

## LAWYERS TURN THE TECHNOLOGY CORNER (AS IF ...)

*By Mazyar M. Hedayat*

Last month I spoke with a successful lawyer-entrepreneur who did IT consulting for mid-sized firms. Before our conversation was cut short after about 5 minutes he agreed that the legal community had long been in technology's rearview mirror. Then he offered this opinion: that the profession had turned a corner when it came to the use of technology. I never got a chance to follow up with him, and ever since have been trying to figure out what he could have meant.

So the question is simply this: have we really reached a watershed in our attitude towards, and use of, technology? Based on my experience the answer is a mixed bag.

### *Pro (We've Made The Breakthrough)*

Getting RSSified: An increasing number of federal courts now provide RSS feeds of their decisions; quite a mind-bender when you consider that most lawyers don't know what RSS is must less how to use it.

Practice Without a Net: Online suites like Clio are popping up all over, meaning that a critical mass of lawyers now considers them a) practical, b) secure, c) not too complicated, and d) not too pricey.

Social Networking: This development has been accelerating in the last few months and is nothing less than stunning. Networks like FaceBook, Plaxo, and LinkedIn have become virtually choked with lawyers and now feature more than a few federal and state court judges. I'm speechless.

Top-Down Mandate: Nothing beats coercion to enforce systemic change. The more courts incorporate and acknowledge RSS feeds, blogs, wikis, and microblogs, the sooner those tools will become as common as e-Discovery. Enough said.

### *Con (Right Back Where We Started)*

Despite such ostensibly positive developments, lawyers have yet to use even tried and true forms of technology to collaborate in a sustained way or help one another overcome common barriers like the traditional law-firm pyramid, overpriced vendors, marketing scams, unrealistic judicial and client expectations, or persistent over-regulation.

### *Where We Stand*

So, have we turned a corner? I'm still not sure. But a few things come to mind.

- Maybe my colleague was referring to the fact that more lawyers than ever are networking their computers and using e-mail to communicate with clients and each other. Not exactly the cutting edge, but still ...
- Maybe he was referring to way that the Blackberry, the iPhone, and the ubiquity of mobile e-mail has eased a generation of lawyers into the world of always-on technology since e-mail is a 'gateway technology' for many.
- Maybe he just meant more lawyers than ever find that the rapidly changing technological environment favors them - something that was bound to happen as younger lawyers rose to power and reacted to their bosses who were simply pushing the *status quo*.

In the end I'll have to wait for my colleague to call me again and explain what he meant. That is, assuming he ever gets around to doing that. Seems he's too busy networking computers in the offices of Chicago law firms to comment on what it was he had in mind. I'll let you know if he ever gets back to me.