

The Modern Law Firm: Breaking Out of Comfort Zones and Old School Methods

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If you had to guess what one emotion is elicited when lawyers are faced with the ability to adopt new technology, what would you guess?

If you guessed hesitancy then you'd be right. When it comes to advancements in new technologies, that emotional resistance has become almost an expected response for the legal industry, and it isn't without justification. The importance and sensitive nature of matters handled by attorneys prove reason enough to proceed with caution before diving headfirst into the unfamiliar tech waters.

However, whether firms want to believe it or not, the water is warm and because technology has transformed the capabilities of attorneys in rendering legal services, attorneys and firms that fail to embrace new developments risk depriving their clients of the most effective representation possible. With the level of competition we are seeing today, firms have no choice but to modernize the way they practice.

The Legal Landscape Today

If you take a stand back and look at the legal landscape and where it has evolved from, there are undeniable trends that in some ways, have pushed firms into modernization (whether they were initially willing or not). The explosion of legal technology and improved service delivery models have evolved our use of big data and have led to the digitalization of billing, the automation of client intake and matter management, and ultimately has increased firm's ability to close out cases at a much faster rate. However, demand is rising faster than available resources can accommodate, and firms are faced with a level of strain they haven't seen before. Automation, workflow management, and legal software are easing the pressure, but the adoption of these resources is still slow to catch on. The boundaries of many legal functions within a firm are expanding, and these trends are calling for a few things: new processes, new skills, and new approaches. Unfortunately, fewer attorneys are equipped to thrive in this environment, which is resulting in the isolation of many traditional law firms.

Before we dive deeper into how firms can combat the modernization of the legal industry, it is important to understand what is driving these trends. In one word, it's data. 10 years ago the driver was globalization, but now with the proliferation of information consumers have access to, it's clear that data rules. These quantifiable metrics have no boundaries and they certainly transcend jurisdictions. We're in a [consumer-centric](#) world now, and the only way to keep up with the people you serve is by knowing what they want. And you do that by looking at the numbers.

An Introduction to Modern Law Firms



So what exactly is a modern law firm? Why are they different? Do they really embrace new strategies and methods? Let's find out.

The definition of 'modern' is to relate to the present or recent times as opposed to the remote past. As new technologies are released and new things are discovered, firms have to be willing and able to grow and adapt to these changes. A firm's vision and objective must be clear in order to overcome challenges that will prevent you from keeping up with the rest of the world. And more importantly, how your clients expect your services to be rendered. As the pace of society continues to speed up, and expectations are increased, younger attorneys don't have time to waste on processes that could be simplified and made easier. Today, it is about more than hard work, it's about innovation, creativity, and providing a level of top-notch service that cannot be found anywhere else. To be a modern firm, you must rely on data and technology because that is the best way to serve your employees and clients in this new world.

The generational gap

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus was quoted by Plato as noting that "everything changes and nothing stands still." From one generation to the next, we continue to see a divergence from what used to be popular in culture and technology to the "next best thing" or trend. What was once a gold standard business procedure for Baby Boomers or even Millennials, is now obsolete or antiquated to Gen X-ers. This age gap can lead to misunderstandings and disconnect between younger associates and more senior attorneys. Recruitment is a top priority for firms, but it is also [one of the biggest pain points](#). If management can't understand the technologies the talent they are trying to recruit is using, or if they won't come to terms with the reality of these differences, newer attorneys will find a firm that will. Understanding and taking steps to adopt these technologies will not only bridge this gap but will make your firm more agile and [lean](#).

Culture of open communication

Poor communication is often cited as the biggest factor that leads to client complaints. Similarly, a lack of communication within your law firm is just as detrimental, not only for efficiency but for accuracy as well. Innovation, collaboration, and calculated risk are paramount to a successful firm, and with the prevalence of conferences, virtual meetings, and online and in-person communities, firms have started to recognize the benefit of coming together to share real data. As the industry continues to evolve, these communication channels need to stay open and attorneys need to make use of their time and their client's time. In a world that is always on the go, clients expect fast responses to their questions and routine updates on their cases. There are now technologies that let you privately [send and receive texts and calls](#) from your phone while simultaneously tracking and billing for that time automatically. Software like this function to make your life easier. Not to mention it helps you make more money. It's a no-brainer, and although adoption and technology training may seem like an uphill battle, the benefits of utilizing it at your firm far outweigh those initial burdens.

Artificial intelligence

There is a significant gap today between companies that have adopted (and understand) Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its potential advantages and those who do not.

Savvy law firms are also savvy businesses. They embrace AI to perform repeatable tasks and to process data that is essential for their business campaigns or strategy. Firms also adopt AI to streamline existing business processes, and they have established solid management support for each AI initiative. For example, you can [automate your case management](#) to get your bills sent out faster. By creating a workflow, software can automatically assign or complete tasks for you. This should be a no brainer! Letting traditional ways (looking at you paper people!) go is hard, but if you have a smartphone (as 81% of Americans do), then I bet you adjusted to that technological jump in 07' just fine!

Despite high expectations of AI, statistics show only 23% of businesses have incorporated it into their processes, product, and service offerings. The AI industry and technology involved are surely new, but it is crucial for any business or firm that wants to do better now and in the future to look into it.

Your online presence

When you think of marketing and online presence, law firms, or even the legal industry as a whole, probably don't come to mind. Due to the nature of your work, there has never really been a need for a heavy emphasis on brand positioning. But as we enter this new digital society filled with digitized and remote work, that is beginning to change. We are in an age where everything is and can be found online. Because of this, it is essential that your firm meets the needs of clients who are moving to online resources to help craft their decision making. Everything from your website, your blog, and your social media profiles are essential for the modernization of your company. With the internet, your website is probably the first contact between your audience and your firm. And if we've learned anything from our days sitting across that oak desk at law school entrance interviews... First impressions are everything.

Website design

Every element of a well-designed website is carefully planned, executed, and updated when need be. A modern firm knows that their clients are on the internet, which means if you're not, you're behind. At the end of the day, if your site doesn't accurately reflect your firm, it might be time to take additional steps. The clients you will one day serve are the millennials who are

currently fully immersed in technology. To win their business you must be aligned with their needs.

Implementing these strategies will not happen overnight. They will require time, resources, and commitment. But, if you want to stay competitive, you must make it a priority to modernize your business, otherwise, your days of competitive advantage will soon be over. It is only a matter of time.