

## VIRTECH SOFTWARE SYSTEM STREAMLINES WORK OF PARALEGALS, SOME FEAR IT MIGHT ELIMINATE PARALEGAL JOBS

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When Brandon Lloyd and Jovaunda Brown were introduced to each other by a mutual friend, they knew that they were both paralegals. What wasn't initially clear, though, was that each of them shared a similar vision of what a law firm's

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functionality should be like – a smoothly run operation where all information could be accessed from one central location to maximize efficiency.

Both Lloyd, who had worked as a paralegal for criminal lawyers, and Brown, whose paralegal expertise came from working with a large firm, could understand firsthand the frustration of working within a system where research could take hours, if not days, to locate and compile.

Lloyd had a concept where one software system would handle and replace several software processes – viewing client information, case files, research, rules, schedules and billing. It turns out that Brown also envisioned a computer program that would permit an attorney to use just one system to run all processes. "I wanted to create a software system that would allow an attorney to access his law firm from anywhere in the world through the use of one system," Brown said, adding that the system, as she visualized it, would be available anywhere there was Internet access, including an iPhone.

And, thus, Virtech Paralegal was born. Brown and Lloyd collaborated, shared and fleshed out their ideas, and created a company that set out to do exactly what they intended. What they didn't anticipate, however, was that some critics in the legal community would view the company as a threat to paralegal jobs.

The Dallas-based company functions as a virtual paralegal service providing firms that need a paralegal or additional help on a case-by-case basis with an extra set of hands and an extra pair of eyes. "We staff paralegals and then the firm selects who they would want to work on their cases based on their resume and their legal area of expertise," explained Lloyd.

Brown and Lloyd, who are president and COO of Virtech Paralegal, respectively, also created the software system they envisioned and called it VIP Suite. The "VIP" stands for "Virtual Integrated Paralegal." The most notable aspect of the software is its Web-based qualities; other software systems are self-contained and can't be accessed via the Web, but VIP Suite allows the user to log in from anywhere on any machine. And while other software systems can only be updated by one person at a time, which can frequently involve downloading documents and uploading updated ones, VIP Suite allows multiple people in multiple locations to work on the same case file at the same time right within the system. Users can view client information, case files, research, rules, schedules and billing.

"Virtech Paralegal was created to save all attorneys time and money," said

Lloyd, "but it's important to note that it was designed to level the playing field for attorneys who can't afford to hire a paralegal." Virtech's software helps leverage economies of scale to give solos and smaller firms an advantage. Smaller firms can staff a big case by hiring a virtual paralegal to handle some of the work without the financial burden of paying a full-time paralegal's salary and benefits.

Due to a \$500,000 investment from a local angel group, Brown and Lloyd have recently expanded their task forces to include 40 employees. The company is making quite a splash in the legal community but there is some concern over whether or not the service, which costs \$1,250 to \$2,000 a month depending on the package purchased, is going to replace paralegals in the workforce. This monthly cost is at least



Brandon Lloyd, COO, and Jovaunda Brown, president, co-founded Virtech to assist paralegals and attorneys with their workloads and streamline a variety of processes into one.

half of an attorney housing a staff paralegal. Some ask whether it wouldn't be easier to purchase the software and eliminate the paralegal altogether.

Lloyd maintains that Virtech Paralegal will not replace paralegals. First, the software is only available to trained paralegals employed by Virtech and law firms who use their service. Second, Lloyd's actual clients do not indicate any type of trepidation. "The first people we interact with when we meet with potential clients are

the paralegals," he said. "And when we explain to them that we're not there to take away their jobs, that we're there to ease their workloads, they're willing to listen."

Lloyd argues that outsourcing paralegal work on an as-needed basis doesn't endanger the jobs of paralegals already established at law firms. An attorney who has enough budgeted for a paralegal can still keep that paralegal on staff. "Virtech Paralegal is absolutely not designed to replace the work that paralegals do," Lloyd stated.

"It's designed to complement it."

Brown and Lloyd are encouraged by the support they've received and plan to develop a second generation of the VIP Suite software system. The current generation will populate any document that is currently related to a specific case or specific area of law. The new generation

will have a feature that will auto-populate areas of data for briefing purposes. For example, paralegals can type in a phrase and Virtech will locate any previous cases that also contain that phrase, Brown noted. Thus, an attorney drafting a brief will have the documents right in front of her to help determine what type of precedent was established.

Lloyd and Brown officially launched Virtech at the beginning of January 2010, although they had begun the process of developing the software in mid-2009. In less than two years, they've taken their concept of a one-stop software system and have turned it into a successful reality. Lloyd is quick to credit the hard work of his staff, though. "We have some exceptional talent on board," he said. "We're both pleased with the direction in which these people have taken us."

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Jovaunda Brown assists Virtech's paralegal supervisor Michell May with how to use the Virtech system.