

# No Office, No Staff, No Paper...No Problem

## Veteran attorney's practice thriving in high-tech legal world

By Lynn Patrick Ingram

*"Adapt or perish, now as ever, is nature's inexorable imperative."* —H. G. Wells

**V**eteran family law appellate lawyer Scott Bassett saw it coming. So he embraced it. He evolved. And he says others need to do the same, or risk extinction.

"I think lawyers who are not evolving are struggling and may soon be gone," he said. "Not every lawyer needs to be a techie. But all lawyers need to appreciate the role that technology plays in law practice today."

According to Bassett, this is true for lawyers and law firms, big and small.

"I actually think large firms, so-called 'Big Law,' have the most to lose in this transformation," he noted. "Big firms are ponderous and slow to change. Clients no longer want to pay for the overhead that consists of inflated salaries and opulent offices."

Clients also have more options in today's legal world, thanks to technology.

"I see the automation of the creation of legal documents, from basic to complex, as the next big step," he said. "If you are in a practice that is capable of being reduced to the completion of forms, you will be gone in 10 years. The lawyers who survive will be those who offer something more than mere preparation of documents. Those who offer judgment and experience that cannot be replicated by machines will survive and prosper."

"Future of Law" is a regular column of the *Michigan Bar Journal*. Articles relating to lawyers using technology in their practices are written by Lynn Patrick Ingram. To submit a story idea, please contact Lynn at [lingram@michbar.org](mailto:lingram@michbar.org).

"Why else should lawyers embrace technology?" Bassett pondered. "Survival in a world full of LegalZooms and RocketLawyers."

### Be nimble, be quick

Bassett, who lives in Florida but handles cases all over the country, is also an adjunct law professor at Stetson University College of Law in Gulfport, Florida, and a writer and editor for the law office technology newsletter published by Affinity Consulting Group.

He says he can juggle everything because of—and thanks to—technology.

The biggest change, he recalls, was e-filing, which allowed him to quickly, efficiently, and at a lower cost to his clients file briefs more than 1,000 miles away from a court in which he was practicing.

Then came "the security of cloud-based document storage, backup, and synchronization" with products such as Google Drive, Microsoft OneDrive, Dropbox, and others.

"I no longer have to worry about whether a document is physically stored on my desktop, laptop, iPad, or phone," he said. "I can quickly get to all my open (and closed) cases filed on any device from anywhere with an Internet connection. And it is much more secure than anything I could set up and maintain locally at my residence.

"I would say the move to a paperless office and e-filing are the biggest changes for attorneys."

### Pack light

As for actual equipment, Bassett says he relies heavily on a few items, including a "fairly modest Dell desktop PC with a Core i5 processor, a pair of 1 TB hard drives, 8 GB of RAM, Windows 10, and three large monitors (two 27" monitors and one 25" monitor)."

What he doesn't get done on his desktop, he usually handles on his Microsoft Surface Book laptop (Core i5, 256 GB SSD, 8 GB of RAM, Windows 10, and a detachable 13-inch screen that essentially becomes a Windows tablet).

"It is one of the best laptops on the market," he said. "I can use it in tablet mode during oral arguments in the Court of Appeals or Supreme Court."

His primary tablet is the iPad 4G with a Verizon cell data connection.

"I sometimes use it for reading and annotating documents or during appeal arguments," he noted. "I like that the App Store for iOS has many good legal-specific apps such as TabLit's Oral Argument or Lit Software's DocReviewPad."

His phone is the latest iPhone 7 Plus.

Finally, he highly recommends the "wonderful" Sony Digital Paper Device, which he says is almost a necessity for lawyers who travel and read/annotate multiple documents because it "can't be done on a regular monitor or tablet" without destroying your eyes.

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—Scott Bassett

“It is like a giant Kindle,” he observed. “It has an e-ink screen with no backlighting to cause eye strain. All of my current case files sync via Box to my Digital Paper devices using Wi-Fi. It comes with a stylus to annotate documents on screen. Those annotations then appear in the PDF document when it is opened on a PC, laptop, tablet, or phone.”

### Just dive in

All this might seem a bit daunting to some, especially those who have waited to upgrade technology.

The biggest obstacle to embracing technology is fear, Bassett said, noting that learning technology is actually a lot like learning to swim.

“Lawyers need to lose their fear of tech and just dive in,” he said. “The water is fine.”

He suggests beginning with education.

“Go to legal-specific tech seminars. Learn Microsoft Word from someone who actually knows how lawyers use it. Listen to tech

and legal tech podcasts—something I do every day—and don’t be afraid to play with technology,” he advised. “Playing is also learning. It’s difficult to break modern tech. Just make sure you have good backups.”

Although Bassett believes the advances in technology have been transformative, he cautions that they are not without potential pitfalls.

“People who create tech also have a moral responsibility to consider the societal implications of their inventions,” he said. “If a new technology will displace a huge number of workers but makes that inventor a ton of money, that inventor has a moral obligation to use some of that money to help find a way to put displaced workers back to work. That responsibility cannot all be dumped on government. It is also a private-sector responsibility.”

Finally, he says lawyers need to remember that we will always have one big advantage over technology—the personal connection.

“Despite tech advances, lawyers are still, and will always be, in the client service business,” he said. “You have to respect and care about the people you represent—or if you can’t respect them personally, at least respect the legal problems they bring to you. It is no secret that lawyers who promptly return phone calls and respond to client questions almost never get sued or grieved, no matter how deficient their actual legal services.”

The bottom line, Bassett says, is that the practice of law is always evolving, and we as lawyers must do the same.

“There are no more milkmen or elevator operators,” he noted. “Lawyers who cannot use technology to become more efficient are heading in the same direction. Embrace the transformation.” ■

*Lynn Patrick Ingram is publications development manager and legal editor at the State Bar of Michigan.*

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