



# Law Firm Merger Data Migration

## Professional Playbook and Checklist

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**Disclaimer:** Operational guidance only. This document is not legal advice.

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## 1. Executive summary

A merger lands well when billing, conflicts, and delivery remain steady while two firms become one. That stability depends on disciplined data migration. Treat this work like a closing checklist. Decide what moves, map fields with care, test in staging, run a controlled cutover, and verify with specialists.

### **12-step quick start**

1. Form the migration team and RACI.
2. Inventory every system and choose what migrates.
3. Decide time slice and depth by module.
4. Build sample exports and a field mapping matrix.

5. Clean data and define crosswalks for clients, matters, and people.
6. Stand up a staging environment and run a test import.
7. Validate with module experts and fix defects.
8. Lock a freeze window and capture delta changes.
9. Back up both environments and prepare rollback criteria.
10. Execute the production import in a controlled order.
11. Reconcile trust, AR, WIP, conflicts, and docketing.
12. Open triage, measure KPIs, and complete cleanup.

**Guiding principle:** Financial accuracy, conflict integrity, and critical deadlines are non-negotiable. Everything else is a managed compromise.

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## 2. Governance and roles

Successful migrations have visible ownership and fast decision-making. Assign module specialists, give one person authority to break ties, and document decisions as you go.

### **RACI overview (sample)**

#### **Program governance**

- Responsible: Migration Lead
- Accountable: COO
- Consulted: CIO, CFO
- Informed: Partners

#### **Data inventory and scope**

- Responsible: Data Lead
- Accountable: COO
- Consulted: IT, Finance
- Informed: Practice Heads

#### **Security and privacy**

- Responsible: InfoSec Lead
- Accountable: CIO
- Consulted: General Counsel, HR
- Informed: All users

#### **Field mapping and transforms**

- Responsible: Data Lead
- Accountable: CIO
- Consulted: Billing, Finance, Conflicts, Docketing
- Informed: Practice Operations

#### **Staging and testing**

- Responsible: Applications Manager
- Accountable: CIO
- Consulted: SMEs per module
- Informed: All users

#### **Financial mapping and reconciliation**

- Responsible: Controller
- Accountable: CFO
- Consulted: Billing Lead
- Informed: Partners

#### **Cutover and rollback**

- Responsible: Migration Lead
- Accountable: CIO
- Consulted: All module owners
- Informed: Entire firm

#### **Communications and training**

- Responsible: Change Manager

- **Accountable:** COO
- **Consulted:** Practice Leads
- **Informed:** Entire firm

**Decision forum:** Weekly 45-minute stand-up. Log each decision with owner, rationale, and date.

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## 3. Definitions and scope

### Systems commonly in scope

- **Documents and DMS:** iManage, NetDocuments, file shares, knowledge banks
- **Practice management:** clients, matters, roles, rates, tasks, notes
- **Timekeeping and billing:** time entries, expenses, prebills, invoices, LEDES, UTBMS codes
- **Accounting and finance:** A/R, A/P, WIP, trust ledgers, chart of accounts, vendor master, taxes
- **Docketing and calendaring:** rule sets, deadlines, reminders, limitation dates
- **Conflicts:** parties, former names, affiliates, screens, historical clearances
- **Email and collaboration:** mailboxes, shared folders, archives, Teams/Slack
- **CRM and BD:** contacts, companies, activities, pipelines
- **HR/Identity:** directory, security groups, roles, SSO/MFA

### Data depth choices

Choose **full history**, **partial history**, or **as-of date** by module. A common approach is: full trust and general ledger history, limited billing history (for example two to three years), and “active matters plus archive” for older closed matters.

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## 4. Phase 1. Pre-migration decisions

### 4.1 Scope and compliance checklist

- Written inventory of every system and data object
- For each object: migrate, archive, or re-key
- Retention rules documented for each jurisdiction
- Active legal holds identified and respected
- Client consent requirements reviewed for file transfer
- Vendor and consultant NDAs in place

### 4.2 Keys and numbering

- Target client and matter numbering rule approved
- Crosswalk tables for client IDs, matter IDs, timekeepers, and users
- Deduplication rules for contacts and companies
- Rate plans normalized: standard, client, matter, timekeeper

### 4.3 Risk and privacy

- Data classification by sensitivity and geography
- Masking rules for personal data in staging
- Encryption required at rest and in transit
- Chain of custody and audit logging defined

### 4.4 Conflicts posture

- Preserve names, former names, and known affiliates
  - Carry forward historical clearances and screens with dates and approvers
  - Confirm how matter “sides” map in the target conflicts model
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## 5. Phase 2. Mapping with a representative sample

Select five to ten clients that represent edge cases: hourly and fixed fee, contingency, trust balances, LEDES billing, and a litigated matter with docketing.

