

LAW MEETS TECHNOLOGY

How Information Technology Has Transformed the Practice of Law

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ABSTRACT

I have preached to many of my law students over the years, the practice of law is not what you see on television. Instead of the fast paced and exciting drama in the courtroom, the vast majority of your time will be spent in the law library researching the minutia of a legal issue amongst piles of journals, treatises, case reporters and code books. At least that is what was taught to this author and that is how I began my law practice not too long ago. Libraries were places where young lawyers went to spend days on end looking for that one piece or shred of law that was going to give them the case precedent or legal rationale to support their client's position. When you found it, your time and effort paid off and now all you needed to do was convince your client that your 15 hours of research at \$200 per hour was worth it to them!

Fast forward to 2015 and law libraries are virtually extinct. The lawyers today can search the same journals, treatises, case reporters and code books in minutes as opposed to hours in years past. The lawyers who have not embraced this technology must either hire someone to undertake this research task or forego any type of law practice that required in-depth research and writing. Our society has become reliant upon instant gratification. Social media, e-mail, online education have all taken over our daily lives. The practice of law and the deliverance of legal services has also undertaken these same principles and changed along with it. Is it all for the better? That depends on what guidelines you are going to use in order to measure the results.

Twenty years ago, if a husband and wife wanted to create a Last Will and Testament, they called their local lawyer and made an appointment. During the hour long appointment, the lawyer would ask about their family and their wishes upon their death and about who would be handling their estate after they passed away. Then the lawyer would send out a draft Last Will and Testament and make any changes that were necessary. After the changes were made, the husband and wife would make another appointment to see the lawyer and they would sign the Wills and get copies to disburse as necessary. This whole process took at least several weeks and sometimes a month or more, depending on how busy the lawyer was at that time.

Today, that same husband and wife can fire up the internet, find a web site such as Legal Zoom or Rocket Lawyer and have that Will in 20 minutes! That same husband and wife can also draft a business partnership, sell property and issue shares of stock in a corporation with these web site gurus. The question remains then, is this a better way of accessing legal services? Is this the waive of the future or simply a fad? Technology is moving faster today that it ever has and if the legal world is not willing to embrace it, are we doomed to fail at it?

The law profession is not the only one that has felt the effects of this technology boom. However, considering that the legal field has traditionally been slow at accepting change and modifying the way it does business, it is an interesting study to see how it will adapt. As with most businesses, if you cannot adapt to the changing environment, you are doomed to fail. The law profession, while probably slower than some other professions, has begrudgingly accepted this as fact and the results are evident.