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The Modern Lawyer: 5 Technologies Every Lawyer Should Be Using Today

The business of law is evolving at an unprecedented pace. As the marketplace becomes more competitive by the day, clients are demanding more from the attorneys they retain while simultaneously resisting higher legal fees.

Meanwhile, rapid technological change threatens to disrupt the legal industry to its core. The Internet reshapes legal research and the filing of documents. Smartphones and tablets make business much more mobile. Cloud technology and advanced telephone systems enhance collaboration and improve productivity.

> *The business of law is evolving at an unprecedented pace*

Technology can't replace the unique human ability to argue the law and earn clients' trust. However, these tools can make it easier to attract clients and perform the work necessary to win cases. This is especially true of five key communications technologies that improve mobility, collaboration and productivity for the legal profession.

A Call for Change in the Business of Law

As if the legal profession wasn't difficult enough, the past few years have presented attorneys with a host of new pressures. Industry growth has been tepid, at best, since the 2008 financial crisis, and many law firms are merging because new business just isn't out there like it used to be.

With the go-go days long past, lawyers might feel the urge to dig in and resist investing in updated technology. That would be the wrong instinct, according to the 2014 Report on the State of the Legal Market, produced by Peer Monitor and the Georgetown Law Center for the Study of the Legal Profession.

"In order to stay relevant and competitive in an increasingly fragmented market, it is incumbent upon firms to reshape themselves to be more responsive to the needs of clients, to deliver services in a more efficient and predictable manner, and to develop pricing models that reflect more accurately the value of the services being delivered," said Mark Medice, senior director at Peer Monitor, a Thomson-Reuters company that provides real-time market data.

The future belongs to law firms that use technology to squeeze more work into every billable hour. Firms that delay could find themselves in history's dustbin so quickly they won't know what hit them.

Five Technologies Reshaping the Legal Sphere

Every case starts with a conversation. The latest communications technologies enable conversations in ways unimagined with the arrival of email a generation ago.

The cloud — Remote servers and high-speed Internet access allow people to fetch documents and run applications from any device that has a web connection. The cloud allows firms to outsource IT functions to IT experts. It also allows them to save a bundle on the costs of storing books and documents. A recent survey by Lexis-Nexis found that nearly three-quarters of lawyers in small firms said their firms were more likely to use cloud technologies in 2014.

Smartphones and tablets — Smartphones and web-connected tablets put massive computing power into the hands of a legal team, allowing attorneys to read and file documents, listen to voicemail, conduct text chats and perform just about any other communication task their business requires. According to an American Bar Association survey, iPad use among lawyers jumped from 15 percent in 2011 to 48 percent to 2013.
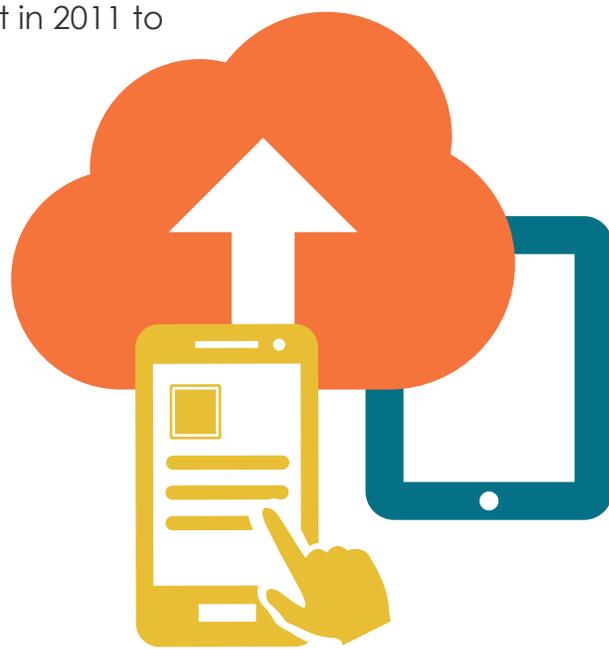
Five Technologies Reshaping the Legal Sphere

Electronic court filing and online legal research — Legal documents can be filed via PDF in many jurisdictions, allowing lawyers to file from just about anywhere. And when it comes to legal research, people outside the legal industry can find a host of free legal information online, placing much more pressure on lawyers to master subtleties of the law that are unavailable to the general public.