### 5.1 Sample export set

- Clients
- Matters
- Contacts and relationships (including companies)
- Time entries
- Expenses
- Invoices
- Payments
- Trust ledger (transaction-level)
- Conflicts parties and affiliates
- Docketing events and rule identifiers
- Users, roles, and rate tables
- Optional: document manifest (for metadata-driven DMS moves)

### 5.2 Field mapping matrix (template)

Create a spreadsheet with these columns:

- Source table/object
- Source field
- Target table/object
- Target field
- Data type
- Required: Yes/No
- Transform rule (exact logic, including examples)
- Default value (if needed)

- Exception handling (what happens if missing)
- Owner (who approves the mapping)

### 5.3 Example mappings (illustrative)

- ClientID → Target “Legacy Key” custom field (preserve old identifier)
- MatterNumber → Target Matter Number (via crosswalk to new numbering scheme)
- LeadAttorney → Responsible Attorney (map via user crosswalk)
- Time “Hours” → Duration in minutes (Hours × 60, rounded per firm policy)
- UTBMS Task/Activity → Target task codes (validate against target code set)
- Invoice status → Target invoice state (Open/Paid/Write-off mapping)
- Trust transaction type → Deposit/Disbursement only; flag anything else for review
- Conflicts former names → Alias records (split and store as separate searchable names)
- Docketing rule set → Target rule profile (or store as plain events with notes)

### 5.4 No one-to-one mapping rule

When the target system has no equivalent:

1. Transform to preserve meaning if possible.
2. Map into a target custom field if permitted.
3. Store in a read-only “Legacy” bundle attached to the client/matter and flag for manual review.

### 5.5 Data hygiene gates

- Remove duplicates (clients, contacts, companies)
- Normalize addresses and phone formats
- Expand initials and store former names for conflicts
- Validate dates, currency, taxes, and trust transaction integrity
- Align rate tables and time rounding rules
- Document every transform with at least one worked example

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## 6. Phase 3. Staging import and validation

### 6.1 Build a production-like sandbox

- Clone or configure target staging to mirror production settings
- Restrict access to migration team and reviewers
- Disable external notifications and billing integrations
- Mask personal data where required and feasible

### 6.2 Assign module reviewers (SMEs)

- **DMS specialist:** structures, permissions, metadata, versions, search
- **Practice management lead:** clients, matters, roles, rates, tasks, notes
- **Billing lead:** time/expense behavior, prebills, invoice templates, LEDES
- **Controller:** A/R, WIP, trust reconciliation, GL postings
- **Conflicts counsel:** search quality, historical clearances, screens
- **Docketing lead:** rules, trigger dates, reminders, limitation dates
- **Email admin:** mailbox ownership, shared folders, archives

### 6.3 Acceptance criteria (minimum)

- Record counts within tolerance (commonly 0.5% or tighter for critical objects)
- Trust balances match **by matter** and **in total** to the penny
- Recreate invoices for a test set and confirm totals, taxes, discounts, narratives
- Conflicts searches return equal or better results for a defined “tricky names” list
- Docketing deadlines match expected dates for a rules test pack
- Security sampling confirms correct access by role

### 6.4 Defect loop (repeat until clean)

- Log issues with source example and target example
- Adjust export transforms or import templates

- Rerun staging import for affected objects
  - SME retests and signs off
  - Regression checks confirm fixes did not break other mappings
- 

## 7. Phase 4. Production cutover

### 7.1 Pre-cutover checklist

- Announce freeze windows for source systems
- Capture a delta export since last validated staging run
- Verified backups and snapshots of source and target production
- Reconcile WIP, A/R, and trust balances before cutover
- Rollback triggers defined (what forces a rollback, and who decides)
- Cutover runbook printed and assigned by owner
- Communications and training reminders published

