TRACKER™
Elevate Your Practice

# Getting the Most from Your Immigration Management Software

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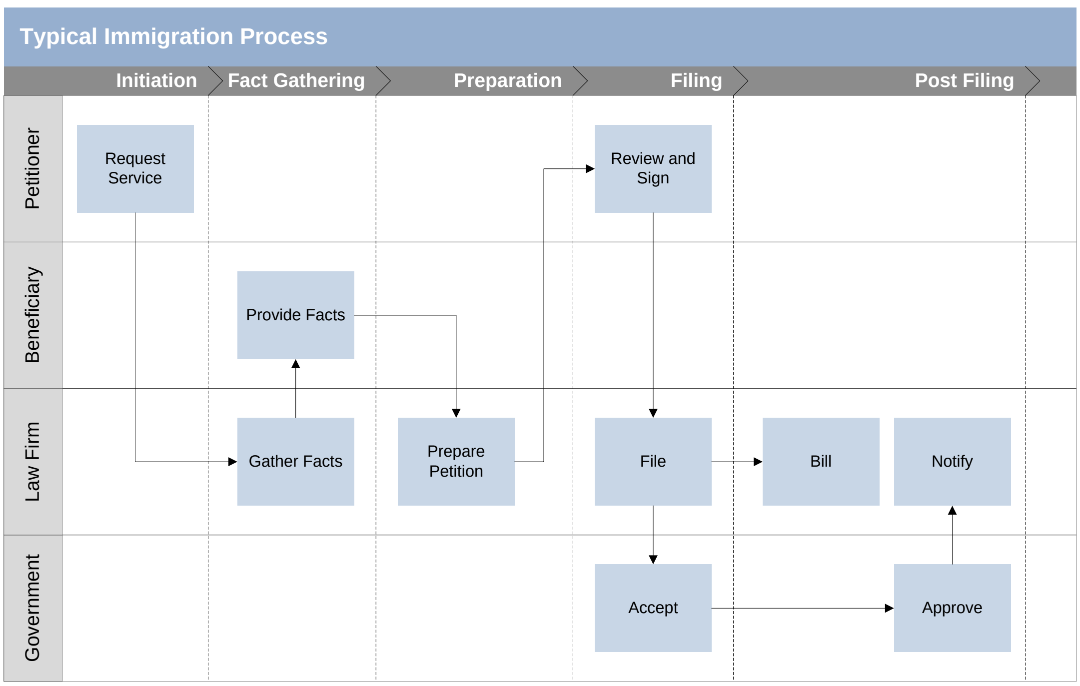
# Contents

# The big picture

If your immigration law firm is like many, you have embraced some form of immigration management software (IMS) as essential in one or more areas of your practice. In the current ever-changing immigration environment, immigration law firms are striving to automate process-oriented tasks so that highly-skilled legal staff can utilize their valuable time in legal analysis and decision making. Unfortunately, either because their software does not have the required functionality or because they are not aware of the capabilities that do exist, many law firms are only capitalizing on a small fraction of the efficiencies that can be gained through IMS technologies.

This paper delineates the immigration process in five phases and illustrates how technology can be applied to achieve higher efficiencies across the end-to-end process. While the paper focuses on a United States inbound employment immigration process, the same or similar efficiencies can be gained in other processes such as family based and worldwide immigration cases.




# The five phases

## *Phase #1: Your client needs an immigration service (Initiation)*

How do you learn that your client has an immigration service need? A phone call? An email? Do you get enough information in the initial request to start the process? Do you have the information you will need to bill for the service, or will you need to take an extra step to follow up on that later? Is it clear to you and your client that a service has been requested, and in the future, will you know the exact point in time that the request was received?

If you are already using a standardized service initiator form or questionnaire, you are well on your way in the right direction. A good IMS program will take it a step further and make the form available to your clients in an easy-to-use online format. A configurable online service initiator will allow you to ensure that all the information required to start and invoice a case is gathered. Additionally, as service initiators come in, your caseworkers should be able to create new case records or update existing ones with virtually no manual data entry. When the service initiator gets to you or your caseworker, it should contain, at a minimum, all of the contact information needed for the next phase, fact gathering, as well as any client-specific information you may need to include on the invoice or client-specific reports such as employee ID, cost center number or department name. Because the form will be electronically submitted, exact and verifiable date and time stamps should be recorded and available later for reporting or service level agreement documentation. A well designed IMS program will pass all data, including data from a service initiator, in a way that is much more secure than traditional initiation methods like phone calls, emails or faxes.

A concise and perpetually available electronic service initiator is an advantage to your client and to you.

An alternative to the online service initiator form is an initiation data feed. Some clients will prefer to create a direct initiation data feed from their HRIS system to initiate services. You will want to ensure the IMS provider you choose is able to work with you and your client to accommodate this type of integration. Intake from a data feed should work similarly to the process described above for intakes using an online service initiator. The advantage to your client would be the ability to send the required information directly from their HRIS system as opposed to keying it into the electronic form.

