

Ten Trends That Will Shape the Legal Industry in 2022

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It's no secret that the last two years have been filled with unprecedented challenges. But, navigating these challenges has armed attorneys and [legal operations professionals](#) with valuable lessons about providing legal services in the midst of difficult times. Moving into 2022, the legal industry as a whole is taking those lessons and turning them into resources to support a successful year to come.

Firms want tools that help them handle routine tasks in a more efficient manner so they can save time and drive revenue. As such, two words will define the legal industry in 2022: **streamlined and convenient**.

Keep reading to explore some of the trends that will drive these concepts and shape the industry in 2022.

Client Focus

As consumers in the larger economy, legal clients have come to expect convenience from every business they patronize, and that includes law firms. They want a seamless [client experience](#) that meets them where they are without requiring what they perceive as unnecessary steps. With a goal of maintaining positive client relationships, firms will increasingly rely on technology to meet that objective.

Tools like virtual meeting platforms, [client portals](#), and electronic payment capabilities will maintain their prevalence among law firms in 2022. Even as some firms have returned to in-person meetings and proceedings, many clients still expect the convenience of conducting business from the comfort and security of their homes. To remain competitive within the industry, firms of all sizes will have to meet this expectation.

Electronic Discovery

Discovery is often one of the most convoluted tasks that a law firm handles, requiring time-consuming contributions and coordination between all parties to a matter. It can be a complicated process that drives industry efforts to make the process easier to handle. E-discovery uses artificial intelligence (AI) and automation technology to collect and produce data in response to formal requests within a legal proceeding. Not to mention, it is a \$2B industry that helps law firms pull relevant information from volumes of various types of records. A cost-effective alternative to traditional discovery methods, e-discovery is expected to continue growing and helping firms increase revenues in the year ahead.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing has become a widely accepted practice for law firms in recent years as they look for ways to complete administrative, and even legal, tasks in an efficient and cost-effective manner. Outsourcing involves the identification of tasks and practice areas that can be best handled by outside service providers. According to experts, the outsourcing of legal processes will continue to be a growing industry in the year ahead, providing law firms with services related to accounting, legal billing, and various tech functions.

By outsourcing some necessary non-legal duties, firms can spend more time and resources on their most profitable tasks. But some firms are even choosing to outsource some of their more intricate legal processes. The use of contract paralegals will continue to expand during 2022. Firms benefit from bringing in these professionals to work on specific matters without the extra overhead costs that come along with hiring a new employee. Particularly within small and mid-sized firms, paralegal outsourcing can help drive revenue in an efficient manner.

“New Law”

“New law” is taking outsourcing to another level with many big firms hiring contract attorneys to handle matters on an as-needed basis. This innovative way of providing legal services is largely in response to consumer complaints about high costs and hourly fees. Firm leaders have discovered that the use of contract lawyers can help them control their costs. They can then pass some of those savings onto their clients, while also maximizing profits.

In 2022, “new law” offers law firms and individual attorneys the flexibility they need as the uncertainties of the pandemic persist. They can pivot quickly to remain competitive while continuously meeting client needs and driving revenue.

Automation

[Automation](#) is a major driver for streamlining the practice of law, and any reduction in repetitive law firm tasks equates to more time for work that drives revenue. Automation technologies are evolving the basic administrative functions of a law firm through the use of AI innovations. They take on various forms, and each can significantly ease the day-to-day functions of a law firm. In 2022, firms will look for the repetitive tasks that create bottlenecks within their workflows and seek out automation options that can better handle them. Tasks like [calendaring](#), client onboarding, conflict checks, and even the creation of some court documents can be effectively handled through automation.

Evolving Remote Work

Remote work was a quick necessity at the start of the pandemic, but moving into 2022, firms will look for ways to evolve these arrangements, making them more efficient, seamless, and responsive. The “make it work” perspective will be replaced with one that embraces serious thought and strategy. Firms will revisit their policies to identify areas for improvement.

As better technology adds to a more effective remote working environment, communication will play a large role. Firms will seek improved communication systems to remove obstacles that thwart both collaborations between firm members and effective communications between the firm and clients. The use of cloud-based softphones and texting platforms will expand in 2022, along with client

portals. From lead management to collections, firms will seek ways to raise the communication bar.

Embracing Technology

The wave of legal technology will not come to an end in 2022. Many courts and jurisdictions recognized the efficiency of processes like remote hearings and no-appearance proceedings when they became a necessity, and even as the world reopens, they will continue utilizing these tools. The access to justice will expand and legal technologies will keep evolving to meet these needs. As such, law firms will also continue embracing new technologies as the year progresses.

Data Focus

For law firms to thrive in 2022, they will need to pay close attention to [analytics and reporting](#). Information related to revenue, profits, expenses, and practice area performance will be key to making decisions about the direction and growth of firms. Over the past year, attorneys and law firm administrators have put a lot of thought and effort into transforming their practices and working to make them pandemic-proof. 2022 will be the year of determining whether these new processes have actually translated into real profits. To do this, firms will need technologies that make the capturing and reporting of data quick and easy. With a data-focused perspective, law firms will be able to make informed decisions in the new year.

Part-Timers

Part-time work generally does not come to mind when thinking about jobs within the legal industry, but experts suggest that this will be a trend in the coming year. Many employees enjoyed the work-life balance that they experienced during shutdowns. They will seek ways to continue that flexibility in 2022 and part-time opportunities offer a viable solution. Firm members can earn enough money to meet necessary expenses and even pay down some student loan debt while maintaining a level of freedom within their personal lives.

Increased Demand

Experts suggest that the increased demand for legal services that started during the pandemic will continue into 2022, especially for the following practice areas:

- Corporate
- Real Estate
- Domestic Relations
- Litigation
- Cryptocurrency

Firms can meet these increases in a number of ways. They should first recognize the potential that lies within these practice areas and the types of prospective clients that they may bring through the door. Firm leaders can identify which of these practice areas best align with the strengths of their firms and how to best leverage existing resources to serve these clients. With an understanding of increased demand within the legal industry, law firms can take advantage of this trend in the coming year.

