

August 27, 2020

## Top legal tech experts explore industry trends reported in Wolters Kluwer's *Future Ready Lawyer Survey*

By *Brad Rosen*

In setting the stage for a lively webinar discussion around Wolters Kluwer's *2020 Future Ready Lawyer Survey*, [Ken Crutchfield](#), a Vice President in the company's Legal Markets group, observed that the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic will have a far-reaching, long-term and structural impact across the legal industry. Crutchfield also noted that amid the changes to come, there will also be continuity, and even acceleration, in the ongoing transformation of the legal profession.

The [webinar](#), hosted in conjunction with the Corporate Counsel Business Journal (CCBJ), explored trends, progress and challenges from across the legal profession, capturing perspectives from both law firms and corporate legal departments. The webinar speakers were some of the nation's leading legal technology and innovation experts, including [Mark Brennan](#), Global Lead Innovation Partner at Hogan Lovells, [Kathryn DeBord](#), Chief Innovation Officer at Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner, and [Evan Slavitt](#), Senior VP and General Counsel at AVX Corporation, a leading manufacturer and supplier of advanced electronic components. [Chantal Vermeire](#), the Head of Strategy for Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory, moderated the discussion.

**Survey and key findings.** The *2020 Future Ready Lawyer Survey: Performance Drivers* was conducted by a global independent research firm on behalf of Wolters Kluwer Legal & Regulatory. Participants included 700 professionals from across 10 countries in the U.S. and Europe representing law firms, corporate legal departments, and business services firms. The report identifies trends affecting the future of law as the industry undergoes significant transformation and examines whether legal organizations are prepared to drive higher performance. While the survey was conducted before the COVID-19 pandemic took hold, the overwhelming consensus among webinar participants was that the pandemic has only accelerated the trends noted in the report.

According to Crutchfield, the financial pressures on businesses created by the crisis have put a spotlight on performance moving ahead, meaning that corporate counsel and law firms will need to increase productivity and efficiency while delivering results and value more aggressively. He summarized the key findings of the survey as follows:

- Technology is a key force for change in the profession and critical to improved relationships, performance and productivity.
- There are gaps in understanding, expectations, experience, priorities, and capabilities within law firms, as well as between law firms and corporate legal departments. These disconnects inhibit top performance.
- Corporate legal departments are pressuring law firms to improve productivity and service. Law firms, driven by client expectations, are getting the message and investing to improve performance.

Crutchfield also underscored one of the key conclusions of the survey, which identifies a correlation between profitability and technology adoption. Notably, 62 percent of attorneys in technology-leading firms reported increased profits, while just 17 percent of those trailing in technological adoption did so.

**Innovation is crucial.** Mark Brennan observed that recent events, including COVID-19 and the demand for racial justice, have greatly accelerated the demand for, and opportunity created by, change. Brennan noted that issues regarding law firms' long-term real estate decisions, workplace locations, and worker agility, which have been lingering for some time, have now come to the forefront. He stated that organizations that have a mindset and culture of innovation are well poised to tackle these problems. Brennan noted that as the world and his firm's clients are changing, the increased focus on diversity in people and thought is critical to innovation, business health, and client relationships.

**Driving change in a crisis.** Kathryn DeBord remarked that in some respects it was easier driving change in this time of crisis, when the pressures to do more with less were undeniable. She noted that her firm has leveraged technology, moved towards automation, and reengineered work that lawyers traditionally do to a more efficient process. DeBord also observed that for her firm, which has had business continuity tools in place and has been planning on going remote for three years, the transition to work-from-home was seamless. DeBord also spoke to the importance of identifying different ways to connect and collaborate with each other. She noted this has been especially important for transatlantic teams and relationships.

**Services beyond bricks and mortar.** According to general counsel Evan Slavitt, if he is noticing flashy technology in the delivery of legal services, he is being distracted. "I shouldn't even notice the technology, I should just notice the legal work," he observed. From Slavitt's perspective, finding the lowest-cost legal provider is not the objective; instead, he looks for one that will provide value by anticipating what he needs and making his job easier. Slavitt also agrees that the pandemic has accelerated trends that were already in motion and that the physical office is now basically irrelevant. He noted that law firms have to find ways to deliver legal services that are beyond the bricks and mortar. In his view, those that have made this jump will also have the advantage once the COVID-19 crisis subsides.

**Technology as a bridge.** DeBord noted that efficient delivery of legal services to corporate clients is key, observing that corporate legal departments are being pushed to be partners in their business rather than seen as traditional cost centers. In her view, law firms must assist corporate clients to decrease transaction cycle times and develop self-help tools for the business. Brennan echoed these sentiments, stating that deploying the right technology can drive efficiency and improve business relationships. However, he cautioned that before deploying a particular technology it is important to carefully think through the issues and use technology in a bespoke manner to address the problems at hand. This may involve some trial and error, Brennan said.

In Slavitt's view, corporate legal departments need to catch up technology-wise, as this segment of the legal industry has typically not been on the cutting edge. Slavitt favors techniques that help

the corporate legal department relate better with other areas of the company, and he is a fan of technologies that “can take work off my desk.” As for specific technologies, Slavitt sees promise for virtual document rooms for M&A transactions, as well as the use of artificial intelligence for document analysis.

**Realization versus readiness.** Brennan noted one of the most remarkable findings of the survey for him was that while respondents recognized the increasing importance of legal technology in the future, only 28 percent of those attorneys feel that their organization is very prepared to address that trend. Brennan observed that with so many legal solutions out there, there is a day-to-day disconnect on how to best use those technologies.

Nonetheless, solving the technology puzzle will remain paramount for lawyers. In this vein, Crutchfield concluded the webinar quoting legal technologist Bob Ambrogi: “Organizations that already leveraged technology were the ones that were best prepared to meet this crisis head on and continue to serve their clients with a minimum of disruption.”

The *2020 Future Ready Lawyer Survey: Performance Drivers* can be obtained [here](#).