COVID-19 Challenges: Keeping Law Firms Going Amid Uncertain Times

The COVID-19 pandemic is forcing changes in the way the world works to such a degree that the effects are sure to extend far beyond the current situation.

In the legal world, there are currently a variety of responses in play.

What Law Firms Have Done

Social distancing is in effect at many firms, while others are rotating teams of lawyers in and out each day. This platooning strategy allows the firm to maintain a presence in its offices while minimizing the chances for its attorneys to encounter the virus. Some large and midsized firms have opted for these approaches, which may be giving firms more time to possibly prepare to accelerate its processes for allowing all its attorneys to be fully remote, eventually.

Of course, this approach is not without risks in a legal environment that was undergoing significant change even before COVID-19 hit. For example, the focus on allowing lawyers to avoid the office actually represents a struggle for many law firm partners who value face-time in the office as part of a firm's culture. However, placed on the scale with concerns over COVID-19 on the other side, on balance, the answer is obvious. Whether it's the COVID-19 pandemic or some other external pressure forcing the legal industry's hand, it's clearly the time to let go of static, out-moded notions of work and instead fully embrace the efficiencies of remote technologies.

Remote access has grown at a fast clip recently. To aid that mass migration, we now may be entering the age of the platform and app.

This technology, which offers scalable collaboration and presentation, is designed for "anywhere access" and is well-equipped to handle the increased traffic as legal professionals conduct internal and external meetings, litigation teams work in concert to craft their arguments and write and submit briefs, and firm managers access and analyze their teams' workflow.

Like the concept of remote lawyering, however, this available technology comes with risks, too. For example, those law firms that use VPNs sometimes struggle with network speed, depending on connection and workload; and in fact, many networks may be ill-equipped to handle nearly all their employees working remotely. Beyond considering system capacities, however, corporate IT departments have an even bigger worry — cybersecurity.

Ben Levi, co-founder & COO of InCloudCounsel, recently wrote how the rise of remote lawyering and flex-work ability was increasingly becoming the reality throughout the legal industry even before the outbreak. That's not only good for law firms wanting to increase efficiency and save on overhead costs, but it's also reflective of lawyers wanting more fulfilling lives and better well-being.

If the virus continues to disrupt life for several months, as many experts expect it to, law firms will have to rethink everything, from industry events to summer associate programs to their long-held traditions and ways of doing business.