

Technology Is in His DNA

By Lynn Patrick Ingram

Commerce Township lawyer Matt LaMaster represents the new breed of attorney. He has never used a typewriter, he doesn't need a fax machine, and his first phone was "smart." He started his firm two years ago "on a foundation of technology" and can't imagine practicing law any other way.

LaMaster says embracing technology is the key to a successful practice, and the only way to provide effective and cost-conscious service to clients. He is a twenty-first-century lawyer, and you can learn from him.

I recently had the opportunity to speak with LaMaster.

Tell me about your practice.

My practice focuses on helping dentists, veterinarians, chiropractors, and physicians. I started my own firm approximately two years ago. I am licensed in Florida, Michigan, and Wisconsin. I have clients in all three states, but I live here in Michigan. I mostly work with my clients on transactional matters.

How has technology changed your practice over the last several years? How do you think it has changed the practice of law generally?

Technology has changed the practice of law in many ways. I believe it has made lawyers more efficient. It has also allowed us greater access to information to help our clients, and at the same time, it has allowed

our clients to become more informed before they reach us. Technology, in some ways, has increased competition for lawyers; however, it has also set some attorneys apart.

When did you first notice the shift in the way law was being practiced? What was the shift and how did you respond?

For small and solo practices, I noticed a strong shift about three or four years ago. That's when the technology that big firms were using started to become affordable for smaller firms.

What are the key pieces of technology that you use daily in your practice or on a regular basis?

Laptop, Fujitsu ScanSnap, VOIP phone system, LawPay, Xero accounting software, Clio practice management software, and Office 365 with SharePoint.

What are some of the more recent technological developments you've adopted and how are they working?

Realistically, I started my firm on a good foundation of technology, so I have not implemented much new lately. That said, I'm looking into scheduling apps for clients.

Where do you see technology and the practice of law going in the next 10 years? How will you prepare?

I'm always looking for ways to provide my clients more efficient service. I believe that a lot of the tools are already out there, and over the next 10 years those tools will continue to improve. I also believe that technology will push some attorneys out of the profession.

What have you noticed about lawyers who have not evolved in terms of using technology?

They are inefficient and difficult to work with. It takes longer to get responses, which

makes my job more challenging. In a transactional environment like my practice, it doesn't make sense not to evolve. However, some lawyers continue to provide ineffective representation that takes more time and increases costs for their clients.

Are there any drawbacks to the technology movement?

Security is a potential negative depending on the systems that an attorney uses. Also, some attorneys may find themselves with less work because clients will hire an attorney who knows how to use technology to provide more effective services.

Why do you believe it's so important for you to keep up with the latest technology? Why should other lawyers do it?

To provide the best service for our clients, we need to know what can help us be more efficient. If you're not looking for ways to improve your firm and you're not looking for ways to provide better service, then you need to look at why you're practicing law.

What would you advise lawyers to do if they want to get in line with technology, especially those who have been doing it the old-fashioned way for years and may not have a lot of knowledge or experience using technology?

Start taking some classes from the State Bar. It's that simple. They will put things into perspective and give you information to start putting the pieces in place. ■

Note: This interview has been lightly edited for clarity.

"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.

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