What's trending in the legal tech world

It is an ongoing topic of discussion within the legal community. Technology is changing how law firms do business. Even attorneys who have consistently refused to let go of their analog ways are feeling pressured to incorporate new legal technologies and administrative-enhancing gadgets. Whether you lead the charge towards legal innovation, or you begrudgingly lag in the back row, the following are some legal tech trends that are impacting the practice of law right now.

Internet of Things (IoT)

IoT continues to expand its influence on the legal profession in various ways. Virtually every electronic device on the market comes with some sort of "smart" option, connecting the objects you use daily with the internet. This wildly popular technology has implications that affect the practice of law in three general ways.

From an administrative standpoint, IoT devices can be used to handle some of your basic (and even not so basic) administrative tasks. With E-Discovery and other legal applications, machines are quickly learning how to do work that was traditional handled by attorneys or legal support staff members. E-discovery programs can search through thousands of discovery documents in a fraction of the time, quickly completing tasks that have been traditionally handled by associates or legal assistants. There are even legal applications that create automated contracts. I'm not talking about simple leases or sales agreements. I'm talking highly detailed contracts with multiple parties and very specific terms. Lawyers who embrace these IoT technologies may experience greater efficiency and significant cost savings.

IoT can also make the physical environment in your office more comfortable and financially efficient. Smart thermostats and lighting can be programmed to automatically lower or turn off during non-business hours. Security concerns can be addressed with smart locks and surveillance cameras. As law firms move towards paperless offices, smart desks can be used to review documentation with clients. I recently made a purchase where all my documentation was presented on a smart desk. I even signed my contracts directly onto the desk's surface with a stylus. My documents were then downloaded onto a flash drive and handed to me without the need for one piece of paper. What would your clients think about that type of technology in your law office?

Lastly, depending on your practice area, IoT may likely become an integral part of a future case (if it hasn't happened already). Courts across the country are establishing precedents about the admissibility of everything from fitness watch data to smart home device recordings. As these devices and wearables constantly collect information about their users, they may also be collecting valuable evidence for one of your future legal battles.

Smart Sourcing

I'm sure you've heard of outsourcing. Now, allow me to introduce you to smart-sourcing. A tool for securing the extra resources your law practice may need, while keeping high-value tasks and billable hours in-house. The process uses an external platform to funnel less profitable tasks to third-party providers. The use of this platform allows you to maintain a substantial amount of control and governance over the tasks undertaken by these providers. A recent article on [Law.com](Law.com) discusses this trend and how it can be an effective tool for the specific IT needs of a law firm. As stated in the article, smart-sourcing centralizes various IT security tools into one tool, "eliminating not only the logistics and confusion of juggling an arsenal of technology, but also the costs of maintaining each of those numerous tools."

Cloud computing

This isn't a new trend, but I will continuously sound the trumpet until all lawyers embrace the efficiency and effectiveness of cloud storage for their firm's administrative and practice needs. Cloud technology has been around for a while now. Amazon Web Services first began offering cloud - based services in 2002, more than 15 years ago. Yet, some attorneys still hesitate to embrace this technology. So, let's revisit the reasons to switch.

- It's cost effective. If you are still using a dedicated server for your law firm billing and practice management needs, you are essentially throwing money (and profits) away. Many lawyers have decided that the expense of maintaining, updating, and fixing these servers make them cost-prohibitive. Why haven't you?
- The cloud is more secure. When using a professional cloud-based provider, you are getting the most advanced innovations in cybersecurity. These companies employ security experts who solely focus on identifying threats and addressing them before they compromise your secure and valuable data. Even a dedicated security professional likely cannot provide you with the level of protection you receive from a reputable cloud-based provider.
- It's mobile. How often do you work on cases away from your physical office? Probably quite often. With cloud technology, you can access necessary files and documents from virtually anywhere in the world. A cloud-based billing software, like [TimeSolv](#), allows you to instantly record your time instead of relying on an unreliable memory.

The digital courtroom

For litigators, technology will continue to evolve and shape the way you interact with the courts. Numerous larger jurisdictions have already implemented mandatory electronic filing requirements to cut down on the incredible amount of paper that overwhelms most clerk offices. Experts say that smaller jurisdictions will begin moving towards e-filing as well, along with advanced e-trial systems that streamline the scheduling and discovery processes.

The courtroom itself is likely to start seeing technological advancements as well. Judges may handle their caseloads electronically, relying on touchscreens and voice recognition to record opinions and make real-time rulings. Courtrooms will be outfitted with smart technologies for efficient review of evidence and documents. From accident reenactments to crime scene viewing, technological advancements could completely change the way your case is handled in the courtroom.

These are just a few of the numerous technological advances that are moving the practice of law into the future. As a law firm owner of manager, you are likely trying to decide how new technologies should fit into the direction of your practice. Don't let these innovations overwhelm you though. Remember that even small steps will eventually lead to significant gains.

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.