February 26, 2015

TO: Daniel Murphy, Sr., Esq.

FROM: Christine Graham

RE: Research on Google Hangouts

Per your request, I have researched Google Hangouts for consideration as an application to be used for the firm’s communications and storage.

Google Hangouts is an application that allows for group conversation over devices that connect to the Internet. These devices include the home computer, Android phones and tablets, iPhone, iPad and iPod Touch. Set up is easy by just downloading and starting the Google Hangouts application to the devices of choice.

The advantages of Google Hangouts include, the ability to conference call, instant message, hold video conversations, phone conversations on your computer (this is free within the U.S. and Canada and includes lower rates for calls to Foreign Countries), works with Gmail, has Live-Streaming that could make for less expensive depositions (like Justin Bieber’s deposition on YouTube; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emsLrZg160s>) and can be used to market lawyers.

To give you a better idea, I will elaborate on some of the features. Video conferencing can include multiple people to share screen space and documents. It offers the convenience of simple access anywhere for those who travel a lot. Live-Streaming seminars hosted by lawyers can help market the firm. The lawyer can invite potential clients to listen in and ask questions. The firm can save these seminars to the YouTube channel that is available for additional viewings. Google Hangouts provides clients and attorneys a central repository of their prior interactions that include conversations and documents that were uploaded. This can be found on an attorney-client dashboard that can be accessed by them to refresh themselves and can be available to others that weren’t at the meeting.

As mentioned in my prior memo on security concerns for cloud storage, the law would extend to Google Hangouts. To refresh you, Rule 1.6 of Massachusetts Rules of Professional Conduct, Lawyers have the obligation to avoid using means of communication with the client that poses an unreasonable risk of inadvertent disclosure to third persons. Rule 1.6 was reexamined, following the statues of the Electronic Communications Privacy Act, where confidential communications through the Internet’s e-mail were not in violation of Rule 1.6(a). The Committee on Professional Ethics extended this policy to include computer software and more recently, Internet storage.

Any security concerns about using Google Hangouts for storing meetings and correspondences for lawyers and or clients to access at later times are backed by the fact that you can set domain restrictions and encryption. There are Business, Government and Education editions of Google Hangouts that offer security geared to business.

Google Hangouts certainly offers convenience to stay in touch with clients and have those correspondences recorded as work product. As an added note, I had chatted with CLIO to see if this was a feature that could be added to CLIO. CLIO uses Google Sync Google Drive and Gmail. The representative at CLIO stated that they don’t have Google Hangouts included and would relay a request to the development team to do so. But, since both Google Hangouts and CLIO use Gmail, I’m wondering if they can actually access each other despite the representative’s contrary comment. It is certainly something to consider.

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