

Anticipate the Future – Will Lawyers be Replaced by Robots?

By: Brani Andreev, Associated Services

With Professor Andrew Perlman at the helm, Suffolk University Law School in Boston recently created the [Institute on Law Practice Technology & Innovation](#). Its purpose: To “study how technology is revolutionizing the practice of law.” The future holds a great deal of uncertainty for lawyers.

In a recent round table discussion at Law Practice Today, a panel of legal professionals offered their insights about the future of law practice and shared their advice about how lawyers can best prepare and prosper. From harnessing new technologies, to minimizing costs through alternate workspace arrangements and law firm structures, and expanding a firm’s online presence through social media and other avenues of client engagement and management, the practice of law is rapidly changing and as the pace of technological innovation accelerates the legal world will have to continue evolving to keep up. What does the future look like for the practice of law?

Law Practice Outlook

The legal profession is in the early stages of digital transformation. Lawyers of the future who will still be practicing law as we think of it today, meaning trading time for dollars, will be doing so because they are experts with deep subject matter knowledge and experience applying that knowledge to assist a specific group of clients. In addition, new roles will emerge for lawyers with diversified skill sets that address changing consumer expectations. These skills may include knowledge management, data analysis, and process development, among others. According to the legal professionals at Law Practice

Today, the industry will see more fixed-pricing based on “best practices” developed by each firm. For small firms, there will be more collaboration with outside third parties to mimic—and in some cases exceed—the capabilities of larger firms. Solo practitioners will also learn to be more collaborative with other

solos and other service providers. In smaller, younger practices, we are already seeing that the law practice of the future will be cloud-based, it will facilitate remote work, and many of its repetitive tasks will be automated. The legal experts also believe that more and more firms that traditionally cling to the billable hour model will be shifting to fixed-fee billing practices or alternatively fade away altogether.

While some types of work, like litigation, are going to stick to billable hours, many other tasks are better suited to fixed-fee billing. In the age of mass commoditization of services, clients want to know what they are budgeting for and what they are getting when they pay for something.



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Here are some of the current trends occurring in the legal industry right now:

Commoditization is Inevitable

Advances in technology will serve to commoditize the more routine aspects of the legal profession. It has already occurred in legal research, in e-discovery, electronic filing, and in trial software, and it will continue at an ever-increasing pace in other areas of the law.

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Alternative Business Structures

Entities that provide both legal and non-legal expertise will arise. The UK and Australia are experimenting with these models and I expect them to spread over the next 20 years.

Work-Life Integration

As new generations enter the workforce, work-life balance will become a key factor in recruiting and retaining talent. The practice of law will always require long hours, so to the extent that firms and law departments can accommodate the whole of the employee and not merely view them as a unit of production, they will have a competitive advantage in the battle for talent.

Globalized Economy

Despite what appears today to be a trend toward closed borders and restricted trade, in the long run a more globalized economy is likely to prevail. Consequently, linguistic and cultural fluency will be huge pluses in the law practice of the future.

Within recent memory, lawyers were the prime sources of legal knowledge and services. Law firms, government entities, corporations, nonprofits and others accessed legal resources appropriate to their needs and their means principally from 'their lawyers.' The providers of these services enjoyed a monopoly guaranteed by the system, with competition centered principally within legal sectors. Today, we see technology changing traditional ways

of providing legal services. This has led to greater democratization of the 'industry,' and introduced new competition and continual searching for better and more efficient ways of providing legal services. These trends promise to continue as legal resources and intelligence become increasingly accessible through various technological advances.



Brani Andreev is the owner of Associated Services, a legal support and management services agency located in Syracuse, NY. She is a frequent speaker on the topics of headache-free process serving and law firm management.

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