

# CHECKLIST FOR SCANNING CLIENT FILES

## Imaging Client Files for Digital Storage

Before implementing a program to scan and digitally store client files, ask yourself: what kind of documents do you wish to store electronically and why? Do you want to scan closed client files with the intention of shredding the paper afterwards, or is the goal to go paperless from the start and eliminate or drastically reduce the need to maintain a physical file? In either case, consider the following:

1. If you are scanning closed files, are notes and memoranda included? By default, the client is entitled to attorney notes and memoranda unless exceptions apply. See [OSB Formal Ethics Opinion No. 2017-192](#). The Professional Liability Fund (PLF) encourages lawyers to keep complete copies of their files. See *File Retention and Destruction Guidelines*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Retention and Destruction Guidelines.
2. If the goal is to go paperless from the outset, are *electronic* notes and memoranda preserved? See [OSB Formal Ethics Opinion No. 2017-192](#).
3. Unsigned word processing documents are usually saved in their native format and stored in a subfolder for each client. How will you retain these documents once they are signed? There are several options:
  - Create a PDF from your word processing document and apply an authenticated digital signature. Retain the word processing document and the authenticated, signed PDF.
  - Create a PDF from your word processing document and use Adobe Acrobat's custom stamp tool to insert a scanned image of your signature. Retain the word processing document and the PDF with your scanned signature.
  - Create a jpeg of your scanned signature and insert it directly into your word processing document. Print the signed document to PDF. (Use File, Print to PDF so your signature is [flattened](#).)
  - Keeping your word processing document intact, print a hard copy, sign it, scan it, and store it as a PDF.

Note: See item 7 below for a discussion on saving documents in their native format. Also, note that you may elect to append the signed page to your original document when creating a PDF to store in your client file. See Adobe Acrobat Help for more information on creating and using authenticated digital signatures and custom stamps. If you intend to scan your signature and insert it into word processing or PDF documents, you will need image-editing software to crop the scanned signature and make the background transparent.

4. If imaged files are to be joined with documents that are electronic in origin, are all electronic document and database sources considered in the capture process? (Documents and databases residing on network servers, cloud servers, local hard drives, flash drives, disks, smartphones, or other media.)
5. Are documents being scanned at the lowest acceptable resolution and optimized afterwards to reduce file size? The resolution on most scanners can be adjusted quite easily. Adobe Acrobat has an [optimization feature](#) which helps further reduce file size after scanning.
6. Are scanned documents reviewed for quality and completeness of electronic capture?
7. Is the shelf life of the chosen electronic format acceptable? Saving digital file content using Adobe's archival standard (PDF/A) assures that *files created in earlier versions of Acrobat are guaranteed to be readable in future versions of PDF*. This is not a given if you attempt to keep files in their native

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application (Microsoft® Word and WordPerfect® come to mind.) To learn more about the PDF/A format, see Reagan DeWitt-Henderson, "[PDF/A – PDF for Archiving](#)," *In Brief* (June 2011).

8. Is your storage media up to the task? Storing scanned files on a hard drive or server that is properly backed up (see item 14 below) is preferable to using CDs or DVDs. Compact or digital video discs are made from layers of materials that can delaminate or oxidize over time. Environmental exposure, improper storage, or improper handling all present opportunities for this kind of media to degrade.
9. Are imaged files electronically Bates-stamped or indexed? Organized in subfiles? Bates stamping, indexing, and organization of documents into subfiles will make it much easier to access needed information. Case management or document management software can make this process easier. Bates stamping can also be done in Adobe Acrobat.
10. Scanners are usually sold with OCR (optical character recognition) software. Without this technology, scanned documents are static images that cannot be searched. Is OCR software used as part of the scanning process to ensure that documents are searchable? If OCR software did not come packaged with your scanner, Adobe Acrobat has built-in text recognition capability. Search Help in Acrobat for step-by-step instructions on applying OCR during or after the scanning process. WordPerfect X6 and later also has built-in OCR capability.
11. Are privileged litigation documents clearly marked in the electronic file?
12. Are documents not subject to client disclosure clearly marked in the electronic file? See [OSB Formal Ethics Opinion No. 2017-192](#).
13. Are electronic files stored securely with password protection, encryption, or other security as needed? If you possess electronic data containing "consumer personal information" within the meaning of the Oregon Consumer Identity Theft Protection Act (ORS 646A.600 to 646A.628) you are required to develop, implement, and maintain safeguards to protect the security and disposal of the data. Failure to do so can result in civil penalties.
14. Are electronic files backed up daily (or more frequently)? Are backups stored on *and* off-site? Are the backups tested periodically? Are backups secured (password-protected, encrypted)? For a thorough discussion on backing up computer data and applications, see *How to Back Up Your Computer*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Using Technology > How to Back Up Your Computer.
15. Is an electronic file retention policy in place and enforced? Regardless of how files are retained, the PLF recommends that all client files be kept a minimum of 10 years. Some files may need to be kept longer. See *File Retention and Destruction Guidelines*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Retention and Destruction Guidelines.
16. The lawyer responsible for a given matter should sign-off before electronic data is destroyed. Permanent destruction of electronic data requires special expertise. For more information, see *File Retention and Destruction Guidelines*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Retention and Destruction Guidelines.
17. Scanning files can be expensive and time-consuming. Any odd-sized paper (legal size documents, phone message slips, post-it notes, fragile carbon copies, etc.) will require special handling. All paper clips and staples must be removed. Folded and hole-punched documents may jam the

