



Attorneys Use Technology to Better Serve Clients

By [Robert B. Fleming, CELA](#) & [Dennis S. Voorhees, CELA](#)

Technology is reshaping home and workplace—and law offices are no exception. Software, cloud computing and mobile devices have introduced convenience and efficiencies that benefit families with special needs.

Assistive Technology

Technical advances are making it easier to communicate directly with clients who are nonverbal. One young woman, who had been listening to her parents and attorney discuss a third party special needs trust being created on her behalf, followed up with her own comments by computer. Using a head pointer, she tapped out her concerns, offering tremendous insight into how the document should be drafted. Communications boards are another example of how technology can promote self-advocacy.

Case Management Software

Long gone are the days of paper routing slips, desktop inboxes and consecutive reviews as attorney/paralegal teams collaborate. With case management software, incoming documents can be read simultaneously by everyone with a need to know, each annotating and distributing updates as they occur. Software-based checklists and templates free attorneys to concentrate on a client's unique needs when constructing detailed documents. By enabling legal teams to focus their creativity and better share their insights, such software applications improve quality, shorten timeframes and drive down costs.

Research and Mobile Technology

Although subscription research services have been available to attorneys online for decades, rendering hard copy law libraries redundant, lawyers have come to love Google. Most courts post their cases on the Web, reducing search time to seconds.

A 2011 survey conducted by the American Bar Association found that 88 percent of respondents used smartphones for law-related work. A fifth of them were using research apps, and those numbers have undoubtedly surged since. With laptops, tablets and the ubiquitous Internet, attorneys can work wherever they are and whenever they have available chunks of time. They get faster answers to client questions, and can dash off quick emails in response, regardless of time of day.

Virtual Offices and Cloud Computing

Virtual law offices, which largely serve their clients online, are becoming more common. Web-based software enables a firm's documents to be securely stored in "the cloud" and accessed from nearly any location. A wealth of call forwarding technologies enable clients to call a central number to reach an attorney anywhere. It suddenly becomes practical for clients to work with law firms at a greater distance from the family home. Gone are rows of filing cabinets and since in-person meetings are minimized, modest conference rooms do the trick, driving down overhead.

Client portals are beginning to offer even more convenience. Password-protected portions of a law firm's website provide a more secure alternative to email. Families can access their case information day or night, comment on drafts and get updates on court dates. Phone tag is greatly reduced. For families with special needs, this added flexibility means fewer demands on their overcrowded schedules. Still somewhat rare, due to the cost and complexity of implementation, client portals will undoubtedly proliferate as the technology matures.

Undoubtedly, technology will continue to change the ways that special needs legal teams serve their clients. Who knows what innovations will become commonplace during the next decade? We can be confident, though, that as-yet-unimagined products and services will contribute to improved quality, convenience and affordability.

About this Article: *We hope you find this article informative, but it is not legal advice. You should consult your own attorney, who can review your specific situation and account for variations in state law and local practices. Laws and regulations are constantly changing, so the longer it has been since an article was written, the greater the likelihood that the article might be out of date. SNA members focus on this complex, evolving area of law. To locate a member in your state, visit [Find an Attorney](#).*

Requirements for Reproducing this Article: *The above article may be reprinted only if it appears unmodified, including both the author description above the title and the "About this Article" paragraph immediately following the article, accompanied by the following statement: "Reprinted with permission of the Special Needs Alliance – www.specialneedsalliance.org." The article may not be reproduced online. Instead, references to it should link to it on the SNA website.*