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Collaboration tools for lawyers online

My co-author, Carolyn Elefant, and I are in the midst of re-writing the last and final draft of our book about social media for lawyers, which will be published by the American Bar Association in the spring.

When we began, we sought out an online platform that would allow us to collaborate and create the first draft. Ideally, we wanted a platform that was easily accessible to both of us and would provide a forum to collect all of our discussions and notes, as well as allow us to upload the most recent versions of our work in progress.

As I researched the possibilities, I sought recommendations on Twitter in an effort to capitalize on the collective knowledge of my large following of knowledgeable, tech-savvy followers — more than 5,500 of them. I received a number of great suggestions, and also received a reply from a representative of a company called Glasscubes (www.glasscubes.com), a product that I hadn't previously heard of . Ultimately, it was the platform we chose to use.

It worked out perfectly for us. It offered a free, password-protected platform that included a discussion forum, a whiteboard that allowed us to create and edit documents online and the ability to upload recent drafts of Word documents, which then appeared as the first option when the draft was accessed, so the likelihood of inadvertently editing an older version was greatly reduced. We also had the ability to add separate comments at the end of each document, which were not included as part of the document, a method I prefer over the alternative (adding comments to the document text).

The interface was clean, user-friendly and intuitive. As is the case with many collaboration platforms, we could send messages to each other, schedules meetings and add task lists.

Glasscubes was the perfect platform for our purposes and I highly recommend it as a collaboration tool.

There are a number of very good, similar alternatives

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for document collaboration. Google Documents (http://docs.google.com) is one of the most popular. The free service allows users to create, store and comment on word processing documents online. Documents can be either public or password-protected and users can choose whom to invite to "share" the documents and collaborate on the creation of the text. Documents can then be exported in any number of formats — including Word — and then worked on offline.

Another popular option is Zoho Projects (www.projects.zoho.com/google-apps), which is very similar to Glasscubes and provides a number of useful tools for project management and online collaboration. It offers group chat, a shared calendar, discussion forums, the ability to create and manage tasks and also integrates with Microsoft and Google Docs.

One final option worth checking out is Huddle (www.huddle.net). Much like the other platforms, it offers the ability to manage projects and create, edit, share and store documents online in a secure environment.

All of the platforms I've mentioned offer a number of levels of paid membership, although the basic level is free and a decent amount of online storage is provided.

Whether a particular platform works best for you depends on the type of project, the features that are most important to you and your personal preference regarding which interface is most appealing and intuitive.

Explore the alternatives, test them out and experiment with collaborating on a project online. I have no doubt you'll find it to be a beneficial and worthwhile experience.

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