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Synopsis

There are triathletes and there are yoga enthusiasts. Advanced training for these pursuits may vary greatly — but basic health, dietary, and lifestyle issues are the same for everyone. Technology works like this too. In this article, legal technology trainer and therapist Adriana Linares describes some commonsense basics — Do's and Don'ts to get your practice into tip-top technology shape. This article contains 1,501 words.

TechnoFeature: Technology Rx — Your Ultimate Guide to Improving Your Law Firm's Techno-Health

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(This article is a TechnoLawyer Exclusive.)

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever noticed that your physical well-being seems to put a spring in your step, a smile on your face, and somehow just makes the rest of your life better? Getting your law practice into tip-top technology shape isn't much different than making sure your body remains fit and healthy. Although law offices, just like individual body types, come in varying shapes, sizes, and needs, there are basic and common technology denominators that any attorney can incorporate.

STRENGTHENING YOUR CORE

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USING ADOBE? WHAT EVERY LAWYER SHOULD KNOW

The vast majority of attorneys using Adobe Acrobat really only use it to convert Office documents into PDFs. But what these attorneys don't know is the money spent on Adobe could purchase a solution that not only creates PDFs, but controls and secures the production, verification, and review of Office documents throughout their lifecycle.

Over 65,000 lawyers have already traded up to better features and benefits while maintaining their ability to convert Office files into PDFs.

What advantages are you missing out on?

[Click to find out.](#)

Changes to the legal landscape have made it impossible for attorneys to avoid technology any longer. The widespread availability of cheap communications that span the entire globe have altered the "geography rules" that once forced clients to hire attorneys that lived within driving distance.

No longer constrained in that way, clients are savvier about hiring lawyers. Clients who routinely use e-mail and other software programs to manage their lives are not likely drawn to an attorney who does not seem to grasp the efficiency that technology can provide.

JUDGES WEIGH-IN

The court systems are also taking advantage of the streamlining and reduced paper load afforded by technology.

For example, the Florida State Court Web site informs visitors that they "have made great advances in the use of technology to improve and enhance the efficiency, effectiveness and timeliness of those processes which are critical to the management of information technologies."

The Florida Supreme Court lets you listen to oral arguments live or download and listen to them later; court dockets are available online, and anything headed to the Bankruptcy court must be filed through its Electronic Case Filing system.

THE STARTING LINE IS PACKED

Technology can help your firm attain a competitive advantage. But you need a clear technology plan to put yourself in that competitive position. With the right tools in place, you can become more efficient, more responsive, and even able to spend time away from the office.

That is the point here, right? Serve your clients in an effective manner (preferably exceeding their expectations), and yet make your life easier and less stressful at the same time.

What about that competition? They are definitely getting more tech-savvy; and incidentally "other lawyers" aren't the only competitors. Independent paralegals, self-help legal software, form books, and Web sites are all easily found by searching the Internet. So hunkering down in your bunker and pretending that technology doesn't matter isn't a good business strategy.

On the other hand mindlessly acquiring technology isn't a good idea either. You need balance. You need a strategy that helps you manage the information that you deal with in your practice.

YOUR BOTTOM ... LINE

At this years ABA TechShow, Nancy N. Grekin, partner at McCarriston,

Miller, Mukai, MacKinnon in Honolulu, Hawaii pointed out a simple and yet startling calculation that incisively illustrates the importance of managing information.

Assuming you spend a total of 15 minutes/day looking for information — try this for yourself:

Your rate for 15 minutes X 20 (working days in a month) = Dollars "lost"/month!

Why lost? Because you couldn't spend them billing!

Now multiply that times the number of attorneys in your firm and then by twelve to calculate a years worth of lost time.

Really want to gasp? Include your paralegal's time!

By implementing the right technology for the right time, your can and will increase your bottom line.

BASIC TRAINING

As a busy practitioner, remember that slow and steady wins the race. Let's begin with some basic principles — technology Do's and Don'ts:

- Do start off moderately. Work technology into your practice one step at a time.
- Don't over do it. Going overboard with purchases, installations, and process redesign can be confusing and lead to frustration.
- Do take the time to develop a list of technologies tailored to your needs.
- Don't push an issue. Just like a physical injury, pushing a small hurt can lead to big problems later on. If you experience repetitive or long term technology pain, stop and seek professional help.
- Do use the buddy system. Having top-of-the-line equipment doesn't build muscles. You need to know how to use it and actually put it into action! Hire a computer consultant and/or trainer who specializes in the legal space.
- Don't jump on the fad-bandwagon. New tech-toys come out everyday; you don't have to buy all of them. Wait for the early adopters to iron out the glitches before wasting your hard earned dollars.