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scanner. Be prepared to outsource or devote adequate staff time to major scanning projects. If you truly want to go paperless, or simply have less paper, start with active files or begin scanning files as you close them. Form good paper-processing habits, such as retaining client emails electronically rather than printing hard copies.

For more information on retaining client emails, see *Documenting Email as Part of the Client File*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Paperless Office and Cloud Computing > Documenting Email as Part of the Client File.

18. Is the firm aware of ethical considerations in going paperless? See Amber Hollister, "[Floating in the Cloud: The Ethics of Electronic Client Files](#)," *Oregon State Bar Bulletin*, May 2017.
19. Is the firm aware of restrictions imposed by statute or rule that require retention of certain documents in original paper form? For more information, see *File Retention and Destruction Guidelines*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Retention and Destruction Guidelines.

### Disposition of Original Documents

1. Satisfy yourself that the imaging process has integrity (no missing or incomplete documents).
2. Communicate file retention policies to clients. Ideally, the issue of record retention should be addressed in the initial client fee agreement or engagement letter and again at the time of file closing. The PLF has sample fee agreement and engagement letters, as well as a sample closing letter, which incorporate file retention language. These practice aids are available at [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org).
3. Review each file *individually*. Wholesale rules cannot apply due to discrepancies in file content. (See discussion below.)
4. The PLF recommends that lawyers refrain from accepting original client property, or at a minimum, return all original documents and client property at the time of file closing. For more information, see "Closing Files," a chapter in [A Guide to Setting Up and Running Your Law Office](#), published by the PLF. See also *File Closing Checklist*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Closing Checklist.
5. Disposition of original documents must comply with applicable rules and statutes relevant in your specific area of law. For more information, see *File Retention and Destruction Guidelines*, available on the PLF website, [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org). Click on Services tab > CLEs & Resources > Practice Aids > Office Systems and Procedures > File Retention and Destruction Guidelines.
6. When choosing a document or media disposal service, select a company certified by the [International Secure Information Governance & Management Association](#) (i-SIGMA). Members securely destroy materials in compliance with [FACTA](#), [HIPAA](#), and the [Gramm-Leach-Bliley](#) Acts. Casually discarded information is a risk and a liability. Search for services in your area using the [directory](#).
7. The lawyer responsible for a given matter should sign off before the client's paper file is destroyed.

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### Resources

#### Professional Liability Fund

Review technology forms and *In Brief* articles available from the PLF, as well as CLE offerings. Visit [www.osbplf.org](http://www.osbplf.org) for more information.

#### American Bar Association

The ABA offers many print and online resources with an ongoing focus on technology, including the paperless office. These include [Law Practice magazine](#), and the [Legal Technology Resource Center](#). For an overview of resources, visit the [ABA Law Practice Division](#).

#### Association for Records Management

[ARMA International](#) is a not-for-profit professional association and the authority on governing information as a strategic asset. ARMA International offers invaluable resources such as: legislative and regulatory updates; standards and best practices; technology trends and applications; live and web-based education; marketplace news and analysis; books & videos on managing records and information; and a global network of members.

International Secure Information Governance & Management Association™ (i-SIGMA®)[i-SIGMA](#) is the international trade association for companies providing information destruction services. Suppliers of products, equipment, and services to destruction companies are also eligible for membership. Their mission is to promote the information destruction industry and the standards and ethics of its member companies. Locate a secure data destruction provider on the [i-SIGMA](#) website.

#### The Adobe Blog

[The Adobe Blog](#) is a resource for lawyers, law firms, paralegals, legal IT pros and anyone interested in the use of Acrobat in the legal community. Search the blog for helpful tips or videos on many topics, including scanning, OCR, and PDF/A for archiving.

## IMPORTANT NOTICES

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