



Skills Assessment

White Paper

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Executive Summary

While most law firms fully recognize the need for implementing a more rigorous, measurable skills assessment program for its existing and prospective employees, few find the time and focus to actually implement one. With training budgets being squeezed, a law firm must protect against a widening gap between the skills available versus the skills required to deliver the best work product. This is especially important given the fact that, in order to increase profitability, law firms are asking secretaries to support more lawyers.

To address these issues, as well as to improve employee retention, law firms are increasingly planning, creating and implementing skills assessment programs. The Microsystems Skills Assessment Module is the legal market's only solution for providing automated assessment of the advanced Microsoft Word skills required by the legal market.

Why assess?

Human Resource and Administrative leadership at law firms are driving the implementation of skills assessment programs for document-centric positions – secretaries, word processors, help desk analysts, trainers - that go well beyond simple typing tests. The increase in skills assessment programs is being driven by several strategic initiatives:

- **Improve hiring decisions** – According to statistics provided to Microsystems by its customers, the cost of a bad hire can easily reach \$100,000.
- **Reduce training time and expense** – Target training programs to meet the specific needs where document production skills are lacking.
- **Reduce support costs** – Document production resources are more productive when training is targeted to their specific, assessed needs.
- **Increase client service** – Law firm clients are better served when documents are produced quickly and at a high quality.
- **Increase lawyer to secretary ratio** – Assessment and corresponding targeted training help secretaries gain efficiencies in producing documents.
- **Reduce employee turnover** – Better skilled employees are proven to have higher on-the-job satisfaction, leading to greater retention.

What to assess?

Skills assessment programs are focused on the advanced Microsoft Word skills that are a fundamental part of document production within law firms.

These skills include:

- Cleaning up Word documents (tables, cross referencing, footnotes).
- Working with fields (e.g., Hyperlinks; page numbering).
- Applying outline numbering.
- Formatting documents.
- Styling documents.

When to assess?

While there are many periods during which an assessment can occur, the majority of skills assessment programs target the following three moments:

- **Pre-hire** – Does a prospective new hire really possess the advanced Word skills and competencies that one professes or that the firm requires from a new hire?
- **New hire** – New hire training is often limited to just a few hours; this is especially true for newly hired secretaries, as the lawyers they serve are typically anxious to have them in place. What are the targeted training areas to focus on during that precious training time so that a secretary can be productive immediately upon completing training?
- **Professional development** – Do the advanced Word skills of a secretary or word processor match the requirements demanded by the practice areas they serve?

Why is assessment challenging?

There are many reasons why law firms find it challenging to implement an advanced Microsoft Word assessment program:

- **The program is a time burden to administer** – Human resource professionals or office administrators can provide the assessment, but typically lack the “Word Expert” skills in order to grade the output. This increases the time and manpower required to accurately assess a user.
- **The program is not relevant to an end user’s day-to-day responsibilities** – The assessment does not reflect a typical document with which the user works.
- **The program does not reflect the firm’s unique Word desktop** – The assessment typically is done within a generic Word desktop, not one that reflects the firm’s unique desktop.
- **Grading the assessment is done manually** – The output of an assessment typically requires manual grading, which is both time consuming and subjective.

What is the cost of a bad hire?

If a law firm chooses not to implement a skills assessment program for prospective new hires in the secretarial, word processing or help desk areas, it runs an increased risk of making a bad hire. Based on information provided by our customers, Microsystems estimates that, on average, the cost of a bad hire totals \$100,000, including the following components:

- Agency fee.
- Internal time spent recruiting.
- Salary paid.
- Severance pay.
- Overtime required to compensate for low performance.
- Lawyer frustration.

In addition, an unqualified hire increases the likelihood of the firm sending out a poorly formatted document to a client, which can negatively impact client service.

What is the Microsystems Skills Assessment Module?

The Microsystems Skills Assessment Module, a component of the Knowledge Partnership solution, provides automated advanced Microsoft Word skills assessment test for a law firm's pre-hires, new hires and current employees.

The Skills Assessment Module is specifically designed to measure the advanced Word skills needed to be efficient and productive in legal document production. It evaluates the document clean-up and formatting skills of current, new and prospective employees involved in the document production process. The module is simple to implement and administer, and automates the time-consuming grading process of the exercise document. No other software or component is required.

