

## White Paper

### **Outsourcing Your Legal Document Transcription: Working Smarter in Today's Economy**

Overhead costs pose a serious challenge to virtually every law practice as they strive to increase revenue and stay competitive in today's uncertain economy. Everything from office space to administrative salaries impact profitability at a time when margins are strained by limited numbers of clients who themselves are seeking to economize. Document production is one of the most expensive, yet most important, administrative functions in large and small firms alike.

Off-site, outsourced document transcription affords an immediate and effective alternative solution to the hours of daily documentation required to support a thriving practice. Using an outsourced transcription service to type correspondence, briefs, pleadings, deposition summaries and other documents frees substantial amounts of time, reduces backlog, lowers overhead, and enables attorney and staff to be more productive and profitable. And important changes have taken place in the transcription field, making it advantageous to assess how the right transcription solution can benefit every type of law practice today.

#### **What is Outsourced Transcription Today?**

Outsourced transcription is an external service that accepts dictated or otherwise recorded material and types it to your specifications. Transcription is not voice or speech recognition, which uses computer software to convert a user's speech into typed text.

Some firms have previous experience with transcription services, either in their current operations or in the past, using outdated processes - recording dictation onto cassette tapes, delivering those tapes to a typist and awaiting the return of the completed documents. But by choosing the right provider today, it is possible to have instant access to your transcription service from the office, from home or while travelling. Attorneys and staff can use any telephone to dictate directly into the provider's system, or upload dictation from their desktops, laptops, handheld recorders or mobile devices. Users can dictate free-form text for pleadings, briefs, correspondence, email content, and many other documents, and have them completed in a fraction of the time it would take to type them in-house. Through the use of templates, users can dictate the content of any standardized documents, greatly reducing the amount of time it typically takes to complete the work. The transcription provider returns completed documents via email or secure pick up from a web site. Depending on the provider you choose, your documents can be returned in as little as three hours or less.

## **Benefits of Outsourced Transcription**

### **Generates Immediate Reductions in Overhead**

Using a pay-as-you-go outsourced transcription service, provided they have large enough numbers of typists to provide consistently fast turnaround, can decrease overhead immediately by reducing the need for in-house administrative personnel. There is no effort or expense required to purchase, develop, integrate or test new hardware or software, and the attorneys and staff in your practice can start using it quickly with minimal or no training. Look for a provider with no contract, no usage minimums and no start up costs and you may be able to start saving right away.

### **Produces Substantial Time Savings**

Using a transcription service shifts more of your attorneys' and in-house staff's time to more critical functions and to the specialized work they are hired to perform.

### **Enables More Work in a Compressed Timeframe**

An outsourced transcription service with a large base of typists can help you achieve greater amounts of work in a shorter amount of time. For example, in preparing for trial, you may have several associates working simultaneously on different documents. This can cause backups and delays in your existing administrative pool and/or require you to retain after hours administrative help. Using a transcription company enables you to send multiple documents for transcription at any time, day or night, and have those documents produced simultaneously. This capability applies to individual work as well as team scenarios. For example, if an attorney is preparing a lengthy pleading, he or she can dictate a portion of the pleading and send it for transcription. The provider will begin typing the document while the attorney dictates the next portion of the pleading. Continuing in this way, the attorney will have very little lag time between finishing the dictation and receiving the completed transcription.

### **Makes Individual Attorneys More Productive**

How many times does an attorney leave a client interview, only to rush to the next meeting or court appearance, then to the next, until she finds herself pouring over her notes late at night trying to interpret what she wrote hours earlier? With a transcription service, that attorney could have instead:

1. Left the client meeting
2. Called the provider's telephone dictation line from the car while the meeting is still fresh in her mind
3. Recorded the points from the meeting while referring to her handwritten notes
4. Received the typewritten notes from the transcription provider via email upon returning to the office.

There are many similar scenarios that can increase the productivity and timeliness of attorneys' individual work. Transcription also supports the mobility, flexible schedules and work from home scenarios that are increasingly common.