**Key IMS criteria for lowest operations costs and highest client satisfaction in the Initiation Phase:**

- Ability to give each client their own portal, customized exactly as you want it, including online service initiator capability
- Ability to configure your service initiator electronic forms exactly as you want them, by client
- Qualified service support team able to support special projects such as integration with your clients' HRIS systems
- Recorded date and time stamps for key events such as service initiator receipts, case process creation and first client contact
- Secure IMS application with secure hosting and documented third party security assessments

## *Phase #2: You need the facts (Fact Gathering)*

You have a service request, you know who the players are, and you have the information you need to invoice. Regardless of how the case was initiated, excepting the most basic service requests, you most likely need more information before you can start assembling a filing. In the employment immigration arena, you may need additional information from the employer, and you most likely always need more biographical information from the employee. In the past, you may have given the individual a call to gather the information, or better yet, invited him or her to the office for an interview. In today's fast-paced world, no one has that kind of time. Much as an electronic service initiator enables more effective case intake, online electronic questionnaires save all parties significant time, improve data accuracy, and increase security of personal identifiable information (PII).

Unlike the service initiator which should be available at all times to designated client personnel, the online questionnaires should be available only when you or your caseworkers have sent a questionnaire invitation, and only to the client personnel to whom you sent the invitation. An information update questionnaire which will be discussed later is the exception. Once casework has been initiated and all necessary records have been created or updated, the IMS program should allow your caseworkers to invite specific client personnel and/or foreign national employees to complete a questionnaire that you have designed specifically for the client and matter. Your IMS program should provide a full set of ready-to-use questionnaires for common case types as a starting point. The invitee should receive an electronic invitation with a link to the questionnaire, which is posted on the secure client web portal.

Gathering the facts for an immigration case is often the most time-consuming active phase of the entire process.

Any information that already exists in the records should be pre-filled on the questionnaire for the employee or employer to confirm or modify. The questionnaire should be easy for the invitee to complete with dropdown selections where appropriate and opportunities to attach documentation as needed. Upon receipt of the questionnaire, the IMS application should clearly designate information that will change existing data. This will alert you or your caseworker to items that may need to be reviewed with particular care which simplifies the review process and promotes accuracy. Once the review is done, you or your caseworker should be able to automatically update or create records with the new data much like the service initiator process described earlier.

The information update questionnaire is an exception. This type of questionnaire is a mechanism that should be persistently available to specific client portal users. The update questionnaire will allow employees to update information as qualifying events occur. Examples of information updates include a new I-94 card, or a change in dependent information or a work location. The questionnaire needs to be available at all times since you or your caseworker would not know to ask for this information. The completion of one of these questionnaires should trigger an electronic notification just as the previous two types of electronic forms do; and the caseworker should be able to automatically update the information as appropriate.

**Key IMS criteria for lowest operations costs and highest client satisfaction in the Fact Gathering Phase:**

- Easy-to-use client facing portal questionnaire capability
- Full baseline set of questionnaires
- Configurable questions, fields, labels and controls (dropdowns, checkboxes, etc.)
- Perpetual as well as by-invitation questionnaires
- Ability for questionnaires to be prefilled with information from your IMS database
- Configurable questionnaire workflow

## *Phase #3: You pull it all together (Preparation)*

You have gathered all of the facts that you need to do your legal analysis and determine appropriate actions. Now, you really do have everything you need to assemble a case filing; but you and your staff still have the task of transferring all the data that you so efficiently gathered onto the unique collection of government forms, word documents, and instructional emails that comprise each type of case.

Configurability is key to any successful IMS program along with a support staff with whom you can partner.

The very earliest adaptors of IMS programs enjoyed the benefits of completing government forms by automatically pulling data elements from the database and populating them into pre-mapped fields producing completed government forms in the same manner one would produce a form letter. The best IMS programs have taken that concept beyond government forms and have applied it to the many documents and email communications that one needs to compose during the preparation of an immigration case, including external communications such as welcome or instructional letters and internal communication such as requests for filing fee checks. An effective IMS program will come with a multitude of out-of-the-box document templates and, more importantly, will allow you to configure your own templates and automated merge documents to suit your individual needs. Further, you should not have to start from scratch. Your IMS program should allow you to easily convert documents you are already using to automated merge templates.

Your IMS program should also guide your caseworker through the steps and documents necessary for every case type. Your IMS program should come with a rich collection of preconfigured case processes. Additionally, you should be able to easily modify the processes or configure your own with document template collections, government forms, and task assignment and reminder triggers to suit the needs of your firm and each of your clients. Lastly, your IMS provider should have a support staff that you can rely upon to understand your business needs and assist you with your specific configurations if needed.

