

Technology: Law's Collaborative Catalyst

Technology dominates the legal tabloids. Investment in legal tech, blockchain and AI's emergence as potential game changers, technology's impact on legal jobs, the rise of law companies and legal operations, and technology's role in legal education and training are common topics. With all the legal tech frenzy, there is rarely mention of technology's role promoting collaboration and helping to create an emerging global legal culture dedicated to democratization of access to legal resources and improvement of legal services. This might be technology's most enduring contribution to realigning the legal industry with the needs of consumers and society. It's worth taking a closer look how this is playing out.

Lawyer Ambivalence and The Transformation of Legal Culture

Lawyers have an [uneasy relationship](#) with technology, even as the legal industry is being transformed by it. It's not technology itself that lawyers resist—how many attorneys do you know that don't have smart phones, buy online, or go offline only when they are asleep? What lawyers don't like is that technology—and those that design, build, invest, deploy, and integrate it with other resources—is changing the economics, delivery, careers, and 'lawyers and non-lawyers' culture of the legal industry. Technology is not replacing lawyers but it is infusing the industry with an interdisciplinary mix of professionals, paraprofessionals, and machines collaborating, innovating, and aligning with consumers. This has elevated consumer expectations, introduced business discipline to legal delivery, and hastened the sunset of the [legal guild](#). Law is no longer solely about lawyers, and many in the profession, to borrow from T.S. Eliot, are 'no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation.'

Technology is transforming law from a sole-source, clubby, homogenous, tradition bound, pedigree-centric, labor-intensive parochial guild into something entirely different. The legal industry is morphing into a diverse global marketplace where legal 'practice'—differentiated skills and expertise possessed by some lawyers—is separated from 'the business of delivering legal services.' Practice is shrinking and delivery is expanding—in no small part because technology and business expertise are reshaping the contours of practice and identifying, then implementing, innovative ways to leverage it to promote efficiency, predict risk, gauge value, reduce cost, and deploy the appropriate resource to a task, matter, or portfolio.

Law's Emerging Global Collaborative Culture

There is an emerging global legal community that is reshaping the culture, face, contours, composition participants, skillsets, and priorities of the legal industry. Technology is the nucleating force of a new legal culture that is transparent, collaborative, diverse, cross-border, data-driven, problem solving, tech and process centric, diverse, inter-disciplinary, merit-centric, flat, pedigree-agnostic, and innovative. This is replacing the incumbent legal culture that is parochial, fragmented, labor-

intensive, lawyer-centric, risk and change-averse one that was designed, regulated, and dominated by lawyers for their own benefit.

Technology is breaking down the provincialism of traditional legal practice by removing geographical barriers, enabling the creation of agile, collaborative supply chains, attracting investment capital, catalyzing innovation, and providing consumers—and those in need of access to legal services—with new delivery options that often involve collaboration between providers. Consider the recent [collaboration](#) of [law company](#) Elevate with mega-firm Hogan Lovells or UnitedLex's blockbuster [deal](#) with DXC. Collaboration between and among providers—especially where practice and delivery expertise are melded-- is required in a world where 'faster, better, cheaper' demands smart partnering.

Technology is fueling collaboration in other ways besides the legal supply chain. It is spawning global initiatives to improve legal delivery and access. Here are some notable examples.

The Global Legal Hackathon

The [Global Legal Hackathon](#) (GLH) kicked off this past weekend. The GLH is the legal industry's version of "We Are the World," a global coming together of the legal ecosystem to advance social and business objectives. The business objective is improving the 'business of law' by utilizing block chain, AI, and other technologies. The GLH assembled teams of coders, entrepreneurs, marketers, and others to support a unified vision: rapid development of solutions to improve the legal industry world-wide. The social objective is to solve the legal industry's 'wicked problems' -- access to justice and defending the rule of law, among others-- by the rapid development of solutions that will improve the legal industry globally.

The scale of GLH is remarkable—6 continents, dozens of countries, and more than 40 sites around the world hosted hackers competing—and collaborating-- to 'move the needle.' The breadth of industry stakeholder participation is equally noteworthy—law firms, in-house departments, corporate sponsors, law schools, techies, and entrepreneurs within and outside the industry engaged. The convergence of the retail and corporate segments of the industry is also noteworthy, because technology is creating a market compression that might result in a fusion of the two.

The Global Legal Hackathon personifies the collaborative approach taken by the legal tech community. Technology is a team sport; it requires participation of stakeholders with different skillsets, from different geographies and different cultural backgrounds, to identify and address common challenges collaboratively. The well-defined, material focus of the GLH evidences a maturation of the legal tech community; it does not advance technology as an end unto itself but as a vehicle for forging a scaled global effort to solve law's 'wicked problems' and to improve legal delivery for all.

