Project Biography: Automated PIF Form Using Microsoft Forms & Power Automate

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GitHub Repo: https://github.com/giannamcnally/finalproject

Link to Final Microsoft Form: https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=qT9zeA5UuE6_KXPE7rY0EsOyyHPoJwZHg1ljXt2qkaRUM1dFS0lYMEcwOUc5RThPUzZVOVlOVTVKNy4u

Link to Power Automate Flow: https://make.powerautomate.com/environments/Default-78733fa9-540e-4eb8-bf29-73c4eeb63412/flows/shared/9040fb14-ab82-419d-baff-ee21ba94eee6/details?v3=false (I added you as an Owner, I believe this should give you access to see everything.)

Link to Word Template: https://sumail-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/gmcnally_su_suffolk_edu/EdO1S6zV1x5FiQvOCe_-vzABUpCcfgLa8zcDSt4d3e4KYA?e=EOX6we

Link to Example of Flow Product (Template filled with form response): https://sumail-my.sharepoint.com/:w:/g/personal/gmcnally_su_suffolk_edu/EX5CN34zIUhAvLMX6AfUjKABOxUsFZ31FT_cvjuFR8bM3w?e=uzAITz

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Project Summary

Framing. *How well does the student define a problem facing legal practitioners or consumers, including a definition of relevant stakeholders / users?*

My project seeks to remedy an issue which effects both legal practitioners and their clients. Namely, my project seeks to expedite the client intake process in a way that minimizes frustration for clients and maximizes functionality for practitioners.

I currently work at a small estate planning law firm that has each of its potential clients fill out a Personal Information Form, or "PIF." Clients fill out and return this PIF before coming in for their initial meeting; the information within is meant to help the attorney approach the client meeting in a strategic, personalized way.

The current process surrounding PIFs is fairly outdated and has been the cause of some friction. For instance, clients are currently expected to complete a fillable PDF and upload it to Sharefile, a secure sharing site. This may sound simple, but it can be very difficult for some of our less tech-literate clients, who have difficulty with creating a Sharefile login, opening and filling out the PDF, uploading to Sharefile, etc. This leads to the firm's support staff having to dedicate time to guiding clients through this process on the phone or over email, which can add up.

The current process can also be problematic for the firm's attorneys. Clients may get overwhelmed by the extensive PDF form and fail to answer some questions, whether intentionally or otherwise. This impedes the attorney's ability to approach an initial client meeting in a strategic, informed way. Further, the form's formatting is fairly clunky, making it difficult for staff to identify pertinent information quickly.

Research. *How extensive is the student's research of existing solutions?*

I researched many different methods for remedying the issues described above. Some existing solutions include (1) keeping the current process, (2) having clients email their PIF instead of uploading to Sharefile; (3) printing and mailing PIFs to clients and having them mail it back; (4) a Google Forms interview; (5) a Microsoft Forms interview paired with Power Automate functionality; (6) Docassemble; and (7) a Gavel subscription, among others. I based my research on the information presented in class as well as independent searches on Google, Reddit, etc.

Ideation & Prototyping. *How well does the student explore the available space of potential solutions?*

I evaluated each solution available and ultimately decided that Microsoft Forms + Power Automate was the best fit for my project. Microsoft Forms offers a pre-made interview interface that is clean-looking and intuitive. Microsoft Forms also offers a slew of question formats and, importantly, logic branching options. Power Automate has broad functionality and multiple avenues for automating documents from Forms responses. Unfortunately, the simplest avenues require paid subscriptions, but it is possible to populate a document using only Microsoft tools with a little extra work.

In choosing this solution over others, I considered factors like cost, ease of getting the tool up and running, appearance of the final project, ease of access for clients, functionality, and customization.

User Testing. *How rigorously does the student engage in user testing, and how realistic are such tests?*

In testing my project, I aimed to represent each potential user group in a meaningful way. There are two broad camps of users for my tool: the staff of the law firm I work at, and our potential clients. Breaking these camps down further reveals the wants and needs that individual users are likely to prioritize. These priorities are the factors I based my testing strategy on.

In the camp of law firm staff, users will be split between administrative support staff and attorneys. For admin staff, an ideal client intake tool will be easy to distribute to clients and easy to collect once completed, as well as intuitive for clients to use (thereby reducing time spent guiding clients over the phone or email). For attorneys, an ideal client intake tool will condense the relevant information about a client in a clear, easy-to-read format.

To test the staff-facing components of my project, I relied mostly on myself as a test subject, but presented some later iterations to my coworkers to test their satisfaction. For instance, I demonstrated options for exporting Form response documents to our firm's Office Manager, as she manages our office's tech procedures and was the best person to decide the most efficient route. I also presented attorneys with Word doc templates to get a sense of what format and information they found most useful.

