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COVID-19 Will Force Legal Industry Transformation

The onslaught of Coronavirus (COVID-19) is transforming how we live and work in ways profound and superficial alike. The legal profession won't escape unscathed.

By **Basha Rubin & Mirra Levitt** | April 09, 2020



The onslaught of Coronavirus (COVID-19) is transforming how we live and work in ways profound and superficial alike. The legal profession won't escape unscathed. In his March 19, 2020 article (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/technology-is-key-to-stopping-coronavirus-wiping-out-law-firms-5kd307zlk>) in The Times "Technology Is Key to Stopping Coronavirus Wiping Out Law Firms," legal thought-leader Richard Susskind argues that "[i]f law firms . . . cannot find a way to work remotely in the coming weeks, Covid-19 will rapidly run them into the ground." He implores them to embrace technology like "Signal, Zoom, Slack and Google Hangouts" to survive. We agree, but these are just the (new) table stakes. Change in underlying behavior and processes will be needed—and those who don't change, will certainly not thrive, and may not survive.

Since we founded Priori, a legal marketplace for in-house teams to find attorneys for projects globally, we've watched law firms wrestle with adopting new ways of doing business, from easy wins like using the same technologies their clients are using to participating in robust RFP processes to compete for new business.

While discussions about technology adoption and innovation are now happening in many spaces within the legal profession, if you'd asked us a month ago, we would have said there was still a long way to go. Based on what we're seeing right now, however, we predict that the current crisis is going to be the (unfortunate) watershed we've been waiting for.

From what we're seeing unfold daily with our clients and network lawyers, we wanted to offer our predictions about what those changes will be in the post-Coronavirus world. Here's an outline of the transformation we expect when the dust settles:

1. Driven by the necessity for entirely remote teams during this time, many law firms will change their work styles, habits and processes — in ways their clients have wanted for years. In addition to adopting new technologies, we expect many law firms will develop transparent, regular, clear and concise communication, radical responsiveness, empathy and flexibility. In the context of the crisis, we also expect to see a renewed focus on creatively addressing problems (rather than spending time problematizing) and becoming truly, integrated team-players. While remote work at law firms may or may not continue post-pandemic, the work patterns and styles instilled by this period may well remain — not least because clients appreciate them. Indeed, from what we see at Priori already, those who demonstrate precisely these qualities at law firms are the most well-reviewed and receive the most repeat engagements. Firms who don't adapt may be eclipsed by newcomers who do.
2. Collaboration across the legal services ecosystem may offer new business opportunities for firms. While we can't yet know the full scope of the economic fallout of this crisis, it's already clear that the damage will be significant and widespread across industries and geographies. As a result, many in-house legal departments will reduce their outside counsel spending and pause W-2 hiring. In turn, those changes will put pressure on law firms and other service providers to deliver higher quality services more efficiently and cost-effectively than before the pandemic crisis. Law firms have seen "new law companies" like legal marketplaces, outsourcing and staffing firms, and other kinds of "alternative" legal service providers as a threat to their business. Yet, the pressure to deliver excellent services at lower cost could incentivize collaboration — and potentially drive valuable long-lasting partnerships throughout the legal ecosystem.
3. For years, law firms have been able to rely on personal relationships and brand name to maintain their market-share. This will no longer be enough. Data-driven decision making for legal services will become best practice. Amidst cost and business pressures, legal buyers will rely on data, not just firm brand, to select outside legal providers. Even before this crisis, there was swelling demand (<https://www.law360.com/articles/1247045/gcs-hungrier-than-ever-for-outside-counsel-data>) for data with comprehensive RFPs to drive decision-making. After the pandemic, robust data and a RFP process will be part of almost every hiring decision because there will be more pressure on in-house teams to select law firms and other providers who have hyper-specific expertise and can deliver it using best-in-class technology.

In order to survive in a world in which crisis forces some providers to evolve by leaps and bounds and legal purchasers have more budget pressure than ever before, lawyers will need to change their work styles, daily use of technologies and how they compete for clients in order to grow their businesses in the aftermath of this crisis.

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