Legal Geek Conference

The October, 2017 Legal Geek Conference in [London](#) was ‘law’s Woodstock’ because of its size, vibe, and industry significance. All segments of the legal ecosystem were represented, and there was a shared feeling of community that transcended geography, generation, gender, ethnicity, training, pedigree, and financial status. Lawyers, technologists, financiers, entrepreneurs, students, academics, and pundits mingled freely and animatedly, joined by a sense that the legal industry is changing and that this is their time. It’s also noteworthy that the retail and corporate market segments converged—at least for a day—to discuss how they might join forces to improve legal delivery for all. Technology will no doubt narrow the divide between those segments and enable tens of millions of new consumers to access legal services. This is a great opportunity for the legal industry to do good and to do well. Plans for the 2018 Legal Geek Conference are well underway, and organizers project that it will be double the size of last year’s extravaganza. This indicates that the ‘movement’ is sustainable and is broadening its already substantial base.

Legal Hackers

That same global, communal spirit fomented by technology and its promise can be found with Legal Hackers. This community sprung from a Brooklyn Law School clinic led by Jonathan Askin, wherein he posed the question: ‘how can lawyers leverage the tools and collaborative, open ethos of the technology community to anticipate and solve law and policy problems?’ This question led to the first ever legal hackathon in 2012 and became the impetus for a movement that has become the largest grassroots legal innovation community in the world, with more than 75 chapters on 6 continents and over 10,000 members.

Legal Hackers chapters host free, public events—including meet-ups, workshops, demo nights, and hackathons—in order to build community and foster creative problem-solving at the intersection of law and technology. This social objective is emblematic of the new global community. It is a reminder to the legal profession that it is intended not only to serve individual clients zealously, competently, and ethically but also to protect and defend the rule of law.

Legal Education is Being Reimagined and Realigned with The Marketplace

A handful of law schools are in the vanguard of curriculum reform designed to prepare [the future lawyer](#). Bucerius (Germany), IE (Spain), and The University of Miami’s ‘[LawWithoutWalls](#),’ are examples of law programs that have aligned their curricula to the marketplace, providing students with a global industry perspective, core practice skills, exposure to core legal delivery competencies—project management, data analytics, impact of technology on legal delivery, business basics, collaboration, etc.--experiential learning, and other in-demand skillsets. These institutions meld legal,

technological, and business training to provide graduates--and those already in the marketplace-- the skills required in a rapidly changing marketplace.

Each of these institutions has forged close ties with the marketplace. Technology is the bridge connecting them to law firms, corporate legal departments, and law companies that collaborate with and often employ their students. This practice, often referred to as 'tech transfer,' has been in place in engineering and medical schools for some time. Its growing adoption by progressive law schools evidences a recognition that the Academy—like most traditional law firms—has become misaligned with the marketplace. The institutions cited here--and a handful of others--are taking steps to bridge that divide. [Incubators](#) are popping up at law schools (as well as firms) around the world, offering another vehicle for the Academy to leverage its resources and align itself--and students--with other stakeholders in the legal ecosystem.

Ryerson University in Canada is another example of the collaborative power of technology. The Toronto-based University launched its '[Legal Innovation Zone](#)' (LIZ) a few years ago, incubating legal tech companies, serving as a *de facto* ground zero for the energized Toronto legal tech community, and sponsoring events including talks by global legal thought leaders. The LIZ supports, fosters, and develops solutions and techniques to improve legal services and to expand access to them.

This week, the Canadian Common Law Program Approval Committee of the Federation of Law Societies of Canada granted the law school proposal preliminary approval, paving the way for Ryerson to launch a law school. The world may not need another (traditional) law school, but it will surely benefit from Ryerson's progressive approach that combines law, business, technology, experiential learning, social commitment, and a close alignment with the Toronto, Canadian, and global legal business communities. Technology is the mortar cementing the relationship between Ryerson and the community and the cornerstone of the new law school's advancement of the LIZ mission.

Conclusion

Technology is often seen as disconnecting people from one another-- promoting detachment, isolation, and fostering a *faux* intimacy by creating virtual 'relationships.' But technology is also a cohesive force—especially in the legal industry. It has spawned innovation in a precedent-bound culture, replaced parochialism with globalism, transformed a zero-sum ethos into one where 'everyone wins' solutions are sought, and imbued the industry with a new energy, focus, and resolve to address its wicked problems and to improve legal delivery. At the same time, the pervasive use of technology in law is a clarion call to hone emotional intelligence--'people skills.' Becoming a 'trusted advisor' is about building client trust and confidence with demonstrated expertise, judgment, outstanding service, and compassion. These characteristics separate humans from machines, and both are required to solve law's wicked problems and to improve legal delivery for all.

