



How Attorneys Can Adapt Now to the Changing Legal World

What does a lawyer look like? While TV lawyers — Matlock or Julianna Margulies on “The Good Wife” — might come to mind, the reality is that many of today and tomorrow’s attorneys might not look like “lawyers” at all. Instead, they might resemble programmers, freelance writers or other professionals who have no need for office attire — or an office at all, for that matter.

These lawyers might not be found in power suits in large law firm offices, but rather might be at co-working spaces, wearing the same jeans-and-t-shirt uniform as everyone else.

These lawyers will look different because their job will be very different from even a few years ago.

Professional Outlook

Though legal job growth is [rising](#) with the national average, there’s reason to be cautious. The employment rate for new law school graduates was [86.7 percent](#) last year, down from 92 percent in 2007, meaning law school graduates are still grappling with the worst market in decades. Law firms [aren’t doing as well](#) as they have in the past, and [outsourcing](#) and virtual lawyers are driving down salaries. In-house legal departments are getting larger, so there’s less business to go around.

As the industry faces these upheavals, technology and innovative approaches to the business of law are providing new tools for solo practitioners. These are good times, if you navigate them correctly and adapt to the changes that are happening in the legal world. Here four recommendations for doing so:

1. Build Your Professional Brand.

Most lawyers have not thought about their professional brand or what it means. As law schools have no business curriculum, most lawyers don’t have a clue about key aspects of the importance of branding when running a business.

You don’t need an MBA to build your professional brand, though. You just need to know who you are. What kind of lawyer do you aspire to be? What do you want to be known for professionally? After you do this, strategize how to convey this brand through everything you do in your professional life, from interactions with clients and colleagues to what you speak about, share and write.

Leverage the many technological tools available to you to convey your professional brand. These include social networks, your website and even your email correspondence. If you’re looking to expand your business, consider advertising. You can precisely pinpoint potential customers using search and social media advertising.



2. Use Networking Platforms to Open Doors.

Some lawyers shy away from networking platforms. This is a mistake. Networking is crucial to success in any field, including law. Not only is networking crucial to opening the door to business opportunities, but research has shown that networking can even elevate your mood. In one [recent experiment](#), people who spoke with random strangers on their daily commute reported a more positive experience than those who stayed in solitude. Another [study](#) from the University of Michigan found that having positive interactions at work makes workers more creative.

Right now, the best networkers are working almost exclusively online. While attending selective events is still important, many professionals don't really have time for offline networking anymore. The beauty of networking platforms is that you can reach a great number of people with one post and forge relationships in minutes with people you have never met. Most of your business is going to come from referrals, so the sooner you build a network, the better.

You can also tap into networking platforms for career development. Are there skills that you would like to acquire? Find a mentor from whom to learn, or take on pro bono work to get on-the-job training for new legal specialties.

3. Take Advantage of New Technologies.

Today's technologies, if utilized properly, can help you build a worthwhile network of trusted peers with whom you can collaborate, saving you hours of time. For instance, my company, [Foxwordy](#), allows lawyers to collaborate in real time among trusted peers. Sharing documents and clauses, for example, makes legal writing much easier.

Being competitive in this changing legal market means solos need to keep their skills sharp in their practice area, and technology can help lawyers learn new specialties and stay informed on the latest developments. Tools like [Hotshot Legal](#) feature short, practical videos that teach lawyers how to do their jobs better. There are also [tutorials on YouTube](#) aimed at lawyers looking to go it alone.

Technology can transform even the most basic aspects of your business. A few years ago, a lawyer might have needed a fax machine, but now there's [DocuSign](#) and similar services. Some paralegal work can be automated or farmed out to a virtual assistant. All this keeps overhead very low.

In addition to enhancing how we work, technology is transforming where lawyers work. Today, solo practitioners no longer need to have physical office space. Since so much of the business is online now, a home office will allow you work without having to commute. Do you have an in-person client meeting? Then grab a conference room at a co-working space like [WeWork](#).

4. Join a Legal Insurance Practice.

Legal services are becoming so highly priced that the average person can't get proper assistance when they need it. This situation is fostering the rise of legal insurance.

This is good news for the general public, but it can also be good news for lawyers. Attorneys who work with insurers and get on panels to determine rates will have access to a steady stream of business.

Being part of a legal insurance network will also benefit lawyers by providing new ways to build a client base. Solo practice doesn't need to be isolating for lawyers. Aligning with a major legal insurance player can provide access to other solos in different geographic regions or specialties in a non-competitive setting. This allows solos to focus more on growing their business and practicing law.

Legal insurance companies can also provide client-focused training to help attorneys increase client satisfaction and decrease administrative work. It makes sense for lawyers to be forward thinking and adapt to this shifting paradigm now. After all, legal insurance networks allow you to feel good about helping people and get paid for doing it. What's not to like about that?

The Lawyer of the (Near) Future

Taking into account all the tools available these days, there's no need to be pessimistic about the future of the legal profession. As we've seen, the industry is undergoing changes that have many benefits for the individual lawyer. If you dreamed of working at the white-shoe firms depicted on TV dramas, then you may have reason for nostalgia. If your goal is to do great work with personal freedom and without office politics, then get ready to live the dream.



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About the Author

Monica Zent is an experienced entrepreneur, investor, businesswoman and trusted legal advisor to the world's largest brands. Zent has been a successful entrepreneur for decades. Her most recent venture is as founder & CEO of Foxwordy, the private collaboration network for lawyers. She is also the founder of ZentLaw, a leading alternative law firm.

A prominent thought leader and public speaker, Zent's articles on topics related to entrepreneurship, the legal industry, women in technology, innovation in the law and leadership appear regularly in publications including Bloomberg BNA, Reuters, Inside Counsel, Entrepreneur, VentureBeat and Huffington Post.



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