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LegalLOOP

2012 technology trends for large law firms

Earlier this month, the American Lawyer released its annual technology survey results. The Am Law Tech Survey 2012 compiled the responses of 83 Am Law 200 CIOs and technology chiefs regarding their law firms' use of technology over the past year. The end result was clear — large law firms were no more capable of resisting the tidal wave of consumer-driven demand for cloud and mobile computing than any other industry.

For example, the most interesting trend from this year's results was that law firms were giving in to the inevitable, shifting away from typical enterprise-friendly devices and toward those more suited for consumers, especially when it came to mobile devices.

Specifically, there was a decided shift from law firm use of familiar, clunky BlackBerry phones to the more nimble and consumer-friendly Apple and Android smartphones, with 88 percent of respondents expecting a decrease in BlackBerry users and 4 percent reporting that they would cease BlackBerry support altogether. Interestingly, iPhones were the most used device, with 99 percent of respondents indicating that there were iPhone users within their firms and 75 percent reporting the use of Android devices.

Tablets are also influencing purchasing decisions. When it came to new hardware, 37 percent of respondents indicated that there were plans to add a tablet to hardware purchasing decisions for individual attorneys in the near future, with 25 percent planning to issue attorneys a desktop and a tablet and 12 percent planning to issue a laptop and a tablet instead. And, 8 percent of firms reported that they already supplied their attorneys with tablet computers.

The use of cloud computing by large law firms is also increasing, albeit at a slower rate than that of solos or small firms. Nevertheless, there has been an uptick of cloud computing use, with 74 percent reporting using hosted computing services, a decided increase from the 65 percent that reported using these services in last year's survey. And, 50 percent reported an increase in the use of cloud services compared to the prior year.

But how did respondents use cloud computing in their law firms? 63 percent used it for e-discovery and litigation support, over 37 percent used the cloud for human resource matters, 38 percent used it for email management, 13 percent reported using cloud services for data storage, 7 percent used it for billing and 8 percent used cloud-based platforms for document management.

The main cloud computing benefits cited by respondents were simplified support and maintenance (83 percent) and the reduced need for in-house servers and other hardware (44 percent).

Finally, the survey results indicated that social media use by large firms is also on the rise, with 75 percent of respondents indicating that their firms used social media as part of their firm's marketing strategy. Of those firms, 90 percent used LinkedIn, 64 percent used Twitter and 61 percent used Facebook.

So the results are clear — like most other industries, large firms are not immune to the long-reaching effects of the Internet and mobile computing. These new tools are changing the ways that we interact, communicate and conduct business and ignoring the impact of these technologies upon our societal landscape is no longer an option. Accepting and embracing 21st century technologies is the most reasonable course of action and, at long last, law firms are doing just that. It's been a long time coming.

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