

LawStream Implementation

Guidelines to help you enjoy a smooth transition with your new LawStream application

Implementing LawStream into your office will be a smooth transition if you plan ahead. With a couple of exceptions, there is no one "best way" to do this, but these guidelines should help you make some decisions as you go along.

BEFORE YOU START:

Computer hardware, networks, etc.

It seems obvious, but do make sure you have everything hooked up properly and that each person on your staff have had some training in how his or her computer works. It might be helpful to have someone from the business that sold the hardware available for assistance during your implementation. PowerSoft's expertise is in providing for assistance with LawStream, and not with hardware and network concerns, especially as those are areas that differ a great deal among different firms.

Location of the datafile

A computer that acts as a "server" may or may not be required. Systems that handle "peer-to-peer" networks do allow for the datafile to reside on one of the "in-use" computers on the network. You should consult your hardware support people if you are not sure what your hardware will handle. If you plan to set up a network like that, it would be best to have the datafile reside on the most powerful computer in your office. It would also be best for that computer to be used by the person who does the most data entry, because he or she will have the fastest access to the datafile. Another option is to have the datafile on a separate cartridge-type drive (e.g., Zip drive or SyQuest EZ135).

Program installation

Use the installation guide provided in your LawStream package, to install your LawStream files properly. Note that each computer in your office must have its own copy of the program files, and that each LawStream program must access the office's shared datafile.

LawStream training

Built-in html-formated help is available for most windows, menus, tabs and functions. This document is an example of what you can find in the built-in help system. The built-in help is your first source for information about LawStream. PowerSoft Innovations Corporation can and will provide assistance as described in your license agreement.

Remember that the first stage of help (after the built-in help provided with the LawStream software files) is LawStream's bulletin board: check the information on that board first, to see if anyone else has had a problem similar to any problem you have encountered. You can greatly reduce the time (yours and ours) in dealing with problems, if you give each LawStream user in your office the chance to play with the system, using the demo data files and other introductory materials provided. You could also consider making a backup of your own startup datafile, and letting your staff try things for a while on that datafile before doing the "real thing". If all else fails, and you find that you don't want to keep some or all of the data entered on your real datafile, let us know: there is a way to use the Omnis utilities functions, to delete all your accounting transactions, work in progress, etc.. Those deletions involve an "all or nothing" decision, within LawStream's datafile structure. There are ways to delete a selection of transactions, but those must be done one at a time, and may take a considerable amount of your time.

Implementation date

Decide what the implementation date will be. That date should be a point at which all your accounting records are complete and in balance- usually a previous month-end or year-end. No matter what date you choose, you will likely have some catch-up work to do before your data is current.

Work in progress

Once you have selected the implementation date, you should decide what to do about unbilled work in progress up to that point. Some firms choose to bill all work in progress up to and including the implementation date, so they can start fresh using LawStream to record time and disbursements for all files. Other firms choose to use LawStream to record work in progress for new files, but keep their old system (manual or otherwise) going for the older files until all are billed. A third option is to re-enter old work in progress for all open files on LawStream. No matter which option or combination of options you choose, be consistent and keep track of what you have done: you do not want to lose any work in progress in the transition.

Plan for overtime

It is unlikely that you or your staff will be able to implement LawStream effectively during the normal business day while you are still dealing with clients, telephone calls, and other current work. It would be best to plan for weekend or evening time, or perhaps even close the office for a day so you can get things done with fewer interruptions. Hiring temporary staff is an option, but we have found that it is best if the person(s) who will be using the system are involved in how things are set up in the system. Experienced staff members also spot potential problems more quickly, and they can make decisions on how to deal with those problems. If you do want to hire someone to help out while you are implementing LawStream in your office, it would probably be better if that person answered the phone while your regular staff worked on the LawStream implementation.

Contact person(s)

It works best for all concerned, if only one or two people in your office become the main "LawStream gurus" for the office. Those are the people who take a look at any problems first, before you decide if you should pursue other avenues of support from LawStream (or other sources, depending on the nature of the problem). LawStream support personnel at PowerSoft Innovations Corporation will be happy to provide support to anyone in your office, but it will be easier for you and LawStream support people, if you have one person who is aware of the procedures for getting support, and who is most familiar with the LawStream program. You should be sure a knowledgeable accountant or bookkeeper from your office is (or is among) the one(s) selected from your office for contacting LawStream for support.