**Key IMS criteria for lowest operations costs and highest client satisfaction in the Preparation Phase:**

- Preconfigured working case processes and workflows
- Government form support including timely version updates
- Automated document creation via triggers and merge templates
- Email template capability
- Triggered tasks and reminders
- Easy-to-use configuration tools
- Available and capable support staff that takes a consultative approach when needed

## Phase #4: You push it forward (Filing)

Often, your process will require a client review or signature just prior to filing. When you are filing via paper copy, the client will need to return a signed hard copy to you. However, there is almost never a need to send the client a hard copy. The outbound copy for review can nearly always be posted on the client portal, eliminating expensive and time-consuming overnight or messenger services. For e-filing, the approval can be as simple as an email acknowledgement so no messenger services are needed in either direction.

While the United States government has made some strides in the area of electronic filing, many immigration matters still require a printed paper form. IMS providers have a responsibility to keep close watch on advances in government filing technology. As new e-filing capabilities become available, your IMS provider should embrace them and provide mechanisms to e-file directly from within their applications while ensuring compliance and data accuracy.

Regardless of how the filing was done, clients often want to be notified once a case has been filed. You should be able to configure your IMS program to automatically display a personalized ready-to-send email upon filing. The appearance of the email will eliminate the need for the caseworker to compose the email and will also serve as a reminder so that the email is always sent. Lastly, the program should allow you to configure reminder triggers to follow up if a receipt notice or decision has not been received within a designated period of time.

**Key IMS criteria for lowest operations costs and highest client satisfaction in the Filing Phase:**

- Secure and easy-to-use method of posting filing documents for approval
- Dedicated and insightful provider team
- Ability to trigger a wide range of actions including reminders and emails based on any event in the process

## Phase #5: You tie it all up (Post Filing)

While often overlooked, some of the greatest efficiencies and revenue generation opportunities can be gained in the post-filing phase. Often this is the phase where an invoice is issued. Your IMS program should automatically log billable items as they occur so that no items are missed when you invoice. Once a government response has been received, whether a notice of receipt or a decision, many law firms still rely on expensive messenger services to convey that information to their clients. A sound IMS portal will have a mechanism for posting government documents that clients (both employer and employee) can view securely and download. Lastly, as one matter ends, often it is appropriate to record reminders for upcoming matters such as final NIV dates and green card eligibility. These important task reminders can be built into the process to ensure that timely actions are taken. Additionally, you want the ability to set reminders now to follow up on potential business opportunities, such as the naturalization process, years in the future. Your IMS program should allow you to build these reminders into the case process.

### *Key system capabilities across all phases*

Certain IMS capabilities are critical across all phases of the immigration process. Your IMS should be easy to navigate with customizable dashboards that allow each user to choose the information he or she needs most readily. Accurate and timely reporting is needed both internally for you and your caseworkers to manage and monitor casework as well as externally to communicate status and performance levels to your clients. You will need reports that show up-to-the-minute data, and that you can interact with and change on the fly. The ability to schedule reports for automatic distribution will further increase efficiencies. In addition, clients are increasingly demanding the ability to check status at will, run their own reports, and stay independently up to date on their employment immigration programs. Client-facing web portals have played an important role in recent years not only in changing the way caseworkers and attorneys communicate with their clients but also in the way they attract and retain them. The client portals need to be able to serve both the client immigration contacts and the individual beneficiaries, securely providing each with the data, updates, and reports they need. Easy to use web portals that provide access to information considered important keep clients satisfied and at the same time lower your costs.

Clients are increasingly demanding secure web portals as a means to monitor case progress and their employment immigration programs

**Key IMS criteria for lowest operations costs and highest client satisfaction at Post Filing and across all phases:**

- Automated billable items collection and invoicing to ensure you are paid for all services provided
- Robust reporting that allows for customized reporting and real-time data delivery
- Client-facing portal that well-represents your service offering and provides your clients with the information they demand

# Summary

Whether you are a sole practitioner or a law firm with hundreds of attorneys, we hope that this paper has helped you understand how to get the most from an immigration management system, and whether your current IMS is the best program for you.

# About Tracker Corp's Immigration Management Software

ImmigrationTracker™ provides the greatest operational efficiencies and client satisfaction across every phase of immigration casework. You can incorporate automation into every phase of your casework with a complete set of case processes ready to use for every type of case and every phase of the case. Give clients the information they demand, at their fingertips, with secure web portals you customize exactly as you want. Keep team members organized and give management the information they need, at a glance, with personalized dashboards. Gain further visibility with pre-built, real-time reports.

## Next Steps

- Discover more about how ImmigrationTracker creates highly efficient case management
- Read the ImmigrationTracker brochure
- Let us give you a demo of ImmigrationTracker and show you how to streamline your immigration process end to end.