

Digital Tools Level Playing Field

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► Keith Zimmet practices corporate law specializing in asset-based lending, mergers and acquisitions and real estate transactions. He chairs the commercial finance practice group and co-chairs the real estate practice group at the firm, which has 29 attorneys. He was formerly an adjunct professor at UCLA, teaching law to CPA candidates.

What is the biggest impact of digitalization?

Through digitalization of communication, research, discovery and search capabilities, our firm is able to compete with very large firms on a much more equal footing. In addition, digitalization has reduced the need for extensive libraries and file storage, resulting in more efficient use of our space. Also, the use of electronic files and remote access allows our attorneys to access our firm's files wherever they are throughout the world.



How has it affected relationships with clients?

Better and more efficient communication.

What is the biggest challenge?

It has led to some commoditization of legal services. These document preparation companies produce quality-looking documents. However, without performing proper legal analysis, consumers may find out too late that the documents they have received are not truly applicable to their unique situation.

What is the biggest opportunity of digitalization?

Search technology, document management systems and

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discovery software allows smaller firms to compete with larger firms without the need to hire additional support staff.

Has it affected the price of legal services?

It will cause most firms to become more efficient and a greater percentage of attorneys' time will be billed to pure legal analysis, drafting and negotiation, with less time spent on ancillary activities such as the physical distribution of documents.

Who are the biggest winners?

The clients, as digitalization forces most firms to become

more efficient in the services they perform.

The biggest losers?

Traditional law firms that fail to adapt. Also, physical file storage companies, messenger services, librarians and to some extent landlords.

Have you laid off workers?

No. Our firm has substantially increased in size over the past five years.

How will digitalization change the legal profession in the next decade?

We will see continual movement toward mobilization, virtual offices, virtual meetings and court appearances.

— Joel Russell