### 7.2 Cutover runbook (recommended order)

1. Confirm backups, snapshots, and freeze
2. Import identity, roles, and security groups; validate SSO and MFA
3. Import clients, then matters and relationships
4. Import rate tables and timekeepers
5. Import time and expenses
6. Import invoices and payments
7. Import trust ledger and reconcile immediately
8. Import conflicts data and validate searches
9. Import docketing items and spot-check critical dates
10. Import documents and email archives; verify counts and permissions
11. Enable integrations and notifications

12. Rebuild indexes and run application health checks

### 7.3 Day-1 verification checklist

- A/R aging variance within threshold
- Trust balances exact by matter and in total
- Prebills generate correctly for a test pack
- Mandatory conflicts checks behave as expected
- Docketing dashboards show upcoming critical dates
- DMS search works by client, matter, author, and document type

### 7.4 Cleanup plan

Expect cleanup. Common items include: duplicate contacts, orphan matters, misfiled documents, relinking emails, correcting tax codes, reassigning permissions. Maintain a 30-day cleanup queue with weekly burndown.

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## 8. Phase 5. Specialists and vendor migration services

### 8.1 When to bring in specialists

- You lack in-house ETL or DMS engineering
- Trust accounting, GL mapping, or tax logic requires formal validation
- You have complex billing artifacts (evergreen retainers, consolidated bills, multi-currency)
- You need large-scale document reshaping, OCR, or metadata enrichment

### 8.2 Vendor questionnaire (ask in writing)

- Exact list of objects they can export and import
- Field-by-field specs, formats, and required values
- Limits (record caps, file size caps, API limits)
- Handling of partial payments, write-offs, finance charges, multi-tax, multi-currency
- Document handling: versions, authorship, permissions, original paths

- What is explicitly out of scope and suggested workarounds
  - Number of test runs included; who fixes defects
  - Security controls and destruction of project data after completion
  - Post-go-live support window and SLAs
  - Clear division of responsibilities between vendor and your team
- 

## 9. Financial integrity guide

### Trust accounting (non-negotiable)

- Reconcile **transaction-level** trust ledgers, not just ending balances
- Reconcile by matter and client, then in aggregate
- Preserve references (check numbers, wire IDs, deposit details)
- Lock trust posting until reconciliation passes

### Billing and A/R

- Validate time rounding and rate application rules in the target system
  - Recreate a sample of LEDES files and compare to legacy outputs
  - Confirm tax logic per jurisdiction and client settings
  - Ensure write-offs and credits map to correct GL accounts
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## 10. Conflicts and risk controls

- Preserve parties, roles, former names, and known affiliates
- Preserve historical clearance outcomes with date, approver, and rationale
- Preserve ethical screens with scope and effective date
- Test search behavior using a curated list of “known tricky” names
- Document any compromises in conflicts data and the mitigation plan

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## 11. Docketing and deadlines

- Migrate rule sets where supported by the target application
  - If rules do not map, convert to plain events with notes explaining the source rule
  - Validate limitation dates and filing deadlines with the practice team
  - Confirm reminder timing and recipients for key event types
- 

## 12. Security, privacy, and chain of custody

- Encrypt exports and imports in transit and at rest
  - Restrict staging access and maintain audit logs
  - Mask or minimize personal data in nonproduction environments
  - Document who handled data, when, and under what authority
  - Confirm vendor deletion of migration data after project completion
- 

## 13. Communications and training

### Pre-go-live

- One-page “what changes” guide by role
- Instructions for time entry and billing activity during the freeze
- Office hours and training sessions recorded and indexed by topic

### Go-live week

- Daily status update with known issues and workarounds
- Single intake channel for support with posted triage hours
- Clear escalation path for trust, conflicts, and docketing issues

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## 14. KPIs and acceptance thresholds

- Zero critical production defects in week one
  - Trust balances reconcile exactly
  - A/R aging variance under agreed threshold
  - Prebill cycle time equal to or better than baseline
  - 90% of users can enter time, find documents, and generate a prebill by day two
  - Cleanup backlog cleared within 30 days
- 

