powered, under-performing technology just because it costs less.

Cheap Software Often Requires Painful Trade-Offs: For example, we recently worked with a firm that just didn't want to spend money on legal industry standards like Microsoft Exchange & Outlook. So they went with open source1 software instead. Open source means that they paid nothing for the software. While it's nice to pay nothing for software, that also means that there's no one to call for technical support and that it integrates with nothing. By contrast, Exchange and Outlook integrate with almost everything. For example, almost all matter management programs sync with Exchange/Outlook. Every Windows and Mac computer, every Android or iOS tablet and every Windows, Android, Blackberry and iOS smartphone wirelessly sync with Exchange/Outlook. Document management programs all integrate with Outlook. Adobe Acrobat has an incredible integration with Outlook. The list goes on. The end result of this open-source money saving strategy for the firm in question was that all of the users hated the feature-deprived email software, it linked with nothing else they used and no one could get their email, calendar or contacts from the free email software to sync with their tablets or phones.

You can get free office suites including word processors (see www.openoffice.org for example), free PDF creation programs (see www.cutepdf.com for example), and free Fax services (see https://faxzero.com/ for example). However, they're not the legal-industry standard, they have non-existent technical support and they integrate/link with nothing else. In short, they're just not worth it.

Waiting For Technology To Die Is The Worst Way to Upgrade: Many law offices use their existing technology until it dies. This is a really bad idea for the following reasons:

Data Loss: Using anything until it no longer works often means there is no opportunity to transfer data, programs, etc. from the old device to the new one. Transferring data while the old and new devices are still working is typically a lot easier than trying to restore data from a dead device onto a new one.

No Time To Research: If someone's computer just died, you don't have time to conduct a lot of research to ensure you're getting the best replacement technology at the best price.

No Time To Wait For Something To Ship: You always get better deals from online vendors than bricks and mortar vendors. However, if whatever piece of technology is mission-critical, then you might not even have time to wait for something to be shipped to you (or built and shipped to you like a custom computer configuration). This means you'll have to go to the nearest store and buy whatever they have in stock, regardless of whether it's appropriate for your use or your office.

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1 Generically, open source refers to a program in which the source code is available to the general public for use and/or modification from its original design free of charge, i.e., open. Open source code is typically created as a collaborative effort in which programmers improve upon the code and share the changes within the community. Open source sprouted in the technological community as a response to proprietary software owned by corporations. see http://www.webopedia.com/TERM/O/open_source.html, by Vangie Beal.

No Time To Negotiate: If you're buying more than 1 of anything, then you are in a good position to negotiate price. If you buy everything 1 at a time as old technology dies, then you give up that leverage and you pay the most.

End Up With a Hodge-Podge Mix of Technology: Problems with having a varied mix of technology include the following:

It's more expensive to maintain computers of different types/brands/models bought at different times than it is to maintain a set of identical computers bought together.

Users can't easily help each other if your office is using Office 2003, 2007, 2010 and 2013.

If you have 5 different printers, then you have to keep 5 different toner cartridges at all times.

If you haven't upgraded software in a long time (5 years or more), it may no longer be supported by the manufacturer which means you don't have any technical support options.