DATAFILE STRUCTURE (SETUP TAB):

G/L Codes

Your start-up data file most likely came with a set of G/L codes. However, you should go through those codes (from the Setup tab), and add any additional codes you might need, and delete any codes you are not useful to you, and change any code descriptions to match the needs of your office. You can, of course, enter G/L codes later, but everything will flow more smoothly if you can plan ahead a bit. G/L codes for an existing account may also be changed at a later date, and the transactions will automatically follow the new code. However, you must not delete a G/L code once it has transactions in that account, even if those transactions total zero.

Lawyer/attorney/user codes and preferences

Your startup datafile was delivered with initials and preferences for at least one person/user. First, review those preferences and make sure the G/L codes and other options are what that person would want. Next, add any additional user-codes, names and preferences, so each person accessing LawStream in your office can have his or her own sign-in initials and preferences.

Firm data and defaults

You will find that a large part of this information was set up for you when PowerSoft Innovations created your startup datafile. However, you should at least review the options in the various windows accessed from the Setup tab, to be sure everything suits your needs - at least for the moment. One temporary change you might want to make, is to change your own personal preferences in the user preferences window, to suppress the automatic display of the reminder window for new files: by doing so, you will be able to enter new files more quickly during this initial implementation stage.

File/matter types

Many firms want to track the types of files they have. Each file entered into a LawStream datafile may have a one-character and/or a three-character code to identify the type of file/matter record. Many firms assign a source of referral (e.g., Y for yellow pages, R for referral from other client) for the one-character file-types, and an area of law (e.g., PRO for probate, LIL for litigation regarding land, WIL for wills and estate planning) for the three-character file types.

ENTERING CLIENTS AND FILES:

Client codes and file numbers

For detailed information about entering clients and files, see the page in this help system relating to those entries.

Essentially, each client is set up once, with a unique client code. However, a single client may have many files, which are also entered separately. For example, Joe Smith may have a file for a divorce, action, another file for a will, and yet another file for a real estate transaction. Each of those files would have its own file number, but each would be connected to the same client/name record.

Before you start entering client and file data into LawStream, you should think through your existing procedures for assigning codes and numbers, to see what (if anything) needs to be changed before transferring those codes to LawStream. LawStream has no restrictions on the codes and numbers you can use for identifying client/name and file/matter records, apart from a reasonable length for those codes and numbers, and the requirement that they are unique.

Which clients and files should be entered first

Some firms attempt to enter every client and file in their office into their new LawStream datafile, all in one marathon session. However, that can be a formidable task, and it is easy to make mistakes when you are in a hurry. We recommend that you start with those files that have accounting balances (trust or office), and then proceed to enter the files that have unbilled work in progress. After those files have been entered, you can enter your firm's inactive files, at a later date.

IMPORTANT!!!!

For some very good reasons (including integrity for auditors, and accuracy in reports), LawStream does not permit accounting entries with dates prior to the file opening date. The default date for file entry is the current date, which is normally fine. When you are entering clients and files for the purpose of creating opening accounting balances, though, you should use a date earlier than (or equal to) the date of the first receivable or trust balance/transaction you plan to enter for the file.

ENTERING SUPPLIER NAMES AND CODES:

It is not essential to enter suppliers into your datafile's file of client/name records immediately. You can wait until you are ready to use the Payables part of the system. Refer to the help page for client/name entries, for more information on how to enter that information.

ENTERING ACCOUNTING BALANCES:

You must enter any existing balance for each G/L account, as of your chosen implementation date. Those balances **MUST** be in balance overall (i.e., they must add up to zero, including all debits and credits). Make sure you have a G/L account for each balance you need to enter. Also, make sure you have a G/L account called "Suspense", which will be used as part of the recording of your receivables balances. Use the Journal Entries window from the Accounting tab/menu, to enter the account balances. Record each balance with the appropriate debit and credit, and the appropriate detail transaction description ("Opening balance").

Enter all those balances, **EXCEPT FOR TRUST BANK AND LEDGER ACCOUNTS AND RECEIVABLES ACCOUNTS.**

The TRUST balances (bank and ledger) are not entered through journal entries. Those balances will be entered individually, for the files in your office that have trust balances.

The total RECEIVABLES balance should be debited to your office's suspense account, for the moment. Once the Journal Entry for your opening balances is complete, and comes to a total of zero, you can accept it. You may use the "Current Balances" report, or a report of journal entries, to double-check your entries.

ENTERING OPENING TRUST BALANCES:

Trust balances **CANNOT** be entered through journal entries. Each trust balance in your datafile **MUST** be attached to a specific file; without proper entry of initial trust balances, trust checks (cheques) cannot later be entered/processed.

