

# Law Practice Automation

*The future of law practice*



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*Or, when will computers replace the lawyers?*

## The current state of affairs

In this week's readings, the articles reference what the future of law could look like if computers are used to replace lawyers or some of the tasks that lawyers' or their assistants currently handle.

As we've learned throughout the semester, computers are tools. Used appropriately, the computer can enhance the lawyer's ability to practice law and be more effective for the client (which should be the goal). The key with automation is to find those areas of the practice that the computer does better and faster than the lawyer or staff, but is dependent on the lawyer's knowledge and experience to make it work.

As an example, consider the firm's intake process. The lawyer knows what kind of case (e.g., litigation or transactional). The lawyer knows that certain types of cases have certain deadlines. Generally, those items are manually added to the case or practice management system by the lawyer's assistant. But, if the lawyer and his or her staff has utilized the appropriate technology, all of the deadlines can be added to the calendar, tasks assigned to the appropriate individuals in the firm, and even have the initial documents drafted for the attorney to review.

To see an example of this concept in action, read [this article](#) and watch [the video](#).

Other ideas for law office automation are closely related to knowledge management in firms. As mentioned previously in this class, a firm's form bank is an important part of a successful practice. The form is used as a starting point for many documents in a case, rather than re-creating a document from scratch. This saves

time formatting the documents and, more importantly, from recreating former research and the like.

There are programs that take this knowledge management to the next level. One such program is an add-in to Microsoft Word that allows the firm to search its forms bank and add the appropriate sections of the form to the active document. In addition, the program can take a certain piece of data, like a trial date, and give the form user the remaining case deadlines based on entering one data point.

Other uses of this type of technology include the ability to enter a birthday and have the form calculate the age of the individual, loan payments and interest rates, personal pronouns (e.g., he, she, it, they), and more. Check out [these products](#) for more on the features available.

Of course, automating a firm like this takes time and effort to put into place. But, the reward is worth it in the long run.

The future of the legal practice will depend on the lawyer's ability to adapt to available technology. The more that transactional forms are available on the web (e.g., LegalZoom), the more that traditional law firms will have to rely on automation to drive down cost and better serve clients.

A computer will never be able to replace the human aspect of the practice of law, but can be used to allow the firm and its users to have a better experience while practicing law.