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SUSAN SALTONSTALL DUNCAN • TIPS & TACTICS FOR NEW LAWYERS

## Use Technology to Boost Your Success

**Y**ou can't really think about the practice of law without considering the role that technology can play. Technology can enhance communication with and services to clients, as well as support business development initiatives. There are many ways to use technology to strengthen client relationships and increase your marketing reach. Here's a sampling.

**Accessibility.** Clients complain that they often cannot reach their lawyers or never hear back from them in a timely manner. Change your voice-mail message regularly to let callers know your availability and who to call in your absence. Provide your cell phone number to clients, and if you travel a lot, invest in a BlackBerry or a pager. Follow up with e-mails as soon as possible, preferably within hours but at least on the same day. If you'll be out of the office and unable to retrieve e-mail, program in an auto-reply, telling senders when you'll return and who to contact while you're away.

**Work flow and collaboration.** Learn what applications are available to bet-

ter manage cases and to organize data and knowledge. Find out what tools your clients use, and consider what you could do to share work product more effectively—for example, by setting up an extranet, exchanging files in PDF format, investing in a particular practice management program or holding a videoconference.

**Market research.** The Internet provides access to almost limitless sources of information that can help you learn more about clients, prospects, competitors, and practice, industry and economic trends. Visit your contacts' Web sites, and use trade association and business sites to benchmark trends and best practices.

**Electronic discussion groups.** There are more than 20,000 discussion groups on the Internet, offering forums on just about every topic imaginable. Join one or two in which your client base participates, and see what types of discussions transpire. However, take care with how you respond in discussions, since you cannot provide legal advice online without a formal client relationship.

**Web bio.** Many important audiences will visit your firm's Web site, from clients and referral sources to media members. Regularly visit the site yourself and update your bio to include recent cases, speeches, articles and links. Place abbreviated versions of your presentations and PowerPoint slides on the site so that visitors

get a better sense of your expertise.

Whether it's on the Web, in e-mail or via some other technology, always put your best foot forward. *LP*

## Checklist

### Technology Pointers

- Use e-mail as well as a cell phone or a PDA to make yourself more accessible to clients. You don't have to be available 24-7, but you do need to give people a sense of when and how they can reach you.
- Make sure your Web bio is practice- and industry-focused, with appropriate links to and from your areas of expertise.
- Keep current on what software applications and online tools can help you to deliver a better product to clients—and to do so more quickly and cost-effectively.
- Use Web-based resources to extend your geographic reach and promote your expertise to targeted groups.
- Remember that this is still a relationship business that is nurtured through live contacts. So, while new and ever-improving tools can enhance your strategies, knowledge and services, don't overrely on technology. Pick up the phone or meet someone for lunch. Making a personal connection is still the best approach.



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