The digitisation of the Legal sector

Law firms across the UK are transforming the way they work, adapting to the continued digitisation of the legal sector. Although steeped in traditional practice methodology, many lawyers and barristers are rising to this challenge and starting to put digitisation at the heart of their growth strategy. Partly driven by the government's Digital by Default directive which aims to drive paperless efficiency in the country's judiciary, and partly by the need to retain competitive advantage, firms are reducing their dependency on paper, embracing Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems, introducing Cloud and employing mobile technologies.

Sustainable growth

Firms such as TWM Solicitors LLP understand that driving efficiencies in every part of the firm's operations, and meeting the highest standards in regulatory compliance while continuing to innovate digitally is central to delivering strong and sustainable growth. Alan Barrett, Head of IT at TWM comments, "Although we have a heritage dating back to 1799, we're a very modern and digitally ambitious firm which understands the critical role technology can play in driving professionalism and commerciality."

Barristers in the Cloud

The same applies to barristers. Around 1 in 6 barristers have now adopted mobile and Cloud collaboration tools. This means they can access relevant case management files on their own device 24/7, without relying on papers or even entering chambers. Chris Ronan, Chief Executive of St John's Buildings told us "The introduction of paperless working gives our barristers, who are traditionally mobile workers, the ability to service clients in a secure and flexible environment while enhancing the speed and reliability of that service." Similarly, Paul Fletcher, Chambers Director at Albion Chambers notes "We are about to commence a seven-week finding of fact, involving eight of our members and a court bundle of 35,000 pages – and we are working on it without an ounce of paper." A step-change indeed, but there are technologies and skills now entering the legal sector that have the power to take things even further.

In future papers we will be covering some of these innovations in more depth. One of the most exciting developments is the number of lawyers who are embracing technological advances to such a degree that they are learning the basics of coding. #LawyersWhoCode is increasingly popular on Twitter, and modules in coding and AI are now offered at law schools and by firms such as Linklaters and Clifford Chance to encourage their lawyers to become more tech-savvy. Apps and Artificial Intelligence (AI) are becoming a lynchpin in the way forward-thinking legal firms operate, and with these technologies relying so heavily on coding, it is clear to see why lawyers are taking an interest.

The robot is your friend

AI is transforming our lives and the way we work - whether it's translating a foreign language on a phone, using a virtual assistant to seek medical advice or looking at existing problems in a new

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way to advance scientific discovery. The legal sector is no different, and The Law Society has predicted 67,000 legal jobs will be replaced with automation by 2038. However, we shouldn't fear that robots are coming to take our jobs. People with machines – rather than against them – can really accelerate business benefit. There are things machines can do faster and with more accuracy, and there are things that humans excel at – the secret is to spot the difference and then use resources insightfully to reboot productivity. Indeed, in the same Law Society report, it was also predicted that 80,000 new roles are expected to be created in the next decade – 25,000 by 2025 alone. With AI in a firm, lawyers are freed up to focus on more strategic aspects of their work, interpreting information and providing greater depth and value in their advice to clients. AI can revolutionise many mundane legal processes assigned to those in junior roles, increase job satisfaction, help to conduct due diligence in a timely manner, improve accuracy and efficiency and elevate legal staff to take on more challenging work.

The other reality

Other technologies that have seen huge developments recently are Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR), and we are now in the realm of seeking out practical applications for them. They create computer-generated environments that people can experience and explore with the use of a headset. These technologies are starting to be used for closer client engagement, in recruitment and employee training, to create virtual courtrooms or to recreate and immerse a jury in a crime scene. For depositions, lawyers can have jurors put on VR headsets and almost be in the same room as the testimony. Meeting with clients in long-distance locations could become more engaging than traditional video meetings, you can shake somebody's hand in VR and feel as if you are in the same room as them.

The fittest will thrive

Digital advances are affecting all areas of our lives, and law firms need to ask themselves how this can be interpreted to best effect and implemented within the sector. Clients are demanding greater engagement with technology from their law firms. Keith Plowman, Senior Clerk at Ten Old Square comments, "We now work and practice in an increasingly digital world, and the best way to operate a legal services business efficiently is through the use of technology. "The legal sector needs to ensure it doesn't fall behind the expectations of the service industry generally. As Tamara Box, managing partner for Europe and the Middle East at global firm Reed Smith sums up, "Evolution of the legal industry is happening faster now than ever before. Though many will survive, only the fittest – those most capable of adapting, of embracing change – will thrive."*

* Law Gazette, 24 September 2018

Taken from our recent blog series - https://www.oneadvanced.com/news-and-opinion/the-digitisation-of-the-legal-sector/

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