

# Keeping Up with Legal Technology: Five Easy Places

BY JENNIFER L. BEHRENS

*"Time is the lawyer's capital. Every lawyer has just so many more years in which to practice law. Every day, every hour, he has that much less [...] A lawyer must make the most of every hour and every minute. One effective step in this direction is to make his law office as efficient as possible."*<sup>1</sup>

While this 1956 law office handbook went on to describe a complex paper-based bookkeeping and filing system for improving law office efficiency, the author's message remains the same in today's age of case management software and electronic dockets. More than a half-century later, time is still a lawyer's most precious commodity. Automation, personal computers, and the growth of the world wide web have changed the methods, but not the mission: saving time with technology can ultimately improve a lawyer's output.

But as another, more recent, law practice guidebook noted: "[T]echnology, properly understood, properly selected, and properly implemented, is merely an enabler."<sup>2</sup> The converse of this statement, of course, is that poorly-implemented, poorly selected, and/or poorly understood technology can ultimately cost a lawyer or law firm exponentially more time than it saves. It is vital, then, for modern lawyers to become conversant in the basics of their law office's technology, and to also retain some handy reference sources in the event that more research is needed into a particular technology.

There are numerous reasons why an attorney might need a crash course in specific legal technologies. You might be frustrated by a recent "upgrade" to your preferred word-processing program, which has com-

pletely changed the way you've grown accustomed to creating and editing documents. You may be a solo or small-firm practitioner without the benefit of an in-house IT army, investigating a "cloud computing" approach to data storage (where services are provided and hosted on the web). Or you could be drafted for service on a larger firm's technology committee, finding yourself unexpectedly responsible for evaluating policies and recommending large-scale equipment purchases.

If you're like most attorneys, the thought of learning about technology may leave you feeling a little intimidated. Few law schools offer substantive classes in law practice technology,<sup>3</sup> and many practicing lawyers report limited opportunities for in-house training.<sup>4</sup> No matter the firm size, the most common method used by lawyers to find information about legal technology is to turn to their favorite search engine and hope for a reliable, authoritative result.<sup>5</sup> But there are a variety of excellent sources for attorneys to take a more proactive, ongoing approach to learning about legal technology; many are available for free on the web or as a benefit of bar association membership. The remainder of this article will highlight some of the very best.

## North Carolina State Bar & North Carolina Bar Association

Members of the North Carolina State



Bar ([www.ncbar.gov](http://www.ncbar.gov)) can take advantage of opportunities for continuing legal education ([www.nccle.org/](http://www.nccle.org/)), a popular way for lawyers to keep up with the latest technology developments while simultaneously fulfilling professional requirements. The consolidated, searchable online calendar links to local and national CLE opportunities, including a selection of web-based courses. Relevant course topics, offered on a rotating calendar, include "Essential Technology for the Small Law Office," "Ethics of Email and Other Technology," and "Litigating More Effectively Using Technology."

Browsers of the separate North Carolina Bar Association website ([www.ncbar.org](http://www.ncbar.org))

may also find its Center for Practice Management ([www.cpm.ncbar.org](http://www.cpm.ncbar.org)) to be a helpful starting place—literally. The center’s video series on “Starting a Law Firm” includes a 20-minute overview of “Essential Technology” from IT consultant (and Campbell Law instructor) Lee Cumbie. Although aimed at the new law office, its content remains a useful refresher to well-established practices. The center’s “Tech and Practice Management” link consolidates practical articles and popular websites, which are supplemented by the thrice-yearly e-Tech newsletter and the Law Practice Matters blog ([www.lawpracticematters.com/](http://www.lawpracticematters.com/)). While your research will likely not end at these home-grown sites (particularly if you are searching for in-depth product reviews or comparisons), they are worthy additions to a novice NC techie’s bookmark list.

### American Bar Association

The ABA has long been a trusted source for lawyers who wish to learn more about legal technology: an annual survey of practicing attorneys consistently ranks the American Bar Association’s *ABA Journal*, website, and print publications among the most popular sources for law technology information.<sup>6</sup> It’s easy to see why at the Legal Technology Resource Center ([www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/home.html](http://www.abanet.org/tech/ltrc/home.html)), a clearinghouse of free technology information. The link to “FYIs: Technology Overviews” includes product reviews, how-to guides, and comparison charts for a variety of law practice hardware and software categories. The center also links to discounted products for ABA members, reprints technology-related articles from legal publications, and connects users to relevant newsletters, blogs, and e-mail discussion lists. Whether you are a seasoned IT professional or a confused tech newbie, the Legal Technology Resource Center ranks high for content and usefulness.