Virtual and video conferencing — Law firms can shave travel costs by interviewing witnesses and consulting with clients via remote video feeds. As more courtrooms adopt video conferencing, lawyers will increasingly be obliged to master video. Thanks to the cloud, video conferencing costs have fallen dramatically in recent years, making video an option for firms of every size and creating a competitive disadvantage for firms that don't use it.

Advanced business phones — Internet technology enables Unified Communications, which combines phones, chat, email, teleconferences and data tracking of all these services to vastly improve the communications infrastructure of a law firm. With VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) and cloud-based software, law firms can reduce their phone bills, dramatically improve their communications capabilities and use digital data to make their firms more efficient.

These technologies provide three principal advantages to law firms: mobility, collaboration and productivity.

Mobility: Today's Lawyer is Productive on the Go

Smartphones and cloud-based services allow attorneys to be productive anywhere, anytime. The top service providers in the cloud sector empower lawyers to:

- **Carry their office in the palm of their hand.** With a smartphone, tablet, laptop or desktop computer, lawyers can access documents whenever and wherever they need to.

- **Stop fretting over file size limits.** Lawyers no longer have to worry about attaching huge documents to email. With cloud storage, they upload the file once and then send simple text links to anyone who needs them.

- **Keep documents secure**. Top providers ensure that documents are seen only by people with legal access to them. Everyone else is locked out. That eases concerns about lost phones and stolen laptops.

All of this streamlines the process of dealing with legal documents, freeing attorneys to spend more time winning cases.

Collaboration is Key in Today's Legal Environment

Technology can remake the way lawyers consult with clients and colleagues. From partners to paralegals, everyone in a firm can stay in constant contact. Software can be configured to forward people's calls to their homes and track their whereabouts so they can be reached in a flash when needed.

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Videoconferences are becoming increasingly common across the legal sector. Lawyers don't have to lose time waiting for expert witnesses to fly across the country; interviews now can be conducted over laptops or tablets. This allows lawyers to bring in more evidence at lower cost, strengthening their ability to win cases while addressing clients' demands to hold expenses down.

Another advantage of videoconferencing technology is the ability to connect multiple offices. Smartphone apps now allow lawyers in the midst of an important client meeting to contact experts and answer questions immediately rather than telling a client, "I'll have to get back to you on that."
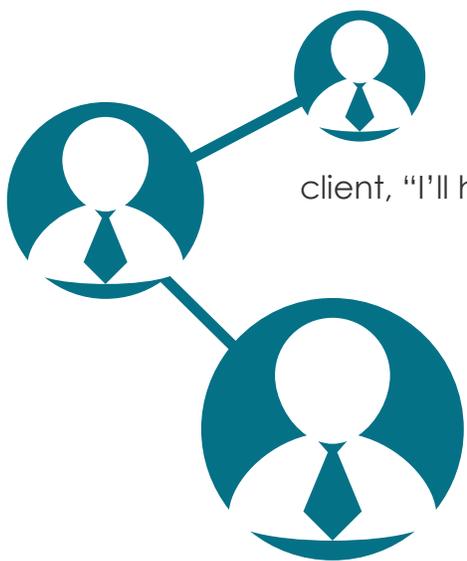
And lawyers can confer with colleagues via video feed without leaving the courtroom, law library or power lunch.

Technology Makes Firms More Productive

As clients push firms to limit fees or switch to value-based billing, the billable hour has come under attack. Yet no two cases are ever alike, so billing by the hour often still makes the most sense.

But that doesn't change the pressure on the legal industry to become more productive and get as much work done as possible per billable hour. Technology will be key to making that happen.

> *Technologies can give a law firm a competitive edge while improving its bottom line.*

It has already become incredibly easy to collect electronic signatures and file legal documents online. That saves a lot of time lost to filing in person at a courthouse. We also are seeing big changes in how clients access legal information. Legal records have become widely available from government sources and websites devoted to covering legal decisions.

Lawyers no longer have a monopoly on legal knowledge, but new technology is enabling legal experts to conduct in-depth, data-driven research that is far beyond the capability of the general public. In addition, communication technologies that track activities on company phone networks can make offices more efficient, reduce waste and streamline client interactions.

