



A WORKED EXAMPLE

Intake form completion at a professional services firm.

One workflow, audited over ten business days. This is what lands on your desk: the workflow as it actually runs, what it costs, what is recoverable, what it would take to fix and whether it is worth fixing. This is an illustrative scenario, not a client engagement. The firm, the people and the numbers are constructed to show the structure, the assumptions and the discipline a real audit produces.

28

forms a week

Client intake form. Nine steps, four roles, six tools, one practice system at the centre.

1.4 h

to 0.35 h per form

Observed time today, and the forecast after the rebuild.

1,529 h

released a year

Of which 459 hours were overtime and casual cover: avoidable cash.

10 to 15

months to breakeven

Expected to conservative case on a monthly cash model, audit fee included. Cash savings alone: month 39.

THE RECOMMENDATION

Build. Then measure it.

The audit recommends a build. The leak is large, the exception paths are known, both systems have usable interfaces, and the people who do the work want it gone. Cumulative cash turns positive in month 10 in the expected case and month 15 in the conservative case, counting the audit fee, the build, a six-week ramp and the running costs that continue after. On cash savings alone it is month 39, which would not justify the build; the case rests on redeploying released hours into billable work. The build is scoped as fixed fee, inside the firm's existing practice management and document systems, with the first version live within four to six weeks of kickoff and measured at twelve months. That measured result is the receipt. This document is the forecast.

HOW TO READ THIS

Cash and capacity are shown separately. Cash is money that stops leaving the firm. Capacity is time that comes back, and it only counts when it has somewhere billable to go. Every number carries its assumption, and the payback is a range because the assumptions move.



01 · THE MAP

The workflow as it ran. Nine steps, four roles, six tools.

STEP	WHAT HAPPENS	DETAIL	WHO	SYSTEM
01	Enquiry arrives	Email or phone. Reception logs it in the CRM by hand.	Reception	CRM
02	Conflict check	Partner or paralegal searches the practice system and two spreadsheets.	Paralegal	PMS, Excel
03	Intake form sent	PDF attached to a templated email. Client fills it in by hand or in Word.	Reception	Email
04	Form returned	Arrives as PDF, photo or Word. Re-keyed into the practice system.	Paralegal	PMS
05	Identity documents	Requested separately if not attached. Chased by phone on average 1.6 times.	Reception	Email, phone
06	Matter opened	Paralegal creates the matter, copies fields from the form, sets fee earner.	Paralegal	PMS
07	Engagement letter	Generated from a template. Fields corrected by hand where the form was unclear.	Paralegal	Word, PMS
08	Partner review	Partner checks the letter and the conflict result. Returns about one in six.	Partner	Email
09	Trust and billing set-up	Finance adds billing details and trust instructions from the form.	Finance	PMS, Xero

Four exception paths nobody had written down: a conflict hit that needs a second partner; a client who returns the form incomplete (about one in four); identity documents that fail the check; and a matter that changes fee earner after the letter is sent. Each one restarts part of the sequence. None appeared in the firm's procedure manual.

02 · THE ASSUMPTIONS

How we measured it, and where each number came from.

INPUT	VALUE	SOURCE AND METHOD
Time per form	1.4 hours	Total labour across 31 forms in week one, divided by 31, exceptions included. Median was 1.1 h; the mean is used so rework is counted. Range 0.9 to 3.1 h.
Volume	28 a week, 52 weeks	Practice system intake count, trailing twelve months, no seasonality adjustment.
Direct cost per hour	\$58	Payroll: blended wage plus super and leave for the roles doing the work. No premises or management overhead, because those costs do not fall when the form gets faster.
Rework	1 in 4 forms	Rework log and email trail. Each incomplete form adds 0.5 h on average, included in the 1.4 h.
Overtime and casual share	30 per cent of hours	Payroll: overtime and casual cover attributable to intake backlog over twelve months.
Time after rebuild	0.35 hours	Forecast. Partner review and judgement calls remain manual; capture, re-keying and chasing do not.
Benefit timing	Half in month 2, full from month 3	Six-week build, then go-live. Running costs start in month 2. Audit and build paid before month 1.
Role split of capacity	About 640 of 1,070 h is paralegal	Only paralegal hours can become billable. The 50 per cent case assumes about 85 per cent of them are redeployed: the upper end of plausible.
GST basis	All figures ex GST	The audit is advertised at \$4,950 inc GST; \$4,500 ex GST is used here.



03 · CASH AND CAPACITY

What was actually recoverable, shown separately.