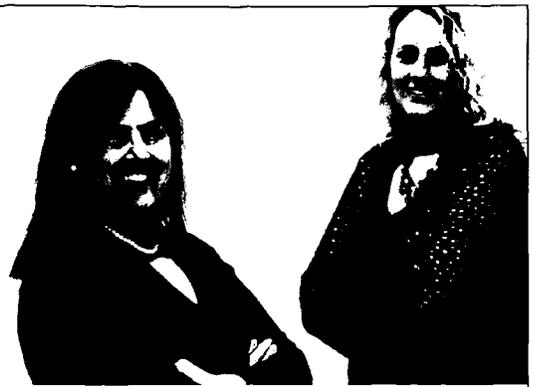
The ABA site also showcases the Law Practice Management Section ([www.abanet.org/lpm/home.shtml](http://www.abanet.org/lpm/home.shtml)), which includes technology as one of its core elements for successful law practice. Key LPM section publications include:

- *Law Practice* magazine contains articles and columns devoted to the latest technology developments and best practices. The print source is supplemented by a free monthly webzine, *Law Practice Today* ([www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt](http://www.abanet.org/lpm/lpt)).

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- Affordable print guides (most under \$100) containing opinionated recommendations on current products. Must-have titles for your practice library include Dennis Kennedy & Tom Mighell’s *The Lawyer’s Guide to Collaboration Tools and Technologies: Smart Ways to Work Together* (2008), as well as program-specific handbooks (such as last year’s *The Lawyer’s Guide to Microsoft Excel 2007* and *The Lawyer’s Guide to Practice Management Systems Software*), which highlight key features as well as hidden tips and tricks for increasing law firm productivity with these programs.

- Also available in the LPM bookstore is the annual *Solo and Small Firm Legal Technology Guide: Critical Decisions Made Simple*. As the title implies, the chapters in this handbook provide an accessible overview of common law office hardware (computers, printers, servers, etc.) and software (word processing, timekeeping, billing, and so on), along with candid recommendations for specific products. Although the editors (a team of attorneys and technology consultants) caution that their perspective is

exclusively intended for small firms and solo practitioners, the authors’ thoughtful comparisons and recommendations, the predictions from the “Tomorrow in Legal Tech” section, and a glossary of key IT terminology could help attorneys at even large firms who wish to “speak geek” with their IT staff.

Readers of the solo and small firm technology guide may also benefit from *GPSOLO*, a magazine from the ABA’s General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Division. *GPSOLO*’s biennial *Technology and Practice Guide* special issue (published in June and December) contains even timelier product reviews and recommendations, aimed at the smaller law office.

### Other Recommended Websites

The American Bar Association is an undeniable powerhouse in legal technology publications. Still, a number of smaller websites and newsletters also merit your attention. The largest of these is undoubtedly the FindLaw Legal Technology Center (<http://technology.findlaw.com/>), a subsection of the popular free web portal for legal links. The FindLaw center



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Law.com, another well-known legal web portal, offers Law Technology News ([www.law.com/jsp/lawtechnologynews/index.jsp](http://www.law.com/jsp/lawtechnologynews/index.jsp)). This multi-purpose site features original technology news and product reviews, featured postings from other websites and blogs, and even an LTN Resource Guide vendor directory. Don't miss the hidden trove of white papers, program downloads, and informative videos underneath the "Resources" link on the left-hand navigation menu. Note that some portions of this site require free registration.

The TechnoLawyer Community ([www.technolawyer.com/](http://www.technolawyer.com/)) also requires free registration, but at least one of its eight unique e-mail newsletters will be worth the trouble of creating yet another username and password. From small-firm focus to biglaw perspectives, each newsletter offers something a little different. Still reluctant to give up your e-mail address? Test-drive TechnoLawyer content at their well-regarded and frequently-updated blog ([blog.technolawyer.com](http://blog.technolawyer.com)), which does

not require registration.

#### Speaking of Blogs...

For truly cutting-edge commentary on law office technology, blogs are your best bet. The best legal blogs (also known as "blawgs") contain up-to-the-minute news and analysis from well-respected experts. In addition to the ABA, NCBA, and other blogs already mentioned above, recommended law technology blogs include:

- **DennisKennedy.com** ([www.denniskennedy.com/blog](http://www.denniskennedy.com/blog)) includes news and commentary from Dennis Kennedy, a renowned legal technology expert from St. Louis. Kennedy also co-hosts a biweekly audio podcast of technology topics, **The Kennedy-Mighell Report** ([www.legaltalknetwork.com/podcasts/kennedy-mighell-report](http://www.legaltalknetwork.com/podcasts/kennedy-mighell-report)).

