

FILENAME CONVERSIONS

Does anyone have any thoughts or resources they can provide regarding efficient computer filenaming conventions/systems for cases? The one I use now works fine, I guess, but I'm always looking for ways to make things run more smoothly.

My current convention goes something like this: Doe, John - 2011.12.09 - Letter to opposing counsel re settlement proposal

I have the client folders broken up into subfolders depending upon the nature of the case, but every file has its own Correspondence, Pleadings, Orders subfolders. Then I just add new subfolders as they become necessary (Discovery, Pictures, Transcripts, etc.).

Any thoughts?

If you use Windows, you can use yy.mm.dd in the first part of the file name and Windows sorts the file names within that folder in 'chron' order, e.g. 11.12.08 LT OPC (letter to opposing counsel). I do not know if Mac OS will do the same

Michael Boli, California

I do not believe there is any one right answer. The convention that you adopt should be consistent and track the information that you use most frequently or make the cases and documents readily identifiable. Remember, naming conventions are not created to make filing clear, but rather to make locating easier. Thinking about how you will search for a document or file in the future will likely help you develop an effective naming system.

Personally, I don't like dates because it doesn't help me identify the style of document; however, I do use them in large files and it usually helps to locate a specific document. However, if your practice requires you to create many of the same style documents for the same client, then dates would be extremely helpful in finding the right document.

Bart Countess, Florida

I'm also interested in this. And how do folks keep their non-case digital files organized? Like forms for various courts, model motions/discovery requests, etc?

Monica Elkinton, Alaska

I create my files like this:

I have to "master" folders, "Clients" and "Legal Stuff." I use Windows sync. to keep them updated on my server and laptop. In my "Legal Stuff" folder I have all of my form letters, court forms, presentations, website backups, logos, etc... In my "Clients" folder, each client has their own sub-folder. Since Amicus Attorney/Accounting automatically generates file and matter numbers, my sub-folder will look like this: "1034 - Proy, Nick." In that folder I have a sub-folder for each matter: 001 - LLC formation, 002 - Zoning Variance, etc...

I used to use sub-folders for each matter within the matter folder, but I found it more organized to have all of the files displayed in one location and organize the files by name, and using the naming convention below, the most recent file is always at the upper left-hand corner, so it's easy to see what the last thing done in the file was.

All of my files are named "YYYY-MM-DD - Title" (ie: "2011-12-08 – Client Letter"). This works for me, but it may not work for you.

I'd use whatever you find the most efficient. I know that I can't stand using abbreviations for file names like OC (Opposing Counsel) or C (Client), so my files are "2011-12-08 - Opposing Counsel Letter." All of my hardcopy files are organized by: Last Name, First Name (Client ID). I have a rubber stamp that says "FILE CLOSED" in red ink with a blank line for the date. Once a matter is completed the physical file comes out of my active files and the date is right on the cover of the file. My retention policy is 5 years, so I can easily purge my files down the road.

Nicholas Proy, Maryland

For my non-case files I have an extensive library that is filed by both type of document and type of case it would be used for (in other words, it resides in one folder with a hyperlink copy in other appropriate folders). I keep the library segregated from my regular files. I treat the library just as I would a physical library, by checking things out and saving markups to the appropriate case files. Should I need to make a permanent change to a document I can make that change in the library and it is available for use later. I keep all my forms in the Library, all my treatises, guides, and formbooks, and even cases that I come across are filed under the appropriate folders in a new folder called, cases.

Roger Traversa, Pennsylvania

Internal to a client folder, I have sub-folders for correspondence, pleadings, etc. Then, I name files within the sub-folders uniformly like this:

Letter 10-04-2011 from client to Callahan.docx
Email 11-08-2011 to client re LLC dispute.docx
Phone call 12-01-2011 from Callahan.rtf

If you use the word identifier first and then the date, windows auto-sorts the files quite nicely so that every file labeled "letter," for example, is chronologically listed in the sub-folder, then so are the emails, and so forth.

Tanner W. Pittman, Georgia

I don't do litigation, but here's my format:

yyyymmdd-description-matternumber

I like the fact the dox are all in chrono order and I can always tell which is the most recent. I also save dox with a pw to modify. The pw is something simple like a single letter, but when I open the doc, it reminds me I may not want to tamper with an as-filed, or as-sent doc. When a doc is filed, even as a .pdf, I follow the date with "af". If I receive a doc via regular mail, it's "rm", if I download it, it "dl", and if it comes via email, it's "em". If it's a doc that I send out to sign, I include "blank" in the description. Then when it comes back signed, I substitute "signed" for "blank".

I know, anal, anal, anal, but it works for me, especially when my memory doesn't. It also helps with searching for a doc when I don't remember exactly where it is. Not a problem with client dox, though.

Bill

William B. Richards

Thanks all for the thoughts on this. As a followup, how many of you use "redundant" filing in your physical (or electronic) file? As in, if you have a separate subfolder/file for all correspondence, and there is, say, a Motion for Summary Judgment -- do you also have all correspondence regarding the MSJ in the MSJ subfolder/file?

Ryan Phillips, South Carolina

I use numerical clients, and matters for each client--it preserves confidentiality and it also means that I automatically sort. My second refinance for john doe might be 106-003, where 106 is "john doe" and -003 is "second refinance."

My filenames are actually quite short: "letter with settlement proposal." that's because my folder structure, not my filename, tells me what it is.

However, I think it's good practice to include a "tracer" in every letter that makes it clear what it is. My "tracer" automatically includes my folder names, so it would show up as "106-003/letter with settlement proposal." 15 years from now you'll thank me.

I don't bother including the date in the filename. if it's relevant it's in the document, and if it's not in the document then it's not relevant.

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts