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*Using a transcription service helped a 150 attorney firm in California cut their in-house administrative staff in half, while reducing their net cost per document by 40%.*

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*Outsourcing transcription enables your existing administrative staff to provide more robust support to the attorneys in your office.*

## **Outsourced Transcription in a Legal Context**

Outsourced transcription has many applications in a law office setting:

1. **Typing documents that would otherwise be produced by in-house administrative staff.** Using outsourced transcription enables your office to reduce the number of administrative employees and the associated office space, benefits, HR overhead, taxes and other expenses. It also enables your practice to refocus remaining administrative staff on more value-added functions. Examples include:
  - Correspondence
  - Legal briefs
  - Legal pleadings
  - In-house Memoranda
  - Deposition summaries
  - Witness interviews
  
2. **Typing attorney notes, summaries, and correspondence that would otherwise be produced by associates and partners themselves.** Attorneys spend hours writing and answering emails and providing review comments to associates and paralegals. Since dictating is much faster than typing, attorneys can use transcription to quickly send the required information for transcription, freeing themselves and other internal staff to do other more value-added tasks. Using outsourced transcription enables your key staff to focus on and bill for the more critical functions of the firm and generally achieve greater productivity and profitability. Examples include:
  - Email
  - Notes/comments from document reviews
  - Transcriptions of meetings
  - Instructions and notes to colleagues or subordinates
  - Time/billing records
  - Post meeting/hearing notes
  - Work from home/after hours work
  - Trial preparation
  - Notes, thoughts and ideas while away from the office
  
3. **Serving as on-demand supplemental typing services.** Using a 24-hour, on-demand transcription service eliminates the need to retain expensive after hours help that you may or may not end up utilizing. Examples include:
  - Temporary help during expected or unexpected spikes in work, such as a large case or trial preparation.
  - Unplanned absence of regular staff.
  - Substitute help for scheduled absences such as vacation, maternity leaves, FMLA, etc.

## **How Much Does It Cost?**

Transcription services are generally priced by the hour of recorded dictation, by number of typed pages, or by the number of typed words. Typical fees range from \$4.50 to \$7.00 per page (about 300 words per page). Prices can be much higher depending on the factors an individual company uses, so it is critical to understand the pricing structure when evaluating any potential provider. Common factors that influence pricing include:

- Turnaround times. Some providers offer tiered pricing depending on how soon you need your documents returned.
- Use of off-shore typists. Providers who use less expensive off-shore labor can sometimes offer lower rates.
- Multiple speakers on a dictation versus a single speaker. Rates to transcribe multiple speakers are usually higher.
- Minimum usage or minimum charge requirements. In some cases, providers charge a standard amount for each invoice over and above the charges for the actual transcription. In other cases, there is a recurring monthly charge or an overall minimum usage charge.
- Software licenses or usage fees. Providers may offer software to record and upload dictations using a computer. When evaluating providers, ask if there is a charge to purchase or use the software.
- Quality of audio. Some providers vary their rates based on the quality of the recorded dictation.

## **What to look for in a Transcription provider**

The following are key considerations to look for when choosing a transcription provider.

### **Turnaround time**

There is a wide range of turnaround times for return of completed work among transcription providers – from three hours to 24 hours and longer. Since in the legal field, many documents are extremely time-sensitive, your provider must be able to consistently and reliably deliver fast turnaround times. Use the following tips to make sure a potential provider can achieve the times your firm requires:

- Make sure you can contractually obligate your provider to a specific average monthly turnaround time so that you are assured they will consistently comply with your requirements.
- Ask whether there are additional charges for quicker turnaround times. For example, a provider may state that they provide same day turnaround, but their standard rate may be based on 24 hour turnaround. You may be charged additional fees for the quicker turnaround time.
- Since some larger law firms often work around the clock, check that a provider will be able to process your transcription jobs 24 hours a day, 365 days per year, so that you are not incurring lengthy delays during off hours.
- Check provider references to ensure that they have delivered the required turnaround times for other firms or large user groups.

*Carefully investigate the security and confidentiality programs of any potential provider. Take special care when evaluating providers who operate off-shore, where stricter U.S. privacy and confidentiality laws cannot easily be enforced.*

### **Confidentiality and Security**

Use the following points to explore the extent of a provider's ability to keep your firm's confidential material protected.

- Find out if the provider's typists work for an outsourced off-shore company. Using off-shore typists makes it difficult for a provider to enforce confidentiality and security provisions in their written agreements.
- A provider should be able to present you with a written plan showing how they keep your records confidential and how they address HIPAA regulations.
- Find if the provider requires employment history and criminal background checks from their typists and whether the typists sign confidentiality agreements.
- Determine if the provider's typists are geographically dispersed or located together in a call center environment. If they are located in call centers, inquire about the provider's safeguards to prevent sharing of confidential information among typists.
- Ask how a provider assigns transcription jobs. Random assignment is best for keeping a typist from viewing multiple files from the same case.
- Determine whether the provider can retain and destroy your firm's dictations and completed documents to meet your specific needs.
- Ask about technical security options such as SSL, VPN, and encryption. Make sure the provider will work with you to provide the most secure solution that is compatible with your firm's technology and requirements.

### **Capacity**

There are many local voice transcription services with a small number of typists who can provide a limited amount of work. Ask potential transcription service providers to assure they have the capacity to meet your firm's demand.

- Estimate the number of documents you produce in a given time period, and make sure the transcription company can provide the capacity you need.
- Estimate the number of calls your staff will be making to the transcription provider and get confirmation that they have a sufficient number of phone lines to handle the anticipated call volume.
- Check provider references to ensure that they have met the capacity needs of other large user groups.

### **Legal experience**

Ask for references from other law firms to ensure that any potential provider utilizes typists with experience producing legal documents. It is helpful to work with a provider whose typists are familiar with legal terminology and formatting, as well as the confidential nature of the material.

### **Call-in number for recording dictations**

Look for a provider that offers a 1-800, 1-888 or similar call-in number you can use to record dictations 24 hours a day. This enables your users to call from their mobile phones after client visits, or any other time or place they have access to a telephone.

### **Other ways to send your documentation for transcription**

A benefit of using outsourced transcription is that it increases the options your staff have for recording and inputting their material. Consider the ways your staff prefer to work. Do you regularly produce documents after hours? Do some of your staff work from home? Does your firm use dictation devices? Ask if the provider offers multiple methods for your staff to input their material – by toll-free telephone dictation, uploaded from your existing dictation devices, directly into mobile computers via a microphone, or directly into desktop computers. The more ways a provider accepts material for transcription, the more effective the service will be for your firm.

### **Mobile device capabilities**

Mobile devices such as laptops, slates, tablets and handheld PDA's are available to support attorneys while they are away from the office. Look for a provider who offers the ability to send and receive jobs via mobile device.

### **Start up process and costs**

The start up process should be well-planned, streamlined and free. Ask, before you choose a provider:

- Does the provider require a contract?
- Is a minimum number of jobs required?
- Are there fees associated with any of the following:
  - Additional features or software
  - Implementation support during the start up period
  - Customer service
- Will the provider establish the accounts for me or will my firm be responsible for setting accounts up individually?
- What type of support will I receive as my users get started with the service?
- What types of training are available for my staff?
- What type of billing and usage reporting is provided? Will I pay extra for reports?

### **Training**

The service should be easy to use and should offer online tutorials or other support tools and job aids.

### **Customer service**

- Ask about the type and extent of customer service. For example, ask if your users would be able to talk to a customer service representative when needed.
- Inquire whether you will have an assigned Account Representative for your firm to contact for questions and support.

### **Formatting Flexibility**

Make sure that the provider can adjust the layout, font size, margins, and other document characteristics for your specific needs. Some companies provide only a standard format, which creates more work later if you need to edit the document.

### **Additional tools**

This paper has addressed the basic functions associated with transcription – dictating and typing. However a company with a robust transcription solution can provide additional tools and benefits. Be sure to ask if there are additional features that you can use to increase productivity among your staff. Examples include incorporation of client-provided templates, training tools, web sites, access to past dictations, and usage reports.

### **A Note about Voice Recognition Technology**

In choosing a transcription provider, you may encounter information about voice recognition technology. Some organizations opt to install voice recognition software on individual computers or mobile devices, in the effort to lower their costs and eliminate a third party transcription provider from the process. However, voice recognition software can be particularly challenging and time consuming to install, train, and use. Using a transcription service's human typists to interpret and type documentation is generally preferable for the following reasons:

- Typists listen to and execute specific instructions. For example, an attorney can instruct the typist to format a document a certain way, i.e. "Bold the following sentence," or "Please use bullets for the following points." Other examples include spelling out acronyms, using specific addresses, or requesting that a copy of the notes be sent to a supervising attorney. In addition to instructions, typists can make any corrections that a user requests during dictation. The ability to interpret verbal instructions provides more flexibility and limits the amount of editing required in the final document.
- Typists can filter out "ahs and ums" and other extraneous words that naturally occur with dictation.
- Voice recognition requires users to dictate in an environment with little or no background noise. Often a special, sometimes expensive, microphone is required to filter out background sounds. Typists are less sensitive to background noise which leads to a more accurate final document.
- It takes time to learn how to use the voice recognition software and time to train the software on the individual user's speech. Outsourced transcription can be used immediately with little or no training time.

