

Prepared by:
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Garry Wise: Toronto Employment Lawyer and Legal Tech Guru

Since he started practicing law, Garry has witnessed first hand how technology has changed the face of the legal industry. Specifically, he points to the following three examples: (1) faster delivery of legal services, (2) increased client involvement, and (3) more streamlined production of complex legal documents. Each of these will be examined briefly in turn.

Quicker Pace of Legal Services

Garry recalled a time when lawyers had many fewer gadgets and the pace of legal service delivery was much slower than today. Take the routine task involving a lawyer writing a letter.

Not that long ago – in the late '80s, before fax machines and desktop PC's - firstly, the lawyer would dictate a letter. Then a secretary would type it on an electric typewriter. The lawyer would then review the draft and perhaps make revisions. Upon completion, the letter would finally be sent out by snail mail and the lawyer would put the file away until a response came back (e.g. from opposing counsel).

This whole process could take a several days, if not weeks, unless timing was critical. In those cases, couriers and taxis were employed to shuffle crucial documents back and forth between offices.

Fast track to today and here's what you'll find. A lawyer drafts a letter on his or her own laptop, PC or mobile device such as a Blackberry. It is delivered instantly via

e-mail. Responses can be received within a few minutes or even seconds.

For those who are not yet paperless, the client's file is probably not put away, but kept close by. For those whose law offices are largely paperless, the paper file may never even be required in the process

In the process, the legal secretary has evolved into the legal assistant, who now typically assumes more challenging law clerk and office administration functions.

Increased Client Involvement

Garry also noted how client involvement and communications have changed with the advent of instant communication – specifically via e-mail.

Technology has allowed for “24/7” lawyering, which basically means two deviations from the past: (1) lawyers are always accessible to their clients via e-mail and (2) lawyers typically spend considerably more time corresponding with their clients, often via extended e-mail strings.

Clients now can be (and according to Garry, should be) kept in the loop 100% of the time about everything relating to their matters.

While this type of client interaction undoubtedly enhances the client service experience, it also likely increases their costs, particularly as lawyers continue to maintain hourly billing (at 6 minute intervals) to value their legal services.

Age:

50 in September

Called to the Bar:

1986

Law Practice Focus:

Employment and Family Law Litigation

Undergrad School:

York University (Psychology)

Law School:

Osgoode Hall Law School

Favourite Law School Professor:

Fred Zemans (who helped pave the way for mediation, alternative dispute resolution, and a “Getting to Yes” philosophy to be introduced into family law litigation)

Articled with:

Atlin Goldenberg

Present Firm:

Wise Law Office

Address:

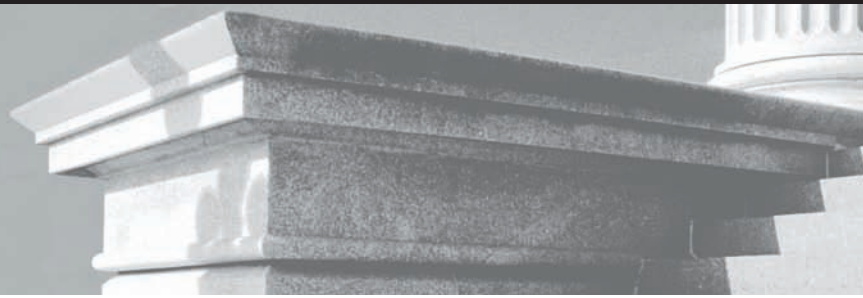
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More Complex Legal Documents

Finally, Garry mentioned how having relevant information at your fingertips has caused the size of legal documents to expand exponentially. Long gone are the days when a lawyer would have to rely on memory, precedent photocopies and a good typewriter to produce contracts, pleadings, and other legal documents.

A lawyer today has access to precedent databases and document assembly systems, which translates into more comprehensive documents with more clauses to “cover every possible angle.”

Overall, as Garry points out, although technology has increased the speed of delivering legal services and enhanced the client service experience, it has not necessarily made legal services more affordable - particularly since lawyers continue to bill by the hour and require more time than before to review lengthy legal documents.

Looking Ahead

As he notes, with the legal profession increasingly (if tentatively) combining these changes with social media and Web 2.0 capabilities, a revolution in the delivery of legal services is plainly underway.

As government offices, land registry systems and our nation’s courts go more digital (and this is happening more slowly than Garry would like), the legal ecosystem system of the not-too-distant future will likely have little in common with the landscape Garry first encountered when he started practicing 23 years ago.

Garry believes that those lawyers who adapt and embrace these developments - and the clients they serve - will be the success stories of the future.

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