The Microsystems Skills Assessment Module includes the following components:

- An exercise document.
- Assessment delivery instructions.
- Participant instructions.
- Automated grading.
- A custom report for capturing and displaying results.
- Assistance customizing your requirements

For prospective hires, the Skills Assessment Module is ready "out of the box" to provide a law firm with an automated advanced Word assessment. For new hires or current employees, the Skills Assessment Module can be configured to assess advanced Word skills specific to the firm – such as the firm's guidelines for styles and numbering.

Benefits of the Skills Assessment Module include:

- Enhances firm profitability by improving the document production competency and efficiency of support staff.
- Improves hiring decisions by identifying how well candidate skills match document production requirements.
- Increases training program ROI and focus by identifying specific training needs per employee.
- Assists employee retention by more efficiently building secretaries' word processing skills so that they match the firm's document production best practices.
- Saves time, cost and resources required to build, administer and maintain a skills assessment program.
- Configurable to support the specific needs of the firm's practice areas.

The Skills Assessment Module is one of several components of Knowledge Partnership: software-based solutions to common Microsoft Word and document production challenges faced by law firms.

Customer Case Studies - Skills Assessment Module

Case #1: Identify Targeted Training for New Secretaries, Reduce the Risk of an Unqualified Secretarial Hire

- Profile:** AmLaw 100 firm with more than 600 lawyers across ten offices.
- Challenge:** Limited training time for secretarial, word processing and help desk new hires.
- Objective:** Execute targeted new hire training, with focus on measuring advanced Word skills.
- Solution:** Implement a new hire assessment module using the Microsystems Skills Assessment Module and customizing it for the firm's document best practices and styles.
- Benefits realized:**
- Increased training ROI.
 - Decreased turnover, as likelihood of a "bad hire" is minimized.
 - Greater initial productivity from new hires.
 - Quick adoption and consistent usage by Human Resources and Training.

Case #2: Maximize Training Effectiveness with Automated Pre- and Post-Test Assessment

- Profile:** Global 100 firm with more than 700 lawyers across nine offices.
- Challenge:** Reduce the number of documents sent to the firm's Help Desk.
- Objective:** Improve secretarial document production and analysis skills.
- Solution:** Create a document clean-up and reformatting training program with customized Skills Assessment Module providing an automated pre-test (to identify which training modules to take) and post-test (to quantify training comprehension).
- Benefits realized:**
- 57% increase in secretarial productivity
 - More efficient Help Desk – less calls to Level 3 Support
 - More effective training

Best practices for implementing a law firm skills assessment program

In working with law firm customers to implement dozens of skills assessment programs utilizing the Skills Assessment Module, Microsystems has identified the following best practices for implementing an advanced Microsoft Word skills assessment program:

- Internally announce the creation of a skills assessment program at least 6-12 months in advance of launching it and clearly describe its objective and how it will work.
- Within the firm's Microsoft Word desktop, provide a "How Am I Doing" button that a user can run to self-assess any Word document a user is working on against the document best practices the assessment checks.
- Collaborate with users to identify a sample document that everyone being assessed is familiar with creating.
- Implement training sessions around the required skills.
- The assessment should measure both a test document and real-life documents pulled from the firm's document production output.
- Schedule time to review the results of an assessment with each participant and give them a chance to describe how they cleaned-up and restyled a document.
- Analyze batches of documents to identify targeted training opportunities.
- Provide positive reinforcement in the form of reviews, certificates, prizes or cash compensation for successfully completing advanced Word competency.
- Use the Skills Assessment Module for automated, uniform reporting and for the targeted development of ongoing training programs.

Learn more about the Microsystems Skills Assessment Module

Download a case study:

- **Cox Smith** uses Microsystems Skills Assessment Module to pinpoint Word skills and provide targeted training to existing staff. (<http://www.microsystems.com/pdfs/word-skills-assessment-training-cox-smith.pdf>)
- **Baker & Hostetler** uses the Skills Assessment Module to reduce the risk of unqualified secretarial hires and identify targeted training for new secretaries. (<http://www.microsystems.com/pdfs/BakerHostetlerCaseStudy.pdf>)
- **Sonnenschein** uses the Skills Assessment Module to maximize its training effectiveness. (<http://www.microsystems.com/pdfs/SonnenscheinCaseStudy.pdf>).

About Microsystems

Founded in 1995, Microsystems is a global leader in document lifecycle software and services designed to improve the total document creation and quality control processes of document-intensive businesses. The company helps more than 650 client firms and companies increase document production efficiencies and reduce costs and risk. Microsystems is based near Chicago in Downers Grove, IL.

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