

## **Technology and the Legal Profession: Trends that Could Impact Your Career**

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From smartphones to tablet computers and Wi-Fi to Cloud computing, technological innovations have prompted permanent shifts in the legal field. Robert Half Legal's annual research project, [Future Law Office: Technology's Transformation of the Legal Field](#), explores how technology has reshaped the management of law firms and corporate legal departments, relationships with clients and the practice of law. In this article, we'll focus on three areas that could affect your career path: the social media revolution, working as a legal professional in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and legal hiring and staffing trends.

### **The Social Media Revolution**

Lawyers, paralegals and others in the field are exploring how high-tech tools and innovations can help them manage their careers. Although the legal field was slow to embrace social media and many in the profession still have concerns about the privacy of client information, sites such as LinkedIn and Facebook are increasingly being used by attorneys, paralegals and others in the field to expand their networks, pursue continuing legal education, develop new business opportunities and even communicate with clients.

### **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Legal Professional**

Smartphones, tablet computers and cloud-based tools afford legal professionals round-the-clock, wireless access to information and data. In one pocket- or briefcase-sized device, legal professionals can carry a digital library; time tracking and invoicing applications; scanned images, files and documents; calendaring tools; legal dictionaries; juror information and more.

This portability and effortless access to information has untethered attorneys from the office. Telecommuting is on the rise among associates, who now work remotely — at home, in others' offices, while traveling, or in public places such as cafes or libraries.

Technology also has changed legal professionals' modes of communication with clients. Tools such as email, texting, videoconferencing and online collaboration platforms have shortened response times and made interactions more efficient. At the same time, these tools have caused many clients to expect instantaneous responses to their messages. Because of the deliberative nature of the law, such speed is not always possible or desirable. The 21<sup>st</sup> century legal professional must weigh such considerations and use available technology tools selectively and strategically to provide optimum client service.

## Legal Hiring and Staffing Trends

Law firms and corporate legal departments are experimenting with various technologies to streamline operations, cut costs and improve client service. For example, law firms are increasingly looking into the delivery of legal services online. They also are using technologies such as cloud computing for knowledge management, document storage, powerful searches, budgeting, calendaring, time tracking, docket management and invoicing. E-billing is also on the rise – 48 percent of lawyers surveyed by Robert Half Legal reported an increase in clients requesting e-billing compared to two years ago. In addition, e-discovery has become a growth area and a challenge for firms and legal departments alike, as the volume of electronic data that must be managed and stored increases dramatically.

Taken together, these developments have reshaped the criteria law firms and legal departments use to hire legal professionals. Today, the most tech-savvy candidates, particularly in the area of litigation and e-discovery, have a competitive advantage in the job market. Lawyers and other legal professionals must know how to use the latest tools and systems to perform tasks, handle their workloads, interact with clients and manage cases.

The key to career management in the digital age is to stay abreast of new developments and constantly evaluate how the latest devices might help you perform your work more efficiently or deliver better service to clients or other business units within your corporation. Also, consider gaining experience and obtaining training in high-demand practice areas, such as litigation and e-discovery. The willingness to learn, explore and experiment with technology will be an essential trait for successful legal professionals now, and in the future.

For more information, download a copy of the research report or watch a video of key research findings, visit <http://www.futurelawoffice.com>.

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