

# The IT Question

At what point does a law firm need its own technology guru on staff?

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What's on legal administrators' minds? Take a closer look at feedback on one topic recently discussed in the online ALA member discussion groups.



***Although I've reviewed several surveys on this subject, I'd like to know how many of you in a firm close to our size (staff of 18) have a full-time IT professional on staff.***

**My firm is not your size**, but what others are doing may not help answer your question. You should assess your personal IT strengths and weaknesses, the time you have to invest in keeping your hardware and software working, the level of IT sophistication of your users, the complexity of the IT hardware and software you are using, the current cost (internal and external) of providing IT support to your firm and the potential tasks and cost of a full-time IT person on staff.

**We have 17 attorneys at our firm.** We have a full-time IT person and use an outside company to support our servers and the network foundation. Our in-house person responds to inquiries on application support, printing, setting up new users and other day-to-day computer support.

**With 13 attorneys and 7 paralegal-timekeepers**, we have a half-time IT position (20 hours per week), with the flexibility to increase those hours when necessary in response to particular situations (replacing the office PCs, for example).

**We have one full-time person** and use an outside consultant to help with large projects and for highly technical issues that are beyond our employee's scope. I was successful in getting this position created in 1997 after a consultant from a large legal management firm said a firm could usually justify a full-time IT person when it had at least 35 users. That was back when the world was not all using Windows – and things haven't gotten any easier since then!

**Our 17-attorney firm** has an arrangement with a technical consultant who is onsite every Thursday for approximately four hours. He is also on call in the event of an emergency, and he's accessible via e-mail for pesky little problems that surface on a day-to-day basis. This has worked very well for our firm – great service without paying out an additional salary and benefits.

Is this a hot topic for you? Do you have a question for your peers? Visit [www.alanet.org/members/network/](http://www.alanet.org/members/network/) to post or read questions and comments. ✱



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