

BRIEFING MEMO

LAW PRACTICE TECHNOLOGY

Many of us imagine the legal profession as being populated by experts who, in first instance, have mastered an understanding of a body of law. To us non-lawyers, this body is comprised of reasonably static codes and an ever-growing series of cases, interpreted & argued by opposing sides of counsel and judged upon by final instances.

Apart from litigation, we then see professionals who are engaged to advise and represent on a vast array of matters wherever an understanding of rules are required. The common denominator to all of this, we would humbly put, is a mountain of data, that needs to be researched and analysed, before it can be used in tactile legal reasoning & argumentation.

***"Everything you can imagine is real." –
Pablo Picasso***

We have come a long way since the era of card catalogues that needed to be rifled through before a relevant book could be physically consulted. And you did find the passage to piece together that unique clue of logic that made the difference in your case. Fast forward to this third decade of a new millennium where information is literally at our fingertips. What has changed?

Many would argue that we now suffer from information overload, the reality is that there is never too much information, instead, we are facing the age-old conundrum of searching for that relevant piece of information. The quantum of structured data has grown and fortunately so too have the means of extraction, though the 'needle in the haystack' adage still applies with a vengeance. The means to identify that defining point of reasoning are nothing other than tools. It is their mastery that legal professionals are steadily obtaining, completely in sync with an increasingly on-line global community.

Recognising that tech jargon is frustratingly acronym-ridden with many new terms to describe the latest developments, we look at how technology is allowing you to exercise your passion, the practice of law or Case Management, versus the business of law or Matter Management.

Similar to how we approached business software, let us put a framework around practice software. Today there really are two areas where we see fascinating software tools adopted by lawyers. First is in the ways that software can automate workflows of sufficiently standardised services, specifically document analysis, contract generation, and the provision of basic legal advice. The second is entirely externally focused and hinges on platforms through which your firm is represented within the digital marketplace.

There is much discussion (and confusion) about how Artificial Intelligence (AI) is replacing humans within the legal profession. Our aim here is to remain in the realm of what is tangible and implementable for your practice, though it is always good to keep an eye on the latest technological advances, howsoever abstract.

Delivering speed, accuracy, and quality at the tightest price is a profitmaking equation

Electronic document (**eDocument**) analysis can also be specialised for the legal profession by offering scrutiny of structured data from the point of view of a lawyer, obeying variables that are different from those of basic analytical engines. The volumes of files, often in different file formats, both within your own firm or externally and all relating to your client's case, need to be managed. Specialised legal software can replace otherwise manually intensive tasks, not just the sourcing, sorting, and customised filtering of content, but also its comprehensive reading - in sum this is an intelligent reading aid, leaving you to focus and interpret.

A term that links closely with the concept of a product in legal services is **document assembly** or better 'contract lifecycle management'. Being able to centrally manage and track the creation process is an evident feature, but imagine the noise of corrections being eliminated through the automatic addition of missing information and error identification.

You are really not far off from having engaged a digital assistant with notifications keeping you informed of key changes. Smart contracts are drawn up, negotiated and signed electronically, all safely and securely actioned through human intelligence. Nothing here is artificial...yet.

You are an expert in your field, your knowledge is very tangible and useful to the lay person, just as doctors and engineers, for example. How often have you been approached on a personal level, with the "I have a friend who has this issue..." and you respond with very standard questions, receive intelligible answers, which further define the issue at hand. You may not have fully concluded the 'case', but advice was given, in a totally standardised, satisfactory and reasoned way. It feels like 'chatter' and the exchange is almost 'robotic'.

The sophistication of **chatbots**, a computer program that enables conversations in text message format, allows your client (or potential client) to ask questions anytime from anywhere, while your software responds with ever-refined questions and concluding suggestions, leaving the door open for a subsequent person-to-person communication. Software is available in your field of law practice which may also be a further hook to grow initial business contacts for your practice.