LINE	VALUE	BASIS
Hours released a year	1,529 h	28 forms × 52 weeks × (1.4 h – 0.35 h). Forecast.
Of which: avoidable cash	459 h · \$26,622	The 30 per cent that was overtime and casual cover, at the \$58 direct rate. Money that stops being paid. Nothing else is counted as cash.
Of which: capacity released	1,070 h	Salaried time that comes back. Worth nothing until it is redeployed.
Capacity redeployed, conservative	25 per cent · 268 h · \$32,160	Paralegal hours moved to billable work at \$120 an hour contribution: \$180 collected less \$60 incremental delivery cost. The partners' own low estimate.
Capacity redeployed, expected	50 per cent · 535 h · \$64,200	Same contribution rate. The firm has a billable backlog in two practice areas, so this is plausible, not certain.

Capacity only counts when it has somewhere billable to go. If the firm cannot redeploy the hours, the honest annualised benefit is the cash line alone: \$26,622 before running costs. The audit says so, and the breakeven table shows that case first.

04 · THE COSTS

Upfront, then running. Running costs do not stop.

ITEM	AMOUNT	WHAT IT COVERS
Workflow Audit	\$4,500	Already paid, ex GST. Counted in the breakeven so the all-in return is visible. For the build decision itself it is sunk.
Build	\$48,000	Fixed fee, quoted after the audit and approved before kickoff. Intake capture, conflict pre-check, re-keying removed, document chasing automated, engagement letter pre-filled.
Upfront total	\$52,500	Audit plus build, paid before go-live. Excludes the firm's own staff time in weeks one to six, estimated at 20 hours.
Running costs	\$800 a month	Licences \$300 (form and document-capture tooling) and review and maintenance \$500. Start at go-live and continue for as long as the workflow runs.
First twelve months, all-in	\$62,100	Upfront plus running cost to month 12. For comparison only; breakeven uses the monthly schedule.

05 · CASH BREAKEVEN

When cumulative net cash turns positive.

CASE	ANNUAL BENEFIT	NET A MONTH	BREAKEVEN	ASSUMPTION
Cash only	\$26,622	\$1,418	Month 39	No capacity redeployed. The floor. On its own, a no.
Conservative	\$58,782	\$4,098	Month 15	Cash plus 25 per cent of capacity at contribution. Still \$9,900 short at month 12.
Expected	\$90,822	\$6,768	Month 10	Cash plus 50 per cent of capacity at contribution. \$4,600 ahead at month 12.

Method. Monthly cash schedule from kickoff, undiscounted. Month 0: \$52,500 paid. Month 1: nothing earned. Month 2: half benefit. Running costs of \$800 a month deducted from month 2. Breakeven is the first month cumulative net cash is positive. What moves it. Volume: two forms a week either way shifts breakeven by about a month. Redeployment matters most, which is why the range is stated and the firm, not N+1, chose the percentages.



06 · THE CALL

Build. Here is why, and here is what would have made it a no.

Why build. The leak is measured, not guessed. Three of the four exception paths can be handled by rules the partners already apply in their heads. Both systems have usable interfaces. The people who do the work asked for it. The conservative case reaches cash breakeven in month 15, counting everything, and the firm has the billable backlog to make redeployment real. That is the hinge: without it, the cash case alone is a no.

What would have made it a no. Volume under about twelve a week. A practice system with no usable interface. Partners unwilling to write down the conflict rules. Or no billable work to redeploy capacity into, which would leave the cash line alone carrying a 39-month breakeven. When that is the picture, the answer is do not build, and the firm keeps the map and the plan.

THE 90-DAY PLAN

What to build, what to buy, what to leave alone.

WHEN	ACTION	WHAT
Weeks 1 to 2	Build	Structured intake form with identity capture, replacing the PDF. Conflict pre-check against the practice system and both spreadsheets.
Weeks 3 to 4	Build	Form data written straight into the practice system. Engagement letter pre-filled. Chasing sequence for incomplete forms and missing documents.
Weeks 5 to 6	Operate	Live with one practice group. Exceptions routed to a named paralegal. First measurement against the week-one baseline.
Weeks 7 to 12	Extend	Second practice group. Trust and billing set-up fields passed to finance. Exception rules tightened from live data.
Leave alone	—	Partner review of the engagement letter. The judgement in it is the firm's asset and the time is small.
Buy, not build	—	Identity verification. A licensed service does it better; the firm stays responsible for its own compliance.

WHAT A REAL AUDIT ADDS

What you get that this example cannot show.

The full audit runs to about twenty pages: the process map as a diagram with every exception path drawn, the observation log, the cost model as a spreadsheet you can change, the integration notes for your systems, the build scope and fixed fee, and the twelve-month measurement plan that produces the receipt. All of it is yours, to use with anyone.

THE WORKFLOW AUDIT

Ten business days. \$4,950 inc GST, fixed and paid up front. Your workflow mapped as it actually runs, the leak measured in hours and dollars, a 90-day plan and a business case like this one, built from your numbers.

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