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Dawn of a New Digital Age: How Firms Can Transform to Meet Our New Digital Normal

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Throughout the course of history, technology has been a disruptive force that has completely changed the landscape of many industries. Technology continues to reshape the way the world works and that is no exception for the legal space. The emergence of the technologies we're seeing today, such as A.I., virtual law, and integration tools are a few of the disruptors that will most likely change the trajectory of the next generation.

The bad news is, if your firm can't keep up with technology, you will quickly lose your competitive edge. But don't worry, there is good news. Adopting this technology is not as dreadful as it sounds, in fact, once you get over the mental hurdle, the actual implementation and utilization will have you regretting that you didn't make the jump sooner.

We are in an era where the shift to mobile and cloud computing for small to medium firms is as far-reaching as the shift to adopting computers was over 30 years ago. At the end of the day, the technology that is available now will allow you to provide better client services and attain higher revenue-driven results. Additionally, you will begin to notice that technology becomes an integral part of attracting new clients. Technology has the power to improve an organization's efficiency if used appropriately. Most traditional law firms are gradually losing ground due to increased competition put on by the digitally advanced firms.

If that made you start to sweat, don't worry! The simple answer to this is to be open to new technology and avoid resistance to change. The return on your investment will be far more impressive from an operational and financial standpoint than the risks associated with pursuing the technology needed to remain competitive. As the adage goes, work smarter, not harder. Implementing legal technology at your firm will allow you to focus on your clients and generate more revenue without increasing your workload. If you think that sounds too good to be true, you better believe that in 2020 it's an attainable reality.

Let's take a look at some of the ways firms can successfully operate in this new world and meet the pace of demand that the younger, tech-savvy consumer base is expecting.

Prevalence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and automation

With the introduction of AI and automation systems, law processes are being simplified. Today, legal documents are being recorded, physical paperwork is being organized and converted into digital files, search and discover features are increasing efficiency, [automated workflow engines](#) are assigning tasks for team members, and much more.

AI has not made a huge splash in the marketplace just yet, as rigorous testing and experimentation is still being conducted. However, let's take a look at some of the features this type of advanced technology could offer your firm in the future. Currently, what many researchers are talking about is AI's ability to assist in the discovery phase of a lawsuit. AI's ability to rapidly confirm facts expedites the process of finding background information, which can accelerate arbitration and litigation proceedings. According to an article from Forbes, AI "can review documents and flag them as particular to a case. Once a certain type of document is denoted as relevant, machine learning algorithms can get to work to find other documents that are similarly relevant." This type of AI and automation can often help sort out problems faster with fewer mistakes that are often overlooked by the human eye. In general, automation enhances consistency in contract and document creation and streamlines your client intake process.

As research and development continue, AI and automation will become increasingly more prevalent with many more functions than the ones just listed. Artificial Intelligence can't take the place of a lawyer, but law firms today can choose more tech-savvy professionals over others. Doing so will significantly decrease the learning curve and informed pessimism of technology adoption in the future. For now, this type of technology may not be widely used, but one day it will be.

Virtual law practice

In [The Disadvantages of Working Remotely: How Legal Professionals Can Overcome Them](#), we discuss the challenges of working outside of the office and the solutions to mitigate some of those pain points. Our new normal includes this transition between working at the office and at home, and there are a variety of drivers, such as work-life integration, travel requirements, and cost-of-living management that all come into play. Working remotely, however, means that technology needs to be used to facilitate business activity in an effective and professional manner.

Some firms are starting to support their teams bringing their own electronics and devices, like personal tablets and laptops. This requires implementing controls to configure and protect noncorporate devices and reimbursement protocols. This also implicates document sharing technology to discourage local storage and encourage [central document management](#).

The younger generations are contributing to this trend as they strongly identify with specific tools and technology, and prefer to continue using tools familiar to them when joining a new company.

Corporate cultural norms are also changing. For example, remote employees are encouraged to turn on their cameras in video meetings so that others on the call may personally interact with them. Because of this, anyone who works in an office must still adapt to virtual practices when working with outside counsel or business partners. Right now, and for the foreseeable future, there will be a mix of remote versus in-office staff, and technology is the only link between them.

Norms also include the prevalence of instant messaging or [chat capability](#), which fosters less stringent communication protocols — which as a result may lead to increase council involvement in potential risk situations stemming from hostile work environments, generally inappropriate discussions, or communication surrounding IP.

With all this being said, the virtual work environment is a tremendous advantage to business continuity and emergency activities. With technology, firms can easily manage workload while remote, stay abreast of litigation matters, and sign documents — without these capabilities, moving forward through the future would be much tougher.

Life integration tools

Given the prevalence of virtual workstyles, globalization, and scope of work, lawyers seem to never be away from work. Newer generations of lawyers — digital natives — grew up managing communication channels. Their integration of tech into their workflow is more natural than for those who are just learning to maximize technology.

Many mobile devices and apps now include virtual assistants that can add tasks and calendar slots based on email or oral statements. At times, this may seem intrusive, but the convenience is real. Smart homes that integrate with your car, phone, and emails can truly simplify everyday items, such as displaying the security wait line time for your flight or order groceries to be delivered right as you arrive home. These same luxuries can be put into context for your firm. With a click of a button, you can deliver anything you want to your front door. With that same click, you can seamlessly send your clients their bills, and everything related to their matters are now in one easy to access place. View deadlines, parties, documents, emails, and outstanding bills from one screen with your deadlines automatically generating and populating your calendar.

It is also common for people to have two or more email accounts on their phones that allow easy navigation between work and personal messages. Unfortunately, apps also make it easy to save

documents to an online service for anywhere-access. This makes it too easy to commingle work and personal documents, so firms should remember that convenience comes with a cost.

Managing your work-life balance is crucial. Cloud-based practice management technology is the best way to keep you organized and connected. And best of all, it will always be available when you need it, where you need it. As we look to the future and how the world is developing, having a cloud-based practice management software is a simple advantage you can't afford to look past.

Law industry falling behind the curve – why it matters

Technology is so advanced these days, almost everyone has a smartphone, most corporate offices are tech-savvy, and even children are given more technical educations.

In a world that breeds competition, clients only continue to lean towards the tech-savvy law firms who meet their needs in the most modern and advanced ways possible. Because of this, there is an undeniable threat to the existence of the law firms who choose not to take advantage of what technology offers them.

At the end of the day, all the legal processes become very time consuming when technology is not used. Introducing automation can help in various small to large scale problems and cloud-based technology provides users secure access to their data whenever and wherever they are.

The bottom line

Change is the only constant in the world, and technology, in large part, is what drives that. Emerging digital technologies like AI are uniquely positioned to disrupt how law firms conduct their businesses today. This, coupled with the fact that client's needs are changing and the younger generation is inherently more immersed in tech means that Law firms need to be constantly innovating and should invest in technologically driven infrastructure to keep up with the pace of the economy and these customers.

The nonstop progress in technology is changing how many lawyers work and how firms operate as a whole. Between changes in their working style and enhancements that improve efficiency, the field is evolving. The legal industry and all its parts must advance along with the rest of the world because the innovation and change we are seeing right now is only the beginning, and it won't stop for anyone.

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