

NEED NEW TECHNOLOGY FOR YOUR FIRM? 4 PROVEN WAYS TO GET BUY-IN

IT departments understand the case for new technology, but not everyone in the firm does. Here's how to change that.

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Quick—think about the oldest software in your law firm. When was it implemented? 2010? 2008? Earlier? The chances are that this older technology doesn't meet the firm's needs.

Aging technology needs to be replaced. It's inefficient, hard to use and difficult to maintain. As part of the IT team, you have reviewed and vetted contenders to replace it. However, knowing what needs to be done and convincing others at the firm that it needs to be done are two separate things.

Even as you explore technology options, you know one of your tasks will include getting support for significant technological changes from decision makers at your firm. Without their approval and acceptance, upgrade projects will have no chance to succeed. How can you get your law firm decision makers on board?

IT needs a strategy that can translate the functionality of new technology into a conversation



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about the high-level effect of aging technology and the benefits of replacing it. By considering the below approaches, you can get the right stakeholders on board to create impactful operational and competitive advantages.

1. Present the Big Picture

Perhaps the new technology you are lobbying for offers

a higher level of security and functionality. While those are important features, they might not translate into clear benefits for decision makers. You should focus on the “big picture” risks that existing technology presents and the benefits this technology offers.

Start discussions with law firm leaders early in the

process to build buy-in. Identify what technology upgrades and changes will make the firm safer from external and internal threats. Outdated technology can leave data vulnerable to breaches that can cause the firm to lose valuable clients and face an onslaught of negative publicity. This translates, ultimately, to lost profits and an impaired ability to gain new clients.

Consider the ongoing fallout from the Panama Papers. In 2015, 11.5 million documents from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca were hacked and leaked. As a result, extremely sensitive information about individuals and public information was widely released. Law firms are targeted every day by hackers. They are now prime targets.

Even if firms manage to avoid data breaches and hacks, they still need to meet client expectations, such as outside counsel guidelines. The times when firms could merely glance at them and say they meet them are done. Clients are actively seeking evidence that this compliance to outside counsel guidelines happens. For example, a client may demand a security audit to demonstrate HIPAA compliance and adherence to other security standards. If your firm's technology works against these guidelines, it risks losing the client (and others).

To sum it up: The conversation isn't about the technology, it's

about the effects of it. In this case, the discussion centers on the potential risks and consequences that outdated software poses and how new technology can offer protection against them to protect profit.

2. Emphasize and Quantify the Potential for Productivity and Efficiency

Along with ensuring that any new technology prepares the firm for future challenges, IT needs to consider attorney and staff productivity and efficiency. Fading technology can slow down work resulting in wasted time and slow client responsiveness, which ultimately will hurt billable hours.

There are many ways that outdated technology can be a drag on firms, rather than boosting performance: poor user interfaces, an inability to integrate with important law firm systems such as a document management system and cumbersome onboarding and training procedures. Attorneys and staff generally build a tolerance to these inefficiencies (although they will understandably grumble about it), incorporating them into their work habits even when they take more time and effort to accomplish.

Imagine a time system that generates only spreadsheets to support billing. Or email that doesn't integrate with a document management system. Both of these examples would

demand manual efforts to collect, process and store valuable information. This gives IT the perfect platform to demonstrate how much time could be saved with new technology and provide hard numbers that time represents. For example, if a new technology cuts a process time by 20 percent for a collective 1,000 hours a year, it will allow firms to reclaim \$150,000 a year (based on \$150/hour billing rate). That is a significant amount of money that will swiftly cover technology costs and continue to pay off in the future.

A perfect complement to this angle is to emphasize the investment demanded by outdated technology. It often requires a substantial amount of repairs and maintenance required to keep it running. How many hours does it require from IT? What new hardware or upgrades are demanded to keep it supported and current? The IT staff can also find itself buried with developing workarounds when technology is no longer supported or has been sunsetted, or the provider has offered upgrades that the firm hasn't installed.

3. Find Support Within Your Firm

The IT department should find key influencers who understand the issues and can help achieve technology goals. Depending on culture, structure, and relationships within

the firm, you can work from the top down, from the bottom up or laterally to gain support.

When working from the top down, focus on getting buy-in from the management committee or managing partner. The firm's technology committee can also play a key role in leading efforts to adopt new technology.

In a bottom-up approach, paralegals and administrators offer an influence on these decisions. Staff members and administrative support specialists are deeply involved in using technology on a day-to-day basis. Their combined preferences will help you make a case for new technology.

There are also peers throughout the firm who can assist with adoption efforts. These people may not necessarily be top-level individuals. Instead, they are individuals in different departments or roles who will benefit the most from the new technology. Explain the advantages to them to gain their support. For example, records management professionals can help you make a case for a new document management system or conflicts software. The marketing department can assist with promoting technology

that will offer competitive certifications opportunities.

4. Look to Outside Sources

Along with those within the firm, third parties can offer invaluable insights and information. Agnostic legal technology experts serve as an important resource. Since they do not manufacture and sell the technology, they can provide unbiased feedback and tips on how to identify candidates and make a case internally. After a solution is identified, the providers themselves might have helpful feedback and reference materials that you can rely on to help your case.

Your competition can be another great source of intelligence, and referencing them can help you gain an edge. Ask your law firm leaders what peer firms are doing, and how you rank against them. Even if you can't ask those who directly compete in your markets and practice areas, similar firms in other markets may be willing to share what technology has worked for them, and what hasn't. Consider cloud-based technology, for example. Even if you are already using some forms of cloud technology, other firms may be able to share how they leverage it to improve security, offer greater

mobility and allow for smoother technology upgrades.

Industry organizations help you gauge trends and how they can impact the firm and its clients. Groups such as the International Legal Technology Association (ILTA) and its members gather feedback and insights and offer best practices. Your firm isn't the first firm to make a case for new technology, and the collective efforts of your peers can highlight new strategies and viewpoints. For example, ILTA produces an annual survey on litigation practice and support technology that offers information on tools that firms use, such as computer/server forensic and collection tools, web and social media capture tools and web-mail collection tools.

Conclusion

IT departments understand the case for new technology, but not everyone in the firm does. In order to persuade decision makers, IT needs to present the risks the firm faces, how technology will offer ROI and how industrywide trends and challenges influence and affect technology decisions. By taking these steps, you can help position the firm for success today and into the future.