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How women attorneys are smartly leveraging legal tech



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# How women attorneys are smartly leveraging legal technology to advance their law practices

BY CHRISTY BURKE



I have spoken to a number of women attorneys who are using technology as a strategy to assertively enhance their efficiency and business development and to differentiate themselves from competitors.

Any legal professional can use technology to benefit a law practice. However, I have keenly observed women lawyers' strategies for success over the years, so I am particularly interested in how they effectively leverage technology tools in their law practices to advance their careers, service clients more efficiently and achieve a better work/life balance.

The women lawyers I spoke to for this article—all of whom are either partners at their firms or founders of their own law practices—are using technology effectively at their firms, including two who were computer programmers before they became lawyers! Several common themes emerged from our conversations and this article summarizes the best practices shared by these successful women. I've also included some resources for women attorneys who want to step up their tech acumen.

## Cloud, integration and investment

Nancy Mertz recently started her own intellectual property law firm, Mertz Law, having left her position as chair of Herrick Feinstein's Intellectual Property Group. Setting up the proper mix of technology was a top priority for Nancy, who has studied computer programming and enjoys mastering new technology.

'My firm uses all cloud-based applications, so I don't have to buy or maintain servers or conduct my own backups,' she says. 'The subscription model helps keep my firm's startup costs to a minimum. I use Clio, Lexicata and Alt Legal, which integrate well together to handle client intake, client and matter management, and docketing. Handling these tasks quickly and easily allows me to spend more time on client service, which is the primary reason I launched my firm. I won't skimp on something if it's the right tool for the job, and I love the efficiency compared to using spreadsheets, traditional databases, typed lists or support staff to do comparable tasks. I also listen to quality podcasts like Legal Talk Network's "New Solo" with Adriana Linares to get suggestions on good tools.'

## Finding strength, power and fun in technology

Day Pitney has a robust estate planning practice with more than 60 estate planning attorneys. Leigh Newman,

a partner at the firm and a former computer programmer at IBM before she went to law school, notes that her technology background has provided unique opportunities she would not have had otherwise. 'Technology knowledge is a plus for any attorney, and bringing value to an organization is never a bad thing,' she says.

Newman has been instrumental in developing Day Pitney's dynamic use of HotDocs document assembly software. HotDocs has become a linchpin of the firm's document assembly system for estate-related documents.

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*Women are not hung up on the way they've always done things - Amy Cahill, Cahill IP*

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'When I first started at Day Pitney, we had a document assembly system that our admin and support people used, but the drafters—mostly associates—were removed from the process,' she says. 'The firm's implementation of HotDocs allows for a high degree of customization of the documents produced and it is simple enough for lawyers to use themselves. Now, 75% of document drafting is done by associates rather than support staff. HotDocs creates more uniformity and helps with quality control, providing a framework that brings strength, power, efficiency and fun to drafting estate documents.'

## Flexibility and automation

Amy Cahill runs Cahill IP, a globally recognized intellectual property practice based in Louisville, Kentucky. Her firm recently became the first ever Kentucky-based law firm accepted for membership in NAMWOLF (National Association of Minority and Women Owned Law Firms). To achieve a paperless office, Cahill uses Office 365, Clio, NetDocuments and Alt Legal, which are all integrated together. She uses Fastcase—provided free to

D.C. Bar members—for legal research. She does not bill clients for checking the docket or sending out reporting letters, and does not need to charge them for a paralegal's time to do these tasks either. As a result of this technology combination, her clients understand their bills more easily. Their bills are lower, too.

Cahill explains that women's innate flexibility can help them adopt new technology more readily. 'Women are not hung up on the way they've always done things,' she says. 'If there's a way to do it better, I have no pride or embarrassment that stops me from doing it a different way. As lawyers, it's really not serving clients well if we avoid automation. Because of our technology tools, it's so easy now for us to get new clients through the door. Also, our services are more affordable, which attracts a broader spectrum of clients.'

## Communication and self-promotion

Technology provides tools like email and social media to connect with current clients, prospective ones and colleagues. These tools are useful for women attorneys to leverage for business development purposes, especially since women are sometimes reticent to promote themselves in a confrontational way. Posting content to LinkedIn, Twitter, blogs and online publications gives women a chance to carefully craft their messages before making them public, rendering business development more accessible and less anxiety-producing.

'Technology levels the playing field and is an indispensable tool for women who may be less inclined to market and promote themselves,' says Shira Nadich Levin, a partner at Cooley. 'It is a way to reach so many more clients and potential clients for all attorneys—women or men, experienced or junior attorneys. If a woman attorney is lucky enough to be at a firm like Cooley, which has a large and sophisticated staff of IT and marketing professionals, she can maximize the benefits of technology as a professional tool, both in a substantive and technical manner.'

Levin is also deputy global chair of the Women in Law Empowerment Forum (WILEF), founded by its global chair Elizabeth Anne 'Betiayn' Tursi. WILEF educates and provides networking opportunities for women in law ▶

firms. Levin notes that WILEF provides programs and events focused on helping female lawyers to network effectively and using technology is always crucially important to building a network.

### **Addressing the challenge of work/life balance**

Work/life balance is another area where technology presents many solutions for female attorneys. With only 24 hours in each day, women are stretched thinly to cover both professional and personal bases. This means mobile devices and remote access capability become mandatory. However, although technology allows lawyers to stay connected to work while taking a child to the doctor's office or attending a school play or ball game, it can also be a distraction and interrupt family time in evenings and on weekends when personal time should prevail.

Technology is a 'double-edged sword' when it comes to maintaining work/life balance, says Johanna Zelman, a partner at FordHarrison. 'I have a young elementary-age daughter and mobile access to my work enables me to spend more time with her, but it also interferes because I'm always "on

call". The ability to get real work done wherever you are is extremely helpful in advancing a woman's career, but it has to be tempered with cutting off work at some points throughout the day. Work/life balance is a conundrum. All female attorney mothers want to set good examples for their kids by being self-sufficient career women, but there also needs to be a limit.'

### **Resources**

Many resources exist for women to educate themselves about technology and further their legal careers. The aforementioned WILEF is a national organization providing content and events, and fostering discussion to help empower women in the profession. The American Bar Association has a Legal Technology Resource Center and a Law Practice Division, both rich with events, contacts and publications for lawyers' edification.

Evolve Law, a membership organization for legaltech companies, is also a great resource for all attorneys looking for the latest technology. 'Evolve Law has a Legal Tech Toolkit that lists our member companies by area of technology, but we also have a large content library, which

includes white papers and blogs plus video of almost all our past events,' says co-founder Mary Juetten. 'Evolve Law's new collaboration with Above the Law provides more informative content too.'

### **Conclusion**

There is nothing gender-specific about using technology—it provides an equal opportunity benefit to all who harness its utility. That said, if a women attorney can view technology as a strategy for assertively enhancing her own efficiency, business development and differentiation from competitors, she can make it her own and glean real benefits for herself.

*Christy Burke is president and founder of Burke & Company, a New York-based PR and marketing consulting firm. She is a prolific writer, having published columns in Legal IT Today, Legal IT Professionals, Law.com, Legal Tech (now Cybersecurity Law & Strategy), the ABA's Law Practice Today, Intellectual Property Today, Attorney at Work, Peer to Peer and Marketing the Law Firm. For more information, visit [burke-company.com](http://burke-company.com) or follow Christy on Twitter: @ChristyBurkePR. ■*

