

Technology is advancing at an ever-increasing pace and **efficiency is the new mantra** for law firms. In order to pair the two, what are the **minimum technology skills required** of a lawyer in 2016? And what will they be in 2026?

We asked three experts for their views on the touchy subject of lawyers' technological prowess



THE VERDICT



D. Casey Flaherty
Principal / Procertas

'It depends' is the default lawyer answer – because it is usually true. Different levels in different substantive areas demand different tech skills. But most lawyers need more tech skills than they have, even if just to know what to delegate and how to oversee the work delegated.

Most lawyers should have a solid foundation in email, word processing, PDFs and spreadsheets (the lingua franca of business). Most think they do. They are wrong. I would add mobility, social media, presentation software, advanced search, data security and some rudimentary comprehension of document automation, structured databases, machine learning, big data, etc.

The future is not here yet, which is what makes it fun. My hope is that the future will include natural language voice input combined with physical gestures in a three-dimensional, persistent computing environment where understanding what the machine is capable of has become substantially more important than memorizing precise user inputs. ■

Jeffrey Roach
President / Encoretch

Identifying the minimum technology skills (minimum? why do we always set the bar so low?) for lawyers for 2016 might be possible, but expecting those skills to stay the same for 2017 and beyond is idealistic at best and reckless at worst. It's not just technology that will continue to change; so will our clients' expectations, the conditions under which we create work product and even the law itself.

That's why we have to change the relationship our lawyers have with technology. Lawyers don't have to embrace technology to use it successfully, but they do have to have a healthy respect for the way in which it continues to impact the practice of law. They have to respect how pervasive it is and how long its memory can be.

Creating a discrete list of skills and working to build competency in those skills is a good start, but it's not enough. Instead of creating a program to address the latest buzzworthy headline, teach your lawyers to be more strategic in their use of technology; to make better choices when they create documents and collaborate with others; and to stop being a passive participant in the way technology continues to reshape the world in which they live and work. ■



Chris Bull
Executive Director / Kingsmead Square

Perhaps we have to reframe our question about the technology skills a lawyer will need in the future. What we are really talking about, and where the legal sector is still lagging quite a few other areas of business, is ensuring that all of our people know and can apply the fundamentals of how to operate as a productive and effective individual, meet the service expectations of their clients and fully contribute to their team. Many don't – including some of the most intelligent and experienced lawyers – and they are now failing on all three counts. But these aren't technology skills; in 2016, they are life skills. ■