## 15. Appendices: Checklists and templates

### Appendix A. Master checklist (one page)

#### Scoping

- Inventory systems and objects
- Decide migrate vs archive vs re-key
- Retention, consent, and legal holds reviewed

#### Architecture

- Numbering, keys, and crosswalks defined
- Rate tables and rounding rules aligned

#### Security

- Masking rules for staging
- Encryption and access logging
- Vendor NDAs and destruction confirmation

#### Mapping

- Sample exports built

- Mapping matrix completed
- Data cleanup complete

### Staging

- Sandbox ready
- Test import executed
- SME validation completed
- Defects resolved and regression tested

### Cutover

- Freeze executed
- Delta export captured
- Backups verified
- Production import completed
- Day-1 verification passed

### Post-go-live

- Financial reconciliation complete
- Conflicts and docketing validated
- Cleanup queue managed and closed
- KPIs measured and reported

## Appendix B. Field mapping matrix starter (copy into a spreadsheet)

Columns:

- Object
- Source field
- Target field
- Data type
- Required (Y/N)
- Transform rule

- Default value
- Exceptions/notes
- Owner
- Approval date

## Appendix C. Data quality rules

- No nulls in required fields
- Dates in ISO format YYYY-MM-DD
- Currency standardized or explicitly flagged
- Time narrative length within policy
- UTBMS validated against firm dictionary
- Emails canonicalized and deduplicated

## Appendix D. Financial reconciliation worksheets (starter)

### Trust reconciliation by matter

- Matter
- Opening balance
- Imports total
- Disbursements total
- Closing balance
- Variance

### A/R aging variance

- Bucket (Current, 30, 60, 90+)
- Source total
- Target total
- Variance

## Appendix E. Conflicts minimum viable model

- Party legal name

- Common name and former names
- Affiliates and relationships
- Role and matter side
- Clearance outcomes with date/approver/rationale
- Ethical screens with effective date and scope

## Appendix F. Docketing validation pack

- Ten rule-based deadlines with expected dates
- Three limitation dates by jurisdiction
- Reminder intervals and recipients
- Side-by-side comparison sheet: legacy vs target

## Appendix G. Communications toolkit (starter)

- One-page role guide template
- Freeze FAQ template
- Daily go-live status update template
- Support intake form fields

## Appendix H. Issue log template

- Issue ID
- Type (Data/Config/Process)
- Priority (Critical/High/Medium/Low)
- Description
- Source example
- Target example
- Owner
- Status
- Target fix date
- Resolution notes

## Acronyms table

<b>Acronym Stands for</b>		<b>What it means in this guide</b>
A/P	Accounts Payable	Bills the firm owes to vendors (part of accounting/finance data)
A/R	Accounts Receivable	Money clients owe the firm (invoices, aging, collections)
BD	Business Development	CRM/relationship and pipeline-related data and activity
CIO	Chief Information Officer	Executive accountable for technology strategy and systems
COO	Chief Operating Officer	Executive accountable for operations and program delivery
CSV	Comma-Separated Values	Common export/import file format used for migrations
DMS	Document Management System	System for storing, securing, versioning, and searching documents
ETL	Extract, Transform, Load	Migration process: pull data, clean/convert it, and load to new system
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions	User-facing reference materials for change management
GL	General Ledger	Accounting record system; chart of accounts and postings land here
HR	Human Resources	User identity, roles, and employment-related administration
ID	Identifier	Unique record key (client ID, matter ID, user ID, issue ID)
KPI	Key Performance Indicator	Success metrics used to measure migration outcomes

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Stands for</b>	<b>What it means in this guide</b>
LEDES	Legal Electronic Data Exchange Standard	Standard format for electronic legal invoices and billing data
MFA	Multi-Factor Authentication	Extra login verification layer (security control)
OCR	Optical Character Recognition	Turning scanned images into searchable text (often in document projects)
PII	Personally Identifiable Information	Personal data that can identify an individual (privacy/security focus)
RACI	Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed	Framework to define ownership and decision rights
SSO	Single Sign-On	Centralized login to multiple systems with one identity
SME	Subject Matter Expert	The person who knows a system/module deeply and validates outcomes
UTBMS	Uniform Task-Based Management System	Standard codes for legal billing tasks and activities
WIP	Work in Progress	Unbilled time/expenses that may need to be migrated and reconciled