Use the trust deposit/receipt entry window (from the trust section of the accounting tab), to enter opening trust balances. Enter the file number, and then record the existing trust balance for that file, as of your implementation date. Make sure the correct trust bank and trust ledger accounts for each file are specified for the entry: default accounts should have already been established for each file, as part of the file/matter entry procedures in the initial implementation. Repeat the trust entry process, for each file in your office that has a trust balance as of the implementation date. Once you finish entering those initial trust balances for each file, the total should match the trust bank totals as of the implementation date.

Print the "Current Balances" report from the accounting tab, and check the balances on that report with your other records of trust balances.

ENTERING OPENING RECEIVABLES BALANCES:

As with opening trust balances, opening receivables balances CANNOT be entered through journal entries. Each receivables balance in your system (for each bill you have sent to a client) must be attached to a specific file; without proper entry of initial receivables balances, you will not be able to record payments on those outstanding receivables. As you might recall from the discussion of journal entries, above, you entered (or should have entered) a total receivables balance as a single amount, to a suspense account. Now, you will be posting the amount owing for each file to the correct receivables account, and gradually crediting the suspense account until it is cleared. To record each amount owing, use the Post Account to G/L window from the Receivables section of the accounting tab.

Date: The date entered is up to you. You may want to use the implementation date. However, to make use of aged receivables listings and aged amounts on monthly statements to clients, you will want to use the actual date the receivable was created (remember that, if you do that, you must be sure the file opening date was on or before the date you use for the receivable).

Lawyer Code: If there are two or more lawyers in your office, make sure the initials used are those of the lawyer who is to be credited when a payment on account is received. If the amount owing is to be credited for two or more lawyers, then enter each part separately. In normal LawStream processing, that sort of allocation will take place automatically as a single posting, but for opening balances you will have to be careful that the correct initials are used.

Amount: When you are recording new (normal) billings in the "Post Account to G/L" window, you will want to distinguish between fees, disbursements, taxes, etc.. However, for the purpose of establishing opening balances, you need only place the total amount owing in the field for "fees" in the main entry window for posting accounts to the general ledger, and be sure no amounts are showing for taxes or parts of a normal bill. The taxes payable on these opening receivables are already included in other opening balances, and should not be duplicated. The total at the bottom of this window would equal the total receivable.

Posting to the general ledger: After keying the information for posting the receivable to the general ledger), click on the Build Posting Details button to display the general ledger posting lines. The receivables account is on the first line with the total amount of the account as a debit, and a "fees billed" account on the second line with a corresponding credit. First, check the receivables account: make sure it is the one for the lawyer whose initials were entered in the previous window, and change it if necessary. The "fees billed" account code should be changed to the code for the "Suspense" account used for receivables in the journal entry (which you should have completed earlier in the implementation procedures). LawStream might warn you that the suspense account is not the account it is expecting, but proceed to complete the entry with that Suspense account (but do not permanently change the default fees billed account for the file to "Suspense"). Press Enter to accept the posting. Repeat that process for each file that has a receivables balance. When you are finished, you should have a debit balance in one or more receivables accounts, equal to the total from your implementation balances. Your suspense account (which has been credited as each receivable is entered) should be zero.

ENTERING OPENING PAYABLES BALANCES:

Opening payables balances are included as a single total in the journal entry you did to enter other opening balances. When you do checks/cheques to pay the invoices that were still outstanding as of your implementation date, use the Payables general ledger account for the debit part of the office check/cheque entry. Any new invoices you receive can be entered using the Payables entry window (once you have set up your Supplier codes in the Contacts window).

RECONCILIATION BALANCES:

In the G/L Accounts section of the Setup tab, make sure you have included your last reconciled date for each bank account. Your first reconciliation or two might be "out of balance" because LawStream does not have a record of your old outstanding checks (cheques). However, once those cheques (checks) are either cleared or cancelled, you will be able to balance. Some firms do a journal entry to debit the bank and credit various expense accounts for the total of the outstanding checks (cheques), and then re-do each check (cheque) in LawStream so they will appear on the outstanding check/cheque list. That would mean you could "clear" each of them on the reconciliation window and produce a balanced reconciliation. The choice is up to you. See the help file associated with bank reconciliations for further details.

BEFORE YOU PROCEED WITH OTHER TRANSACTIONS:

Run either a Financial Statement for the current date (Accounting Tab, Other Reports and Processes, Periodic window) or GL Balances by Code or Category (Accounting tab, Other Reports and Processes, G/L Balances/Details window), to check your entries. The balances in those reports should equal the balances you brought in as of the implementation date.

OTHER TRANSACTIONS:

Once you are certain that your opening balances have been properly recorded, you can proceed with paying accounts, doing trust receipts and payments, and all the other accounting transactions necessary to bring your records up to date.