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Lawyers, at last, make peace with Web 2.0

The American Bar Association released the 2010 Legal Technology Survey Report earlier this year, based on surveys of more than 5,000 ABA members in private practice.

The report offers detailed statistics and trend analysis regarding lawyers' adoption of different types of technologies into their law practices. The survey's results are promising, and indicate that lawyers — a group of professionals historically resistant to technological change — are using a broad spectrum of emerging technologies in their practices, including social media, mobile computing, smart phones, cloud computing and e-book readers.

Use of social media platforms among lawyers appears to be increasing: The majority of respondents, 56 percent, now have a presence on an online community or social network, such as Facebook or LinkedIn, compared to 43 percent in the 2009 survey and 15 percent in the 2008 survey.

Lawyers also have been quick to adopt smart phone use in their day-to-day activities. More than 76 percent of respondents now own smart phones, up from 64 percent in the 2009 survey. More attorneys are using smart phones in the courtroom as well, with 71 percent reporting courtroom usage, up from 60 percent in 2009. Smart phones are used for a variety of reasons while in court, with 64 percent of respondents checking their e-mail, 60 percent sending e-mails and 46 percent using the calendar function.

Use of e-book readers also is on the rise in law firms, with 10 percent of respondents reporting that e-book readers are available in their offices and 16 percent of solo practitioners report using them. Only 4 percent of large firm respondents reported doing so.

Cloud computing and mobile computing have made their mark on the profession as well, with more and more attorneys reporting they are practicing law away from the office. Some are simply working remotely from time to time, while others practice solely from a virtual law office.

Mobile computing is increasing rapidly, with 35 percent of respondents reporting they regularly conduct legal research from home, up from 24 percent in the 2008; 46 percent of respondents reported spending 10 to 24 percent of their time working away from their main office setting and nearly all respondents (96 per-

cent) reported having Internet access available to them while away from the office. The primary devices used to access the Internet while away from the office were laptop computers (49 percent) and smart phones (32 percent). Only 17 percent of respondents reported using desktop computers to access the Internet outside of the office.

Virtual law practices are becoming more common as well: 14 percent of respondents reported that they provided virtual lawyering services, defined for the purposes of the survey as a practice in which the attorney did not typically meet with clients in person, and interacted with clients primarily through using Internet-based software and other electronic communications software.

The results indicate, too, that lawyers increasingly are turning to the Internet as their first source for information, with 46 percent of respondents reporting they seek out information using free online services before turning to fee-based Internet/online services.

The results of the survey are heartening and indicate that lawyers are becoming more accepting of new technologies. Attorneys are taking advantage of the flexibility now available to them through the use of smart phones and tablet computers. Rather than shunning Internet-based tools, they are taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the new platforms.

Who knows what the future will bring? I, for one, am looking forward to next year's survey results. I have no doubt the final statistics will provide further evidence of a profession in the middle of a cataclysmic change — one that will forever shape, for the better, the ways in which legal services are delivered in our country.

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