On the side of client users, the main concern is likely to be user experience and clarity. How a client experiences the tool will be largely influenced by their overall tech literacy. Many (but not all) of our firm's clients are seniors who have little to no experience with technology. Therefore, the tool needs to be accessible to tech novices as well as engaging for tech natives.

To capture the gambit of potential client users, I had people at varying levels of age and tech literacy test out the client-facing portion of my tool, the Microsoft Forms interview. My test subjects included (1) three people in their 20s who are tech natives (my friends); (2) two people in their 60s who use technology regularly but only at a basic level (my parents); and (3) one person in her 80s who has literally never accessed the internet before (my grandmother).

I had different test subjects try out different components throughout the building process, hoping to collect varied data without overburdening my test subjects. At the end stage of my project, I had one person from each age group try the complete Microsoft Form interview, which gave me an overview of the client experience.

I chose to collect user feedback through informal interviews post-use. I asked the test subject questions pertinent to the component they were testing at the time (ex. What question format did you find the easiest to use? Did you understand what that question was asking?). I took notes on the users' responses and analyzed my findings later to determine what changes I should make next.

Refinement. *How well does the student integrate feedback from user testing into subsequent versions of their solution?*

My mantra with this project was simple: test early and often. I tested individual components of my project by myself many times as well as presented components to test subjects for feedback. I did so at multiple stages throughout my project so that I could effectively integrate feedback without getting overwhelmed or missing the forest for the trees. Overall, I went through four iterations of the Word doc template (pertinent to law firm staff users) and six iterations of the Forms interview (pertinent to client users). I tested each iteration to some extent, and approached each new iteration with a clear bullet list of improvements taken from the feedback I received.

Complexity/Robustness. *To what extent is the project taking on a substantial process?*

While my project only makes use of one topic we learned this semester (document automation), it does so in a very thorough way. The client interview I built using Microsoft Forms is approximately 150 questions long, includes several instances of branching logic, and was thoughtfully designed in terms of question formats, phrasing, grouping, etc. In addition to Microsoft Forms, my project required me to build a multi-step Power Automate flow, which in turn required me to build a Word doc template that aligned with Power Automate's functions.

Impact & Efficiencies. *Does the project offer the prospect of greatly increasing the efficiency or expanding the reach of existing practice?*

Yes. This client intake automation tool improves our firm's ability to bring clients into our process and collect meaningful information early on. The quality of information clients provide on their PIF makes a noticeable impact on the quality of their initial client meeting. The more complete a picture the attorney has going into the meeting, the better they can tailor their pitch to the client's goals and make meaningful recommendations early in the process.

Beyond the parameters of the project, this tool demonstrates a proof of concept that automation is a viable option for our firm. Automating documentation will greatly increase our efficiency overall; estate planning involves the filling out of many unform documents. Preparing ancillary documents currently involves copy and pasting information using find-and-replace in Word dozens of times per client. This process is a clear candidate for automation. Automating this process will save us at least an hour of drafting time per client. Our estate planning department operates on a flat fee basis, so reducing the time spent drafting per client is of the utmost importance.

Expanding this concept of document automation in the firm will be highly impactful on our efficiency and future revenue capacity. It will allow us to get through more clients efficiently. Currently, our firm has more potential clients than we can fit into our schedule, meaning there is money left on the table each month. Maximizing the staff we have by offloading rote tasks onto technology will increase our capacity overall.

Fit/Completeness. *How well does the project address the stated problem and known needs of the identified users? Does it do what it was designed for?*

The project as it stands sufficiently addresses the problems I set out to fix. My goal in automating my firm's PIF was to make the process more user-friendly for clients and produce a functional output for staff. I believe I succeeded in addressing these problems largely because of my robust testing and refinement processes.

My final product includes a Microsoft Forms interview which, while long, saves clients as much time as possible by only showing questions relevant to them. This form is also simple to access and complete; it requires no login, downloading, uploading, etc. Rather, clients must only click a link and follow the instructions of the interview.

The output of the interview is a streamlined, easy-to-read document that focuses on that information most useful to attorneys and support staff. Information is presented in logical categories and in a simple yet effective way, thereby maximizing its usefulness to staff.

Documentation. *Is there sufficient documentation to address user needs? Note: your partner is a user. Documentation includes all "help" text, including that found inside your solution. It need not be an external Document.*

There is guiding language included within the Microsoft Forms interview, particularly on questions that could be answered more than one way; this is important to ensure that clients provide the information that our attorneys need. This language takes the form of subtitles below individual questions as well as explanatory introductions at the start of every section.