- **Jim Calloway's Law Practice Tips Blog** ([www.jimcalloway.typepad.com/lawpracticetips](http://www.jimcalloway.typepad.com/lawpracticetips)) features frequent analysis of legal technology from Oklahoma Bar Association program director Jim Calloway. While some posts focus heavily on the Oklahoma/Plains/Midwest regions (particularly when highlighting conferences or other events),

the technology commentary is valuable even to those outside the Central time zone.

- **Slaw** ([www.slaw.ca](http://www.slaw.ca)) is a Canadian law blog which publishes frequently on the topic of legal technology. As with the Calloway blog, readers in the tarheel state may find themselves skipping over region-specific entries, but there is enough general tech commentary to merit an addition to your RSS reader.

These recommendations represent just a fraction of the vast legal "blogosphere." To find law blogs with a narrower focus (such as the recent spate of new blogs devoted to legal applications for Apple's iPad), improve your results by starting with a specialized search engine or law-blog directory, like **Justia Blawgsearch** ([blawgsearch.justia.com](http://blawgsearch.justia.com)) or the **ABA Journal Blawg Directory** ([www.abajournal.com/blawgs](http://www.abajournal.com/blawgs)). Don't be surprised if many of your search results demonstrate all the longevity of a fruit fly; nearly 95% of indexed blogs have not been updated in more than four months.<sup>7</sup>

#### For Popular Audiences

While the majority of listed resources so

far have focused on legal or law office technology, resources aimed at a consumer audience can also be helpful for lawyers who wish to keep watch on the horizon. Law is a notoriously conservative profession, and today's popular technology news and trends will likely take months, if not years, to fully impact the law office.

*Wired* ([www.wired.com](http://www.wired.com)) is a great starting place for general-interest technology news, whether you're reading the long-running print magazine or browsing its home on the web. The online version includes a full-text article archive dating back to the magazine's 1993 inception, and categorized product reviews.

A similar popular publication, *PCMag* ([www.pcmag.com](http://www.pcmag.com)), moved to an online-only format after ceasing print operations in 2008. Like *Wired*, *PCMag's* online home includes categorized product reviews and recommendations, as well as detailed buyer guides ("How to Buy a Laptop" may be of particular interest to solo practitioners or small-firm lawyers).

Blogs may also be a valuable source of consumer-focused technology news. To

locate product reviews and other techie postings from the likes of **Engadget** ([www.engadget.com](http://www.engadget.com)) or **CNET** ([www.cnet.com](http://www.cnet.com)), try the general blog search engine **Technorati** ([www.technorati.com](http://www.technorati.com)).

### Conclusion

Keeping up with legal technology can be as challenging to the modern attorney as maintaining clear and consistent client files likely was to the readers of the 1956 law office manual. But as that bygone author noted: "Better service to clients is what brings them back, brings in more clients, and makes them more willing to pay for legal services. To give better service to clients, a lawyer must have an efficient office."<sup>8</sup> Technology (when used appropriately) is now the backbone of a smoothly-run, modern law practice. The attorney who invests some time becoming familiar with the latest developments today will likely reap the rewards of increased efficiency well into the future. ■

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*Library, where she co-teaches a seminar course on law office technology. She received a JD and an MLS from the State University of New York at Buffalo, and is a member of the New York State Bar.*

### Endnote

1. Arch M. Cantrall, *A Law Office System, The Practical Lawyer's Law Office Manual* 1, 1 (Paul A. Wolkin ed., 1956).
2. Russ L. Kodner, Introduction, *The 2009 Solo and Small Firm Technology Guide: Critical Decisions Made Simple* xxi, xxvi (Sharon D. Nelson, John W. Simck, & Michael C. Maschke, eds., 2009).
3. For insight into the development of one such law school course, see Kenneth J. Hirsh & Wayne Miller, *Law School Education in the 21st Century: Adding Information Technology Instruction to the Curriculum*, 12 WM. & Mary Bill of Rights J. 873 (2004).
4. Amer. Bar Assoc., *Legal Technology Survey Report* xii-xiii (2009) (finding that more than 25% of overall survey respondents reported a complete lack of available technology training; this figure represented nearly half of all solo practitioner responses and almost 40% of small-firm attorneys).
5. *Id.* at I-27.
6. *1 2009 Legal Technology Survey Report*, *supra* note 4, at xiv-xv.
7. See Douglas Quenqua, *Blogs Falling in an Empty Forest*, NY Times, June 5, 2009, at E1.
8. Cantrall, *supra* note 1, at 2.

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