

Technology for Sole Proprietors & New Start-Ups

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The dress and vocabulary of a lawyer may seem archaic to most but that shouldn't prevent you from embracing the 21st century. While a majority of law firms will not have the resources nor the expertise to develop artificial intelligence to outperform junior lawyers and paralegals, you can still and should take small steps to replace hard work with smart work.

Organising Your Diary

Smartphones have become as essential to us as wooden clubs were to our stone age forefathers. While smartphones do come in handy when you're trying to kill time on your commute to work, you should certainly use it to get your work organised. Most email platforms provide users with a calendar feature which can be used to organize your day and to note down key dates, whether it be to meet a prospective client or to file papers in court.

These calendars can be synchronised wirelessly to your mobile phone or tablet without you having to update the information in several places. This will allow you to be prompted of important dates no matter where you are, even in the event that a hardcopy of your diary was lost in a fire.

Don't overlook using this basic feature of your smartphone - there's a reason why PDA devices went out of fashion in the early 2010s!

Communication

Effective communication allows quicker decision-making, a key to any efficient law practice. Your law practice should consider adopting instant messaging platforms as a means for ad-hoc discussions between employees whether they are in the next room or on a different continent. Features such as document sharing and group chats will allow you to bounce ideas off each other with little hassle. The flexibility that instant messaging brings to a workplace cannot be underestimated - you may be able to minimise the need for those dreaded weekly meetings by keeping each other updated on the progress of a case from the comfort of your desk.

The messages which are sent in real time and can be accessed from most devices with internet access enables rapid means of communication and thus improves workplace efficiency. More importantly, instant messaging is a paperless record of what was said should you need to refer to it and most service providers provide end-to-end encryption, which in theory, prevents third parties from deciphering what was communicated between you and your colleagues. Many instant messaging platforms require little to no investment which makes it a viable option even for law firms with limited resources.

Footnote [1] Jane Croft, 'Legal Firms Unleash Office Automatons' Financial Times (16 May 2016) <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/19807d3e-1765-11e6-9d98-00386a18e39d.html#axzz4HiLoOIR6>> accessed 10 August 2016

Talent Hiring

Don't miss that opportunity to hire that fledgling, young lawyer by embracing social media. Bypass headhunters and paid advertisements for that job opening at your law firm by scouting for talent on websites such as LinkedIn and JobStreet. Many young professionals today have profiles and comprehensive CVs listed on business oriented social networking websites, allowing you to find that perfect fit for your law firm even without the luxury of a Human Resources department.

While one shouldn't be quick to judge a book by its cover, a quick search of your potential employee's name or email address will likely come up with some hits and even a social media profile or two. This will allow you to gauge the person's personality and even the level of written English proficiency before the interview. Once your ideal employee is found, you may even consider conducting an interview via video conference should he be located out of town.

Legal Research

A law firm without legal resources is a non-functioning one but filling your library with practitioner texts and law reports can be a costly endeavour, especially if you're a new start up or a small firm. One way to get over this is by subscribing to an online legal database which allows you to search broad practice areas or specific databases for legal authorities from within and outside your jurisdiction depending on your needs.

Online legal databases will not only save you costs but save you the time and effort while doing legal research by essentially bringing the best law libraries in the world right to your desktop. A list of authorities that either affirm or disapprove a legal principle is just a click away without you having to leaf through numerous legal tomes. With most legal databases providing free trials for short periods of time, you should try out a variety to determine what is most suitable for your practice before purchasing a subscription.

Online Presence

A professionally designed website is key to building the credibility you need to compete against the more established names in the legal profession. With potential clients becoming more aware of their options, it is a certainty that your firm will be researched and its name will at the very least, be put through a search engine. A website with well-thought-out contents will give your clients confidence that your firm has enough stability and foresight to have an online presence.

Your website can also serve as a platform for you to air your areas of expertise and a summary of the cases you have handled to a worldwide audience. It is an excellent opportunity for you to tell potential clients why you are deserving of their trust and why you should be hired to represent them.

Aside from being an excellent marketing tool, your website will also make you more accessible to potential clients. Your website will be the first port of call when a potential client has enquiries. As it will be accessible all day and all year round, a client who has the convenience of having the details needed on your website to make an informed decision is likely to hire you over a firm that does not have an online presence. Furthermore, you can use search engine optimization basics to ensure that your website appears as a hit for certain keywords or queries and thus set you up as an authority in the eyes of the increasingly tech-savvy client.

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