As for users on the law firm's end, the Word template I built for this project was made with readability and efficiency in mind. It is clean, organized, easy to read, and includes only necessary information to avoid a cluttered appearance. This last point is a significant improvement over the firm's prior system of having clients fill out a PDF; now that the document produced is only seen by the firm's staff, the document can be simplified and streamlined in a way that would not be suitable for client use.

Real Word Viability. *How far is the project from production?*

The project as it stands could go live for client use, but it is closer to a minimum viable product than a polished tool. There is certainly room for details to be added, such as more guiding language for users and improved visuals. The existing tool does, however, fulfill its goal of collecting client information in an efficient manner and populating an easy-to-decipher document for internal office use.

One significant weak point is that the Microsoft Form interview does not include a section about asset information. As can be seen on the Word template, the asset information requested is vast and detailed, encompassing over 138 discrete data fields. I determined that translating these fields into a Microsoft Form went beyond the scope of my project as the final Forms interview is already about 150 questions long and serves as a robust proof of concept. The asset info section of the PIF is included on the Word doc template and is ready to be linked to Forms questions, were this avenue to be pursued.

Sustainability. *How robust is the plan for continued operation?*

There is a robust plan for continued operation of this tool, though perhaps not in its existing form. Using this tool as a proof of concept and knowledge gained in my legal tech classes to explain its potential, I have successfully convinced my firm's leadership that document automation is our best way forward. It has since been decided that the firm will invest in a Gavel subscription, as its platform offers a more intuitive interface and a more polished appearance. I will use the interview tool I created for this project as the basis for a Gavel automation interview; perhaps the most time-consuming and strategic part of document automation is deciding how to translate document fields into discrete interview questions, and the Microsoft Form I created for this project has that step taken care of.

Letter from Partner

*My partner in this project was the firm I work at, Eckert Byrne LLC. I discussed my project and progress with our Office Manager as well as the attorneys and other admin staff. Because I would be a primary in-office user of this tool were it to be implemented, I wrote the partner letter below on behalf of the firm, taking feedback from my coworkers into consideration.

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Overall, the tool produced by this project has served most valuably as a proof of concept. It demonstrates how our firm's current procedures can be integrated with developing technologies, as well as the potential impact of automation on our efficiency. While the tool as it currently stands is functional and could be implemented, our firm recognizes that there is much room for improvement, and the benefits are well-worth the investment to make these improvements happen.

This Microsoft Forms interview created for this project has served as a jumping off point and provided valuable insight. One such insight is that the current platform is not ideal for our ultimate goals. Some of the things we have learned from this prototype are:

- Investing in a more easily customized, professional-looking questionnaire portal is well worth it. While Microsoft Forms is functional and includes some customization, it is fairly clunky to work with when attempting detailed maneuvers. Some functions that we would like to have available include recalling answers from earlier in the interview, more complex branching, and more varied formatting for questions.
- Integrating legal explanations into the PIF process would improve the effectiveness of our estate planning process. Our attorneys have expressed frustration that initial client meetings are often spent explaining basic legal concepts to new clients, reducing the time available to personalize the meeting to the client's wants and needs. As a solution, we

would like to have our attorneys record short informational videos relating to sections of the PIF (such as who to choose as beneficiaries, what fiduciary roles entail, asset information, etc.), and include these videos at the top of the relevant PIF interview page.

  - This would reap multiple benefits for our estate planning process; clients would fill out their PIFs more thoroughly because they would better understand what as being asked of them, clients would enter their initial meeting with a basic understanding of the estate planning landscape, attorneys could use the initial client meeting to give more substantive feedback, and clients would likely be impressed that we provide such thorough resources.

Having seen the prototype I built for this project, and with these insights in mind, the firm's management has decided to invest in a Gavel subscription for the office. Our first Gavel project will be converting the automated PIF process I created for this project onto Gavel's platform. We will then be jumping head-first into document automation for the practice at large. I will be tasked with automating our drafting process; as mentioned in the project summary above, estate planning practice involves a lot of repetitive documentation. Our current method of drafting ancillary documents is to use find-and-replace on Word, dozens of times per client. This is a clear candidate for automation, and I look forward to improving the firm's efficiency even further in the future.

In sum, this project has been received very positively by my partner. The lead attorney and office manager are both excited about the prospect of using more legal tech and were especially optimistic after seeing the tool I built. Though the Microsoft Forms + Power Automate version of the automated PIF will not be put into use, it will serve as a blueprint for an improved Gavel automated interview, and has effectively kickstarted a legal tech boom at our small firm.