# PCLaw SQL vs. cTree

PCLaw by default uses the cTree database for storing all information, matters, clients, contacts and accounting information. cTree requires no setup and on a fast network provides excellent performance for even large firms.

There are two downsides to cTree:

1. Since cTree is a flat file system and not client server, it depends on all components of the network functioning in harmony to perform without error. Any issues can cause cTree files to become corrupted. Running Verify Data Integrity may or may not fix these issues and data loss can occur.
2. Third party vendors such as document management systems and copy tracking systems cannot access the cTree data. With a SQL system they can automatically update the active matter list.

PCLaw can also use the Microsoft SQL database, and on version 13.x and 14.x it functions pretty well.

The advantages to using SQL:

1. No more VDIs (except Reset Matter Balances occasionally). No more damaged/corrupt files. You can still have the occasional data issue, but it will be caused by unexpected PClaw behavior rather than damaged data files.
2. There will be a lot less fixups needed.
3. Microsoft SQL is Volume Shadow Copy aware, backups can be configured to run continuously and automatically.
4. Most technical people are familiar with SQL and can write small programs or SQL Queries to access data very quickly. I have written simple customized reports for some clients that run almost instantly in an hour or two.
5. Third party vendors can access your PCLaw data and do better integrations.
6. Fixups or mass changes, can often be accomplished with a simple SQL Query rather than having to go through the PCLaw back door and change or update records one at a time.
7. Larger firms can upgrade their server with more memory and faster CPUs to improve performance.

Downsides to SQL:

1. Larger firms will need to buy licenses for a full SQL Server which entails a cost.
2. Most functions and reports in PCLaw can be a little slower and in some cases such as the Work In Progress report a fair bit slower, but SQL handles an increase in network traffic better than cTree and some firms actually report much better performance.
3. SQL Server often requires some IT assistance to setup and maintain.
4. The Receivables by Client report can sometimes skip a matter or two if the Client Name happens to have some non letter/number characters in it. This is not that common but can happen.

# Converting to SQL

There are two ways of converting to SQL. One is to call PCLaw and request that your license be changed to SQL. Once this change has been made, PCLaw support can walk you through the conversion to SQL. In many cases this works just fine. If you have had certain kinds of corruption in your cTree data, the conversion can take a long time. I have heard of conversions taking up to 2 weeks. The conversion can be aborted at any point. I am not sure if PCLaw support will help you fix the damaged data.

The other way is to get a consultant such as myself involved in the process. My method is this:

1. I take a copy of your PCLaw data and restore it to my server. I do not need you to have an updated license from PCLaw at this point.
2. I run a diagnostic program on the data to identify the damaged data and fix it.
3. I run a test conversion to SQL and compare the reports before and after converting to make sure everything comes over correctly.
4. I help you or your IT people restore the test conversion data to your server and setup a small number of users with access to both the live data and the test data.
5. At this point I will make the same fixes to your live data as I did to the copy I have. You do not need people out of PCLaw while I do this.
6. Once you are happy that the test conversion looks good and everything functions as you need it to, we choose a date for the “real” conversion.
7. On the date of the “real” conversion, lock everyone out of PCLaw.
8. I will make a copy of the current data so you can access it after the fact for reference.
9. Depending on the situation we can either run the conversion on your server or my server.
10. The conversion can take anywhere from a few minutes up to a few hours. Typical is about 1-2 hours for a mid-sized PCLaw database.

This work is done at my hourly rate, and is usually somewhere between 3 and 10 hours.