REGIMEN FOR TECHNO-HEALTH

Integrating technology into your legal practice can seem an insurmountable hurdle. Listed here are the basics, in a logical implementation order.

1. New Equipment

At the heart of your performance must sit a healthy and strong computer. Don't wait any longer to buy that new PC; and make sure you are running the newest operating systems (in most cases Windows XP) and office suite (Microsoft Office 2003 or Word Perfect Office 12). The practice of law does not require a mega-performing machine.

2. Internet Access

Internet Explorer (by Microsoft) is favored by the court systems so make sure you are running version 6.

Additionally, trade-in that analog connection for high-speed Internet access. (And yes, you will need a Web site, but we'll get to that later).

3. E-mail Matters

As a professional service provider, your e-mail address should reflect who you are and the name of your law firm. It should be easy to remember and easy to spell.

If you are Jim Able, partner at Clued, Inn and Able, P.A., then your e-mail address should be something like Jable@cialaw.com; an AOL, Yahoo or Hotmail address is not very professional and should be reserved for use by friends and family, not your clients.

Securing a domain name cialaw.com and the e-mail addresses that come with it will cost you less than \$25 per year!

4. Detail Management

Get your information under control and digital. Paper calendars and traditional rolodexes are unacceptable; trying to manage the colossal amount of information associated with running a law practice with pen and paper is a step in the malpractice direction.

If you have followed step #1 then you already own a great calendaring and contact management program such as Outlook or Entourage (see #3 and #9).

5. File Management (and no, not the paper kind)

Get your documents and files under control.

How much time do you spend looking for files on your computer? Your digital filing system should mimic your physical filing system. Files should be logically organized in your "My Documents" folder. (There are great "document management systems" available, but we are focusing on basic and simple here!)

Consider an add-on such as Google's Desktop search tool which helps

to index and find anything on your computer.

6. Adobe Acrobat

This tool is essential to any law practice. It costs about \$200 and enables you to convert any printable file, e-mail, picture, or Web site on your computer into a sharable and "safe" document. (See #7 before buying Acrobat).

There are alternatives to Adobe Acrobat that are less expensive, but go ahead and splurge on the real deal; its added functionality is well, well worth it.

7. Get a Scanner

Paperless office? Highly unlikely for a law firm yet — but we can think less paper.

You will want a sheet fed scanner, which means you will likely get an all-in-one (that is, one device that prints, copies, scans, and even faxes — but you won't need that function (see step # 8).

Many of today's scanners come bundled with Adobe Acrobat — so look for it, and if you have a scanner, you may already have Acrobat or a similar product.

8. The Facts About the Fax

Faxing is taking its sweet time to die — but its death is imminent. There are many services that use the Internet to send and receive faxes. Outbound faxes mimic traditional faxes and inbound faxes get delivered right into your e-mail box as an attachment. Think about the benefits.

9. Get Mobile

Whether you have a "smart" phone or a traditional PDA, these devices provide a tremendously flexible and easy way to keep tabs on your appointments, phone numbers, files, notes and more (refer back to step #4). But they do much more — record voice notes, play videos, display photos, play music, and store a novel.

10. USB Flash Storage

There are many names for these mighty small and useful tools (no bigger or heavier than a tube of lipstick). Essentially they are replacements for floppy drives and CD's. They enable you to easily copy and move files from computer to computer.

CONCLUSION

Technology can be complicated. But it doesn't have to be. You certainly don't decide to run a marathon and just get up and go. It

takes time, dedication, training, rest, and patience. But just like crossing that finish line, using technology can be very rewarding and so, so satisfying. Now get to the gym!

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Until launching LawTech Partners, Adriana spent several years directing the training and technology development functions at two of Florida's largest law firms. In 2004 she opened the doors to LawTech Partners, Inc., a training and consulting firm specializing in solo and small-midsize firms. She has an extensive background in computer training and legal technology development and implementation. [Learn more about Adriana and LawTech](#). You can contact Adriana via e-mail <alinares@lawtechpartners.com>.

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