## **The SpeakWrite Transcription Solution**

SpeakWrite is a quick and effective way to reduce your firm's administrative overhead and increase individual productivity among associates and partners. SpeakWrite is a 24 hour a day, seven day a week transcription company with a large staff of trained legal typists, quick turnaround, no minimums and no contracts. Outsourcing to us is a low-risk way to reduce administrative expenses and refocus your critical staff away from typing and onto the essential functions of your firm. SpeakWrite brings the following advantages to your organization:

### **Quick, easy and free start up and support**

There are no start up fees with SpeakWrite and no minimum number of jobs required. There is no expensive software or hardware to purchase, install, test, or train. Our team can get your firm up and running as soon as we get your account information. Then you simply pay for the work you order and no more. Your dedicated account representative will work with you throughout the process, and SpeakWrite will continue to provide you with live customer service and support. SpeakWrite can also conduct a free pilot with your firm to help you assess the value of the SpeakWrite solution to your practice.

### **Outstanding turnaround time**

SpeakWrite returns completed documents in about three hours - 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.

### **Proven record of success in the legal field**

Over 40% of SpeakWrite's clients are in the legal profession. Our typists are trained in legal terminology and the accurate processing of legal information and documents. We are experienced in handling the confidential material required by our legal clients. All of our typists are located in the U.S. and Canada and undergo criminal background checks.

### **Added Benefits**

SpeakWrite provides many added features and tools at no additional cost:

- Templates that eliminate the need to re-dictate recurring information. SpeakWrite will store an unlimited number of your templates in our database, free of charge. Users can request a template during dictation and our typist will use the template to format the job. This saves dictating time for each user who requests the template, and also contributes to consistent documentation across your practice. Individual users can upload individual templates as well to increase their own productivity.
- Seven ways to submit a transcription job - telephone, Speakeasy Desktop Software, email, fax, hand written notes, digital audio files via member web pages, dictation equipment, and Mail/Courier.

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*In the last five years alone, SpeakWrite has processed over 3.4 million transcription jobs for clients in the legal field.*

- Ability to store additional email addresses Ability to store additional email addresses on every account which means that duplicates of completed documents can be sent to supervisors or any other designated email address.
- On-line access to the status of any job, account information, usage reports, and billing status.
- A Personal Preferences page and address book for each user on the SpeakWrite web site.
- The ability for any user to build a personal 'Word List' of hard to spell words and names. This feature enables our typists to use the proper spellings each time, without the user having to repeat them in each dictation.
- The ability to resend the transcription or the audio of any job to the client, on demand.
- Option to assign transcription jobs to only out-of state typists. This feature enhances confidentiality by ensuring that typists within your state will not view your firm's work product.
- Free software that enables a user to dictate into a computer, and then upload the audio file to a typist for transcription. The user needs only their computer and any inexpensive microphone to use the software.
- On-line tutorials to train your staff. SpeakWrite also works with your firm to assess whether other training solutions, such as train-the-trainer or instructor-led training would be beneficial for your unique users.
- Dedicated account representatives that provide a consistent point-of-contact for your firm

### **About SpeakWrite**

SpeakWrite, established in 1997, is the largest provider of non-medical internet transcription in the United States, serving 35,000 clients in all 50 states. SpeakWrite completes all work using trained, live transcriptionists based in the United States and Canada. SpeakWrite does not use voice recognition software. With SpeakWrite, there is no minimum number of jobs required; you only pay for the work you order.

Visit [www.Speak-Write.com](http://www.Speak-Write.com) today to create a free trial account that enables you to submit dictations free of charge and experience the extra benefits and features SpeakWrite has to offer. Inquire about a free pilot test in your office to help you assess the benefits of the SpeakWrite service to your practice. Contact [customersupport@speak-write.com](mailto:customersupport@speak-write.com) for details.