

Adopting new technology: an action plan

By Tony Williams & Janet Day

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Almost all of us object to imposed change – we rebel, deny, hamper, complain and generally do everything we can to avoid changing at someone else’s command. When, as individuals we decide we want to change, we use the same degree of energy and determination to ensure that we carry out our chosen change.

So what is the trick in making system adoption successful and productive?

Simple – the productive point – if a lawyer can see they professionally or personally benefit from a new technique or technology they will do their best to make it work. Involve them in deciding that the technology based change is imperative for their professional offering to clients and their place within the competitive legal framework and they will bite your hand off. That means the technology is aligned with the business – it is a strategic development tool – not an objectionable change.

Firstly you ensure that the reasons for the change stack up – really take a litigator’s approach to your internal debate about change – try every angle to see that the new system stacks up – and make sure this is constantly articulated by everyone in the team – the same hymn sheet is an imperative.

Get early adopters who will be vociferous in support – and ensure they carry the right degree of gravitas to make that support beneficial. Work hard at making sure those individuals are really reaping the benefits – so predictive coding really did get through the disclosure bundle at a fixed price and in a way the client and the team understood and benefitted from. Make sure the document spewed out through an automated process does have the right clauses in the right place.

As well as early adopters, identify the cynics and pessimists and take time to understand their concerns but don’t get distracted as you may never convert all and you have to focus your efforts where you will achieve results.

Make something new exciting, make it feel like a privilege to try out the augmented intelligence tool to review their documents for omitted or incomplete definitions. Make sure as individuals the lawyers involved in testing know you are only using their time and skills because they are already good at what they do.

Never use technology to hide or cover a mistake – just like trying to outsource a badly performing department, the error does not disappear via an automated tool. A poor manual process when automated will be a poor automated process.

If you can genuinely get technology to help the lawyer, then lawyers will embrace it. In this current highly competitive market anything which makes it easier to meet the clients’ needs or get a task done more speedily, more accurately or at a guaranteed price gets attention.

Use technology to help lawyers understand which work is profitable and which work is not – give them graphic tools which show the impact of writing down or off chunks of time. Many lawyers edit bills based on what they feel the clients will bear – but if they understood what that meant to their profit, they would fight harder to get the right fee for the task.

Aim technology at groups, do not be embarrassed that one group gains more from an investment than others – if the real estate team have elements of repetitive work in their full service mix – help them automate that where possible. Add task management tools, case guidelines and perfect transaction checklists to help guide and support practitioners.

Use generational differences positively – collaboration tools are a natural for millennials – do not force Gen X to use them until they see others gaining benefits. There is no greater advertisement than a peer saying ‘this is good’.

Use technology to help create your global brand – common document styles, common billing practices help the global client see the law firm as a global player. It also helps your own team know they are part of this global enterprise. Use technology to remove language as a barrier, use it to provide international informal information exchange environments.

Above all succeed – but be honest – trying to pretend a poor implementation is successful is foolish and devalues what has been achieved elsewhere. There will be some failures; indeed if there are not then you are not being innovative. So admit, learn and move on.

Technology is the strongest strategic tool in the armory of change agents. A focused and solid technology service can help a firm to grow profitably and to achieve its strategic ambitions.

Janet Day is an independent legal technology consultant and Tony Williams is the principal of Jomati Consultants

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