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EDITOR'S NOTE



All of the professions, including law, have undergone significant changes in the past 25 years. Essentially, the professions have moved away from a “mom and pop” operation to a more centralized, consolidated structure.

The practice of law has become more of a business during this past quarter century. Marketing the profession, providing legal services, and billing for those services have become much more sophisticated. There has been an extraordinary surge in mergers, consolidations, multiple locations for the same firm, and international branches.

To accommodate these fast-paced changes, it has become much more important to have law firm management in a real business sense than in the past. To be progressively successful, the modern law firm must devise a strategic plan, remaining attuned to both obvious and subtle cues in adjusting to new circumstances.

Technology has had a profound impact on law practice. As Bill Ramsey and Phillip Hampton note in this issue, technology has touched almost every aspect of law practice—word processing, time and billing, electronic research, communications by voice and e-mail, presentation of information in court, and discovering and obtaining evidence in litigation. The authors suggest that, instead of making an attorney’s life easier, the growth of electronic information has made it more difficult.

In the past decade, there has been an explosion of mediation and arbitration to resolve legal disputes. Overloaded courts, extremely busy lawyers, and cost-conscious clients all have embraced this trend. As David Taylor’s article explains, alternative dispute resolution has accelerated because of litigation’s expense, undue length, uncertain results, and resulting reputation damage.

Despite the impressive growth in advertising legal services and other marketing-oriented practices—more characteristic of a business than a profession—there remains the problem of delivering effective representation to the poor through pro bono programs and legal aid.

Indeed, an elderly lawyer of 25 years ago would be astonished to see the changes in the profession today.

—Horace E. Johns, Editor

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