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## Basecamp Project Management for Law Firms

by SAM GLOVER on JUNE 14, 2010

Erin Blaskie mentioned the stripped-to-the-essentials project management



software, [Basecamp](#), in her post on [virtual assistants and delegation](#), but Basecamp is good for more than working with virtual assistants.

Project management software evolved as a way to help groups of people accomplish a task together. Much project management software, however, is more time-consuming than the actual project, and impedes productivity. [Basecamp](#) strips down project management to the essential features, according to developer 37signals. Basically, it allows team members to share tasks, messages, and files.

### Task management

Basecamp's central feature is its ability to manage tasks. And to-do lists are, after all, the heart of every project. [Basecamp](#) uses three different types of to-do: milestones, to-do lists, and to-do items. A milestone is tied to a date. The day your motion papers are due, for example. You can tie a to-do list to that milestone, and assign individual to-do items to members of your team.

So for a motion for summary judgment, you will need a notice of hearing, a motion, a memorandum, an affidavit or three, a proposed order, and a certificate of service. Generate (at least) a to-do item for each, assign it to a member of your team, and off they go. If questions arise related to a task, they can use the messaging features to keep relevant comments in one place.

Incidentally, you can create to-do templates. For example, if you wanted to use it for every file, you could create your file opening checklist as a template, and automatically apply it to every new file you open.

## **Messaging**

Basecamp integrates messaging very well. You can add messages on their own, but you can also add comment threads to tasks and milestones, allowing conversations targeted to the job at hand.

Since we all have email—and it works just fine—I was surprised to see how useful Basecamp’s messaging is. Here is why: when you add a comment, it sends an email to the recipient, who can just hit reply to add another comment. This means that everyone can use Basecamp without needing to visit the site.

I recently took a case as co-counsel with a non-profit. Because I wanted to use Basecamp to manage three attorneys doing work on one file, I added each of them to the project. They signed up for a username and password, but they don’t really ever need to sign in again. Every time I assign them a task or send a message, they get an email. It works great, and means I can use Basecamp to manage the project, while they can focus on completing their tasks.

## **Files**

You can upload files to your Basecamp projects, and it includes web-based version control, too. This came in handy for me recently when I wanted to give my co-counsel a copy of my state pleading template. I just uploaded it to Basecamp so he could get at it.

It is a little clumsy for actually editing a document, which is why it includes Writeboards.

## **Collaborative writing**

Writeboards are a—very basic—collaborative writing space. Each writeboard is basically a dead-simple word processor that you can use to draft a document with your team. It works great for portions of briefs, long letters, or other documents, but you might not find it particularly useful when compared with the flexibility of Google Docs or even just Dropbox.

I find this to be the least-useful feature of Basecamp, although I have had occasion to use a writeboard already, and can see why it might come in handy from time to time.

### **A great tool for complex projects**

I do not plan to use Basecamp for every case we take on. But for cases that involve many sub-projects (milestones), it really helps to keep track of things. Right now, I am using it for several cases that involve more work than average, and two cases that involve co-counsel outside the firm.

Basecamp is software you can just pick up and run with. You don't need a user manual; you just need 30 seconds to get started. It is all pretty self-explanatory, and its usefulness should be self-evident. I signed up for the \$24/month plan, and I am positive that **Basecamp** is going to become one of our primary tools.