All of these tools can give a law firm a competitive edge while improving its bottom line. The key is to have an office telephone network that takes advantage of the latest communications technologies.

The Business Phone System Evolves to Support Today's Law Office

The foundation for all this technological change should be the business phone system. The latest tools help improve:

Mobility

Attorneys and their staffs must be available for important calls at all hours. Mobile device integration and secure cloud technology can help keep a law firm connected. VoIP enables attorneys to work from anywhere, with just a modern desk phone and a broadband Internet connection or with a softphone and headset.

When a call is urgent, attorneys will value personalized call routing. They can set up "Find Me/Follow Me" functionality so that important calls from designated clients or staff are transferred to wherever they are. Calls can be seamlessly forwarded to home phones and mobile phones.

Collaboration

Working and sharing ideas with colleagues is a must in the legal profession. A modern phone system can make collaboration much easier.

HD Video Collaboration, for instance, creates a quality video conversation that doesn't require additional third-party subscriptions. A chat function comes in handy in closed-door meetings, when it makes much more sense to touch base with someone via text rather than interrupt a meeting.

Voice calls also can be recorded and automatically translated into text for reading later.

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Productivity

The cloud helps attorneys track the time they spend on the phone with clients. Recording the conversation means that the time gets accurately logged. Accurate records can help pinpoint the days and times of heaviest call volume. Managers can use that data to ensure optimal staffing levels and review employee performance.

Firms with multiple offices and telecommuting employees face communication chaos when trying to track employees down. Multiple-location integration of a business phone system can solve that. All callers are treated as if they are calling into one place, regardless of their locations.

A modern, cloud-based system also eliminates a significant expense: long-distance phone bills. All calls made on a VoIP phone system are local calls. This also means you can eliminate the need to maintain certain equipment in your office. All you need is a router and a phone.

Moving to a cloud-based system and its subscription pricing model means that your phone system moves from a large capital expense to a manageable monthly operating expense. There's no large outlay of cash needed to buy new equipment.

The Phone Still Matters

The beauty of a modern phone system is that, for all its high-end benefits, it preserves the simple value of a client hearing your voice.

Simple value of a client hearing your voice

It's not just because we can talk much faster than we can type. It's because there always will be times when conveying the importance or nuance of a topic requires human conversation. A client can have anxieties about a key element of a case, and that might never show up in an email or a text message. In a phone call, the anxiety will be obvious.

Negotiations require diplomacy to ensure everyone feels satisfied with an agreement. Sometimes, bad news such as a lost appeal or a mistrial simply needs to be passed along in person because the recipient will be badly in need of a sympathetic ear.
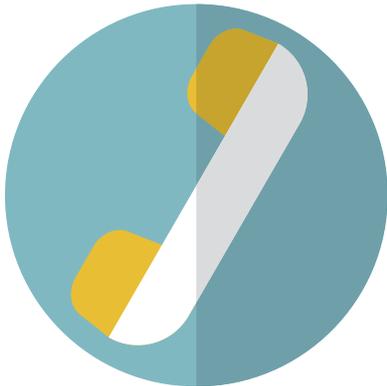
Of course, an in-person conversation usually produces the best outcomes, but the best-case scenario isn't always available in today's fast-paced legal profession. A phone call or a videoconference might provide the personal touch that gives a lawyer an edge over a competitor.

Calling in an Expert

Legal professionals have enough going on in their lives; they don't want to worry about phone system inefficiencies that could slow them down. The advantages are in the cloud: availability, communication, collaboration, recordkeeping, reliability and cost.

Want to learn more about what VoIP and the cloud can do for you? Check out www.Fonality.com or call us at 888 768 3770 for packages and pricing or to request a quote.

About Fonality

Fonality has built its business around helping growing businesses use their phone systems to become more competitive and successful. It has been developing Unified Communications systems since 2004 with more than 20,000 clients serving more than 260,000 end users around the world.

The company's engineering team developed the Fonality Heads Up Display interface and patented hybrid solution to meet the unique needs of emerging companies.

Fonality provides business phone systems and contact center solutions designed exclusively for growing businesses. Fonality is the only provider that can deliver the same user experience in the cloud and on-premise, with innovative features that help smaller businesses save time, communicate more efficiently and reduce costs.

For more information, visit www.Fonality.com or call 1-888-768-3770.