Invest in Your Career By Becoming More Tech Savvy

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce

Some of us are geeks by predilection. We study tech obsessively, looking to learn as many tips and tricks as we can find, like a dog chasing a prized rabbit. (Seriously, google "tips and tricks" on nearly any tech topic, and you'll see the kinds of rabbit holes we dive into.) The thing is, doing this also gives us a distinct career advantage over muggles — by which I mean normal corporate counsel — who obviously know their tech basics but aren't interested in spending the time to learn much more.

Technology gives us a career advantage because we are often able to do the same work as a muggle, just much easier and faster. For example, many geeks have taken the trouble to build a library of often used keyboard shortcuts. I'm not just talking about standard things like using Control or Command + B to make selected type bold, although those kinds of keyboard shortcuts truly can save you a lot of time. I'm talking about creating snippet shortcuts that allow you to type three or four keystrokes that can automatically populate an entire email, letter, or even a contract, leaving just the blanks you need to customize it to the context. This can be easily done on every single operating system, whether you use Windows, Mac, Android, or iOS.

Or there are things like learning how to add one or more attachments or pictures within an email in Mail on iOS by pressing anywhere within the email and scrolling to the far right on the ribbon that then appears. My point is that there are useful tricks anyone can learn that can transform a dilettante into a power user. And being a power user makes you a more powerful and valuable lawyer because you can get more done, faster and more easily.

Here are my suggestions for how to start. Pick the two or three apps you use most often (for many people those will be Word and Outlook), and then start to pay attention to your pain points. These are usually simple and repetitive things you do many times a day that don't involve legal skills. They may not even feel like sources of friction. In some cases, you have been dealing with them for so long they've become invisible to you — but when you begin to pay attention, you will notice that they take

up precious time.

For example, suppose that the first thing you do when opening a blank Word document is to change the font, because even though you aren't a geek, you know better than to settle for Calibri (you do, don't you?). So, every time you open that document, you start by going into Format, then Font, and then select the one you prefer (Optima is really great). And maybe you do that because it hasn't occurred to you, or you don't yet know how, to change the default font. But it's so easy to learn! Once you do, you'll never have to waste those precious moments again. That may be a bad example, but you get my point. Pick an app, pay attention, find a problem, learn the fix.
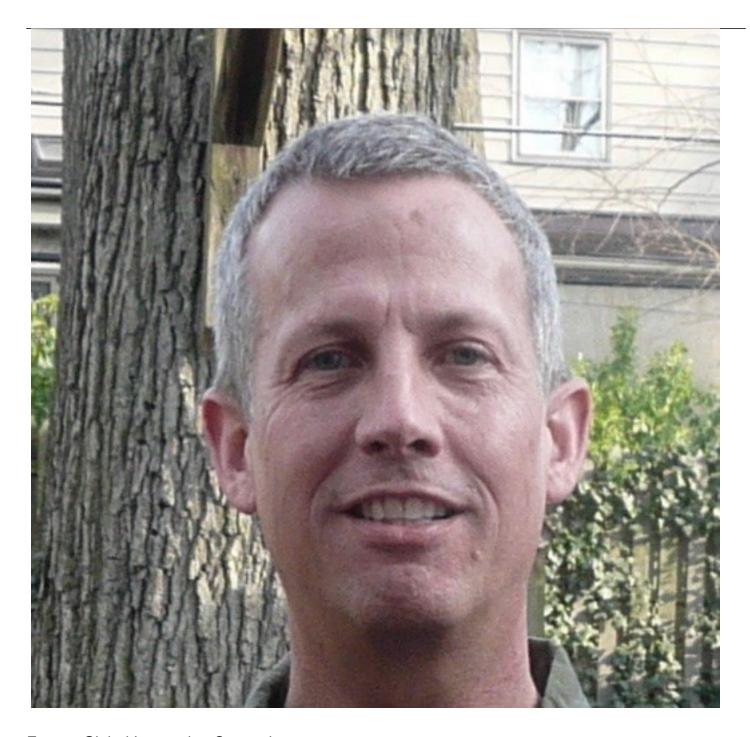
Or pick an Operating System or device that you use all the time and do the same thing. For example, I know that many of you frequently use iPhones. Of course, Apple does its best to make them as intuitive as possible, but they are way more capable than most of us know. One of my geek idols is David Sparks, a California sole practitioner lawyer whose geek nom-de-plume is MacSparky. Sparks writes amazing interactive technology guides in iBooks that include embedded videos. His latest (2018) is the iPhone Field Guide, and even though I've been studying this stuff for years, it has taught me a lot. And he makes learning fun.

Then, of course, there's always the internet. One of the nicest things about the tech community is the number of blogs and forums on just about any technical subject, and the surprisingly huge number of experts willing to write or participate in them.

As a lawyer, you are trained to understand how your clients' business processes work. A lawyer who understands technology may be able to suggest ways to improve those processes that may not arise in your company's IT team, which typically only gets involved when asked. Or, you may be able to suggest ways your entire legal department can better leverage technology as a group.

The point is, a relatively minor investment in learning how to better use the technology that has become so omnipresent in our lives may pay a big dividend, both for your career advancement as well as your overall job satisfaction. It certainly has for me.

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