

The search for the “any” key that actually took an attorney away from billable time and tied up a technician for several minutes is more typical than a scandalous blunder.

In one of his columns, Danzig recounted a problem that is discouragingly chronic in law offices and is typically done more often by support staff who are not properly trained. I myself have watched individuals download documents that are already in PDF format and prepare to file the hard copy somewhere so that it won't be lost. Then, in an apparent desire to move toward a paperless office, they scan the hard copy of the document and dutifully convert it to, yes, a PDF file so that the document can be electronically stored. Of course, the document they downloaded was already in PDF format, but that didn't deter these well-intentioned and hardworking individuals.

Another very minor though chronic problem that occurs with maddening frequency is the call from colleagues who insist that an e-mail that they had been waiting for was never sent to them. Rather than calling for a time-out and attempting to teach them how to conduct a search of the e-mails in their queue on Outlook™, it is more efficient, in the short term, simply to resend the e-mail that had been sent earlier.

Perhaps the whole issue—both large and small—can be reduced to an individual's willingness to consider change. Perhaps our profession has a reputation for being less open to change than some others are. One can certainly point out the rapidity with which technology has entered the legal field. It was not that many years ago that I found myself on a cruise around San Francisco Bay celebrating the 100th anniversary of a certain legal publishing company. Hoisting a cocktail next to me was a fellow who told me that he had been the third person hired at the company that eventually became LexisNexis.™ He told me how he had visited big Wall Street law firms back in those days pushing a rather large cart that contained a dedicated terminal to be used for demonstrating the advantages of online legal research.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” he would begin, “in this box is everything that is in your cavernous law library in the next room, and more.” Laughter would ripple through the boardroom, and the firm's lawyers would look at him as if he were P.T. Barnum. That was the reaction only 40 years ago!

I intend this column to be a look back, not a rant. There are far fewer quill pens in our law offices today than there used to be. The firms have far more lawyers and staff who are technology-oriented. Far fewer technophobes stalk the halls. More of us are open to change than ever before. And those developments are all good. However, there is still a tendency that we must guard against to assume that technology can be assimilated without any training or that only staff members need training and true proficiency; lawyers do not need to develop these skills. There are far too many offices that buy hardware and software because that is what law firms do these days. There are too few firms that make the commitment to the training that is necessary to help the technologically impaired among us to find the “any” keys when we need them. That works to the detriment of all in the firm. It works the detriment of our clients as well.

Conclusion

It is clear that the age of technophobic dinosaurs is passing. However, it is less clear that all of us in the profession share a commitment to the most efficient use of the technology that is available to us. Perhaps that is the next frontier. See you next month in Cyberia. **TFL**

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