All three services outlined above, will make use of the oft-touted Artificial Intelligence buzzwords. When algorithms, mathematical equations, are coded into computer programming languages that learn, the term **Machine Learning** (ML) is one we can safely use here: a program has been written which, according to the input variables, will search, identify, test, produce and store ever richer and relatable outputs.

Speed, accuracy, and quality at the tightest of pricing, and producing a profit to your practice? Is this an unsolvable equation unless something is sacrificed? Not necessarily. The clue is to look at your practice and identify 3-5 key services that can be automated and to which you can ascribe a monetary outcome. Once the relevant software solution has been identified, try imagining a form of packaging that will transform your 'service' into a 'product' to which you can attach a fixed price.

Think of this as a tailor-made legal service for a mass audience, which leaves you to focus on other higher-value niche client advice.

Lawyers are the masters of language and today's speak is short & sharp

'Think globally, act locally' is fitting also to your firm's approach in doing business over the world wide web. The expression has its roots in the early 20th Century with a sustainability connotation: to consider the health of the planet and take action in your own community, where you can have an impact.

Your 'domain' or 'portal' or **Unified Resource Locator** (URL), simply put the internet address of your website, is a reflection of what your firm stands for. It is open to readers on a global scale and allows you to give a message that is specific to your perimeter and area of focus. Therefore, to not embrace the power of an internet presence, is to forego an opportunity that is crucial to the future of your practice.

The legal profession, especially for those practicing on a small and medium size scale, has a wide range of talent platforms to essentially advertise. What is your area of expertise? How do you help your customers? Who is on your team? What is your track record? What do you stand for? **Online legal communities** pool lawyers with diverse specialisations and achieve economies of scale, serving both you and your clients.

They are an automatic means for your firm to pitch your credentials and demonstrate your Unique Selling Proposition (USP) to new clients as well as the talent you would like to hire on a permanent or temporary basis. Your legal creativity can be put to work by introducing packaged advice solutions that you know are immediately value-enhancing to your clientele while you choose to cost these depending on your business model.

It is true, the breadth of our engagement with outside media is expanding dramatically, leaving us to become informed through headlines on a vast array of subjects. Technology is enabling your internet headlines to be more impactful. Imagine being able to 'tune' the attention your portal receives by essentially adjusting dials. **Search Engine Optimisation** (SEO) will get you there, especially as language is necessarily a lawyer's forte. You will be best suited to draft the terminology that will make your portal's content hit the highest search mark by internet users.

You can organically grow the quality and quantity of traffic through your website. The algorithms that drive internet search engines pick up the behaviour of users, the key words and terms further guide the user by offering related content. The content on your website needs to be scripted to maximise the overlaps with what searchers are actually typing.

Social media, be it LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc. will happen for your practice almost despite yourself, as your team grows into one populated by Millennials and iGeners, our digital natives. The habit of maintaining a web log or **blogging** will become second nature – familiarity over the internet is leading users becoming accustomed to being offered frequent updates in informal language with the possibility to immediately publicly exchange with the writer of a blog. It's catchy, bold and refreshing and clients will connect with you when you hit their nerve in just the right way.

Observing the horizon, while steering your course.

Distributed Ledger Technology, E-Notary, Open Law, Online Dispute Resolution, Predictive Policing, and Smart Sentencing are a few of the fascinating fields where technology and law meet with fundamental ethical issues. Much debated at conferences and with first products already being promoted by the LegalTech industry, the law firm of tomorrow will certainly be different from what we know it to be today.

The notion that legal expertise is being rendered obsolete through technology is nonsense. The best practicing lawyers are using smart equipment that allows them to interact with and research the law, while at once giving their clients better oversight of services rendered and value-for-money. Technology will continue to disrupt the distribution channels of your business and it is therefore necessary to build the right technological foundation. Inevitably, 'cloud' or third-party data centre services will be universally adopted, as they are the most efficient means to run the latest software applications with robust security firewalls.

For further insights on this topic, please contact us via our homepage (www.kloudwerk.com)