TECH TRENDS UPDATE (2011)   By Rick Georges, Esq.

•   *Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP). Sometime in the future, land-line telephone companies will be moving to the Internet. For now, my favorite online application is Skype, because I like getting double use out of my tech dollar. I already pay for broadband Internet access through my DSL connection, and Skype leverages that access to permit free telephone calls to any other Skype user over the Internet, and unlimited long-distance to any North American telephone for $29.95 a year. A lot cheaper than long distance, and it works great.*

Since 2007, the Internet Telephony wave has become a Tsunami. More and more individuals and businesses are cancelling POTS (Plain Old Telephone Service), and going wireless. Many persons use mobile phones as their primary mode of communication. In small law offices, Skype has become the first long distance service, and land lines are backups. I no longer have land line telephones at my home, and use Skype for long distance calls. Video conferencing will be the next big small law office wave, as smart phones are adopting front-facing cameras and courts will, in the face of increasing dockets, move to telephone and video hearings.

•   *Mobile communications. If there is anything a lawyer loves, it is being able to be a lawyer while on the move. Treos, BlackBerries, and other smartphones (from Motorola, Nokia, and HP), are doing more and more these days, and a lawyer can check his e-mail, browse the web, keep up with his calendar and contacts and tasks, instant message his office and secretary, find his way while traveling, look at his documents, scan pages into his computer, dictate memos and email them to his secretary or assistant, all from anywhere in the world. Get mobile; it's where the rest of the world is going.*

There is no question that the biggest tech trend since 2007 is the move to wireless and mobile communication. Smart phones are increasingly capable, and the rise of tablet computers will speed the move to wireless lawyering. Current smartphones from Apple and other makers who have adopted Android and BlackBerry, are faster than the typical desktop was in 2007. Smart phones will continue to have bigger and brighter screens, and faster processors. Dual core processors are just the beginning. The next big thing will be near field communication, which will enable micro payments from the phones, and push advertising and other forms of communication. The larger screens make document review on the run easier and more efficient. Legal research is now able to be performed on a smart phone or tablet that is easy to carry.

•   *Electronic discovery. As the new federal electronic discovery rules get adopted by state court systems, as more documents, emails and data get stored electronically...as more data gets stored remotely on servers, and as storage gets more portable and smaller...it is a sure bet that lawyers will have to deal with finding evidence in electronic form, and using it in litigation.*

Electronic discovery, as predicted, has become more complicated, and the subject of many appellate rulings. In fact, lawyers are finding evidence in ever newer electronic environments; such as Twitter and Facebook messages, in which unsuspecting users are posting their secrets without regard to the fact that the Internet never forgets. Electronic discovery now requires a search of the Internet and social media sites, as well as electronic evidence that may be stored in a witness or party's personal or business computer. The new reliance on mobile devices, however, means that locating the computers is more difficult.

•   *Software as a service. More and more software applications are being hosted at remote computers, and accessed over the Web. As Web use becomes ubiquitous, lawyers and clients*

will want access to their data and programs wherever they happen to be. One way is to have the software hosted at a remote server, and accessed over the Web. Legal software providers have been slow to adopt this method, due to fears over data and program security. As these fears subside, it's likely that more and more of what you do as a lawyer will be hosted somewhere else. This method of software delivery has, as a main advantage, the fact that no upgrades of the program are necessary, as it is all handled at the host. In addition, the data is likely more secure, and backed up more often, by a host provider.

SaaS systems continue to gain in popularity. While back office time, billing and matter management systems have been slower in gaining popularity, it is clear that the inevitable movement of time is towards always on Internet access to law office systems. Even with the inherent security risks of storing confidential client data on an Internet database, law offices, small and large, are realizing that the data is likely more secure at an Internet host than on a computer in the office. Online matter management services like Clio and RocketMatter are gaining traction, and many lawyers have already migrated to Google Calendar, Gmail, and other free SaaS services from Google.

*•	Generic operating systems. At the time of this writing, Microsoft Vista is the newest operating system but it is not being adopted quickly. In the future, there is a clear trend towards open-source (free) operating systems; most notably, Linux. There are many new distributions of Linux that are as easy to install and use as Windows, and many users are keeping XP on their systems. It is too early to predict the downfall of the Windows operating system; however, the trend is clearly away from proprietary systems.*

The operating system is likely not going away anytime soon; but, generic free systems are proliferating. Google's Android, based on the Linux kernel, and the Google Chrome OS, also based on Linux, are multiplying. The majority of new smart phones are now using Android, and Android based tablets are just now being built by many manufacturers. It remains to be seen whether computers which are solely based on Google Chrome will succeed; and, in law offices, Windows 7 is still required for many essential law office tasks. Document processing is still a game that is played best on a real computer. Proprietary Apple operating systems still maintain a strong niche market, and many lawyers have adopted the proprietary Applie iOS in the iPad tablet computers. However, it is clear that Android, with its world-wide reach, and many manufacturers, will outstrip Apple in number of units sold, and more lawyers will see the benefits of a less expensive computing solution.

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