



## Legal Media and Tech Skills for Attorneys: Advice to Help You Get Hired and Improve Your Practice

by Morgan C. Smith

Owner of [Cogent Legal](#)

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Almost weekly I get a call from an attorney looking for work and asking for an informational interview to hear advice I might have about landing a position with a firm or starting a solo practice. Often these are recent graduates who are getting quite discouraged about their career prospects as an attorney. I'm happy to share what I know about Northern California's legal landscape, but I find myself repeating one piece of advice to all of them—advice I believe will help all attorneys enhance their job security and improve their practice.

That advice, in a nutshell: Get tech savvy. Develop skills in information design and presentation. Become a whiz with document management. Find your inner geek streak.

File this post under “Things You Don't Learn At Law School But Should.” Just as Personal Finance isn't taught in college but arguably is an essential area of knowledge for success, so too are tech, design and support skills critically important for legal practice but not incorporated into traditional legal education.

At a time when visual presentations and courtroom technology play a central rather than merely supportive role in most litigation, having a diverse skill set that includes practical know-how in the areas of multimedia and litigation support will give you a leg up in the legal marketplace and, once you're gainfully employed as an attorney, will make you much more versatile and indispensable.

Perhaps you're secretly intimidated by this topic and by the prospect of expanding your skills into the multimedia and tech realm. Have no fear. This is an area where “some is better than none,” and breadth counts for more than depth; that is, you don't have to be an expert, and having at least some media and tech skills can help a great deal. The key is to get your feet wet and start familiarizing yourself with these 21st-century skills so that if problems or questions arise—say, you need to import a video clip into a PowerPoint presentation and figure out how to get it to play on a laptop projector at a hearing the next day, and how to make it work on both a Mac and PC platform—you'll know where to look online to try to do it yourself; and if you can't do it yourself, you'll have a better idea of how to find an expert who can.

The great thing about the Internet is you can teach yourself. Sure, it can be a time suck, but it's there for you to learn. Just Google whatever question you have about how to do something, and dive in. I often start learning something new by taking advantage of the tutorials offered on the manufacturer's website. Another great resource for tutorials, though more advanced and geared toward journalists, is the [Knight Digital Media Center](#) from UC Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.

**First steps to take:**

- Learn the basics of [PowerPoint](#) (and [Keynote](#) for Mac). Carve out time to work through the many free tutorials available online. View slides of presentations made by others, and practice making your own. (My earlier post, "[How to Avoid Death by PowerPoint](#)," offers some design and presentation tips for these tools.) *Extra credit:* Learn how to go between a PC and Mac platform; how to set up and run a laptop projector; and how to control your presentation with a tool such as [Keynote Remote](#).
- Learn the principles of effective information design. Read articles on this blog and other blogs about persuasive litigation graphics. *Extra credit:* [Learn how to make timelines](#) and [how to use Google mapping tools](#) for case presentations.
- Learn how to work with and organize different document types (including graphic files and spreadsheets); how to export different types of files to a PDF and link them together; how to create "e-briefs" by hyperlinking PDF versions of supporting documents to the main document, and then how to export it all to a DVD or flash drive. *Extra credit:* Learn how to embed photos, animations and videos into these PDFs. (Read [this earlier post](#) to get over the hurdle of understanding different video formats and various tech tradeoffs.)

**Advanced steps that could make you the coolest and most sought-after person in your firm—or, at least, give you fall-back career options:**

What follows are skills and tools that take a long time to master, but having some knowledge in any of these areas can be of great use to trial attorneys who want to prepare their cases for mediation or trial in the most compelling, efficient way:

- Learn how to operate [Trial Director](#)
- Learn [Photoshop](#)
- Learn a layout program such as [InDesign](#)
- Learn video editing and production

**Stay rust-proof and in touch:**

Don't forget to network and keep your skills up to date by following trends and key influencers through social media. For more advice in this realm, I encourage you to read my earlier post, ["5 Social Media Tips for Law School Grads and Solo Practitioners to Help Find a Job and Build a Practice."](#)

Good luck!

*Morgan Smith is the owner of [Cogent Legal](#), a litigation graphics firm based in the San Francisco Bay Area that develops clear and compelling visual presentations for attorneys to use in mediation or trial. Services include animations, 2D and 3D graphics, medical illustrations, PowerPoint or Keynote presentations, interactive timelines, videos, strategic consulting and trial support. Cogent Legal integrates the legal expertise of a successful trial attorney with the creative and technical talent of a design firm.*