

Is technology making the practice of law better or worse?

There's no denying that technology is everywhere. In fact, it's hard to identify an industry where technological advancements have not improved and expanded the products and services provided to customers.

Unfortunately, the legal industry has been hesitant to embrace these innovations. For various reasons, attorneys have resisted technology, instead opting to embrace decades-old methods and processes.

Even in the face of undeniable evidence, two schools of thought have emerged about the impact of technology on the practice of law. On one side, the lawyers assert that technology has had little influence on the industry and is essentially unnecessary for the profession to thrive. On the other side of the argument lies a group of lawyers who not only recognize the value in tech but put in the effort to keep up with new technologies by implementing them into their practices.

This post will focus on the expansion of technology into the legal profession, and whether or not it has benefitted the practice of law. It will discuss the reasons why some attorneys avoid technological innovations and how these advances have actually proven beneficial.

Why attorneys resist technology

The evidence is held in high regard within the legal community. Yet, even with overwhelming amounts of data confirming the usefulness of legal tech advances, many lawyers continuously reject them. There are two main reasons why attorneys reject technology's place within the legal industry – tradition, and fear.

A profession steeped in tradition

The practice of law is generations old and many of those antiquated traditions are still front and center within the profession. This commitment to tradition counters technical advancements. Instead of benefitting from new technologies, attorneys opt for conventional tools and resources.

Here are some of the thought processes that extend from this dedication to commitment:

- “If it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” – Many attorneys fail to see the weaknesses in their processes. Instead, they assume that their current methods are the most efficient, never even considering other options.
- “The risk is too high.” – Attorneys are trained to avoid risk. When new technologies are introduced, many of them don’t want to be the first out of the gate. Instead, they prefer to let other firms go first, taking a wait-and-see approach.
- “Our clients don’t like change.” – Instead of taking the time to gather client feedback and initiate innovations, law firm leaders often assume that their clients will not appreciate changes in their processes.
- “We’re making money, so we don’t need improvements.” – This exemplifies a major disconnect between legal intelligence and business acumen. The successful businessperson understands the advantage of implementing profitable technical advancements. Why limit your profitability?
- “Don’t reinvent the wheel.” – I don’t know about you, but I heard this phrase countless times in law school. We were constantly being told to duplicate the old instead of creating the new. But sometimes, the wheel needs to be improved.

Fear of replacement

We have seen the effect that technology can have on various industries, with workers being replaced by machines. Some attorneys believe that the legal profession could meet the same fate, and this worry has effectively paralyzed them into avoiding technical advancements.

This fear also stems from concerns about billable hours. When you bill by the hour, new and efficient processes could mean fewer earnings, particularly if you are someone who fails to see these new processes as opportunities for new business.

Why lawyers should stop resisting

While these reasons are firmly engrained within the legal profession, they do not reasonably justify the resistance of legal technologies. For one, new innovations can coexist with tradition within a profitable firm. This whole “don’t fix what’s not broken” argument misses the very reason why law firms should embrace tech advances. You will never know how much better and more profitable your legal practice will be without at least considering growth and advancement.

Secondly, it is highly unlikely that technology will ever fully replace attorneys because the practice of law requires a human touch. Client interaction is a vital part of the profession, and no computer can ever replace that. Legal representation is innately personalized. Successful attorneys form professional bonds with their clients. It’s part of what makes a profitable law firm with repeat clients.

How tech makes legal practice better

Legal technology is a growing field, with new innovations being introduced to the market on a regular basis. Here are some of the areas where technology has already demonstrated how it can make the practice of law better:

- Legal Research – Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionizing traditional legal research. By uploading a single brief or pleading into a database, law firms are able to find and access cases, summaries, and legal analysis. Some of these programs even do the Shepardizing for you.
- Document Review – For years, first-level associates and contract attorneys have sat in large conference rooms, combing through legal

documents in preparation for trial. It is a time-consuming and costly task for law firms, but the implementation of new technologies have greatly cut down on time and cost. Through the use of Artificial Intelligence, computers can now be programmed to quickly review thousands of pages for specific information. Not only is the review completed in a more efficient manner, but associates are freed to handle more profitable tasks.

- Legal Billing – Technology has completely transformed the processes used to track legal time and bill for client tasks. E-billing has done away with the need to obsessively watch the clock or to remember what time you completed a task three weeks ago. Time tracking can now be done with one click of a mouse, and this same convenience can transfer to the billing process with recent tech advances.

Though the pushback continues, the advantages of legal tech cannot be denied for much longer. These advances have helped lawyers move their practices forward in an efficient and profitable way, proving that technology is definitely making the practice of law better.

About Erika Winston:

Erika Winston is a freelance writer with a passion for law. Through her business, The Legal Writing Studio, she helps legal professionals deliver effective written messages. Erika is a regular contributor to [TimeSolv](#) and a variety of other publications.