

## Managing partner strives to keep that technology edge

### Running A Law Firm In 2016

By: Pat Murphy April 8, 2016



Robert P. Brooks can laugh now when kidded that less techno-savvy colleagues might have been tempted to stage a walkout to protest Adler, Pollock & Sheehan's switch from BlackBerrys to iPhones several years ago.

But the firm's leader understands full well that dealing with attorneys with different comfort levels is part of the equation of keeping his firm ahead of the curve when it comes to new technology.

Brooks is in his fourth year as managing partner of the 59-attorney business law firm with offices in Providence, Newport, Boston and Manchester, New Hampshire.

While ensuring that Adler Pollock's attorneys have the best technology to do their jobs is a continuing challenge, Brooks also is mindful that he needs to keep the firm up to speed on issues like cybersecurity and social media in marketing, all while meeting the needs of clients who might be requesting an alternative fee arrangement.

Brooks spoke recently with Lawyers Weekly's Pat Murphy in the first of a series of conversations with managing partners across the state about the challenges of running a law firm in 2016.

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**Q.** *What are your biggest challenges as a managing partner?*

**A.** The biggest challenge has been trying to keep up with technology and making sure the technology we have in the office is the latest thing in terms of assisting the attorneys in their practices. And then it's trying to adapt that technology to the different generations you have who use technology differently.

Our efforts continue every day. For example, right now we're in the process of revamping our entire IT capability. We're working on the "back of the house" kinds of stuff, like the servers. Later on this year we're going to roll out new computers for everyone — the staff and the attorneys. We're looking at whether we're going to offer laptops, desktops or let the attorneys choose. We also want to make sure that, if the attorneys want to work at home, that they have the equipment to do that.

**Q.** *What types of issues have you had to address when introducing new technology in a law office with different generations of attorneys with different comfort levels?*

**A.** In my first year as managing partner, we switched from BlackBerrys to iPhones. The younger attorneys had been telling us it's something we needed to do, that they could be more efficient, that the iPhone would provide them with different features and apps that they could use in their practices. For example, it was easier to transfer and read documents on the iPhone and do research on the fly if they were in court. All of those things turned out to be true.

What was interesting was that most of the attorneys who were reluctant to switch were concerned that they couldn't

type on the iPhone. They were used to the keyboard on the BlackBerry. But everybody adapted in the end.

**Q.** *What strategies have you employed to keep up with technology? Is the firm big on outsourcing?*

**A.** We're really not. We looked at [outsourcing] as an option, but what we decided to do was work with a consultant, mindSHIFT [Technologies, Inc.], that works with law firms and keeps up with the trends and latest technologies that we can work with as a resource.

We prefer to have our own employees on the ground here available to work with our people and to troubleshoot problems, so we've maintained our own [IT] staff. That fits with the culture here.

**Q.** *Is it safe to assume that cybersecurity is a top concern for you given the volume of privileged and confidential information law firms typically handle?*

**A.** It is. With the type of private client information that we have, there are requirements now for if you're sending anything that can identify an employee by their Social Security number or medical documentation or anything like that. [That information] needs to be sent in an encrypted form, so we need to make sure we have the technology to both receive encrypted information and send it.

We've been able to maintain our security, knock on wood, but so far so good. We can tell in our system whether there's been an attempt to infiltrate the firm. There have been [attempts], but fortunately we've been able to maintain the type of software and protection that has kept us from having a problem.

**Q.** *A common complaint in the profession is the lack of opportunities that younger attorneys have to develop their courtroom skills as compared to past generations. Do you believe there is a "litigation gap"?*

**A.** I think there likely is just because the number of attorneys in the market has dramatically increased in the last 20 years. And cases tend to be pushed more to settlement. Alternative dispute resolution has definitely had an impact. You see more cases go to mediation, even more than you would see 10 or 15 years ago. So that eliminates the number of cases that are actually going to go to trial.

**Q.** *What does your firm do to address the problem?*

**A.** What we try to do is provide attorneys with as many opportunities to take testimony under oath as we can, whether it means allowing younger attorneys to take depositions or go to administrative hearings where testimony is going to be taken under oath. Those are all ways that younger attorneys can get the kind of experience they need.

But there's no substitute for the courtroom experience. So the other thing we try to do is, if we have a trial, to make sure the more experienced attorneys are bringing the less-experienced attorneys with them to sit second chair, or assist in the case, or even to just see an opening statement or a closing.

**Q.** *Does your firm see more clients requesting alternative fee arrangements?*

**A.** You do see it. Some alternative fee arrangements are being requested. The other thing we're seeing a lot of is budgets, where the client wants an estimate of what the firm thinks it's going to take to bring a matter to conclusion, and then also updates as to whether we're staying within budget and, if not, an explanation of why not. [We're also asked to work with the clients] to adjust the budgets so there are no surprises. You do see the client trying to better control the expenditure for legal services, whether it's through some kind of alternative fee arrangement or some

other means.

**Q.** *How important is social media in law firm marketing?*

**A.** We just had a meeting with a consultant on search engine optimization and the things we can do. We put up a new website last fall, so it's brand new. In fact, we won the Legal Marketing Association's 2015 award for the best new website.

Our website is equipped with the ability to just click on something we're sending out to share it with the people you're in contact with on LinkedIn, Facebook or other types of social media.

Our consultant told us that social media can only be a part of a much bigger strategy because, if you're a business law firm like we are, the likelihood is you're not going to [connect with business decision makers] on Facebook, but you might be able to do it on LinkedIn, so you have to "tailor the message," so to speak. But you can't overlook anything, either. Our marketing manager, Toni Bianco, is constantly on everyone to share our posts and our news items with our contacts.

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