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A NEWSLETTER PROVIDED BY THE LAW PRACTICE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM  
OF THE STATE BAR OF TEXAS

### THE TECHNOLOGY ROUNDUP

Gerry Morris, J.D.

#### Things to Consider When Buying a Printer

If you have a computer in your office you've got to have a printer. That is unless your office and every person or business you deal with has gone completely paperless. Unless you have a highly specialized practice with just one or two clients, that's not likely. Selecting a printer can be a bit confusing. There are different technologies available, and a lot of manufacturers and models out there. Here are some considerations that may help.



As with purchasing any piece of office equipment, I suggest that you start with analyzing your needs. What will the printer be used for? How many pages per month will be printed? How much, if any, of the printing will be in color. Will photographs be printed? How important is print speed? How many computers will print through the same printer? Would it make sense to buy a multifunction machine that also scans and faxes?

The two major technologies available for office printers are inkjet and laser. Inkjet printers make an image by squirting small quantities of ink out of near microscopic jets. The jets are contained in the ink cartridge itself and are replaced with every cartridge change. The precision of this technology is amazing. The jets are like tiny guns that go off several times per second shooting out just the right amount of ink to make the letters in this column or

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### THE COACH'S CORNER

Debra Bruce, J.D.

#### A Revolution in the Legal World?

A landmark event in the legal world launched in May. This event will ultimately change the course of the practice of law. Or perhaps it is just further evidence of how dramatically the legal world has already changed in the last 10 years.



#### Australian Law Firm Goes Public

An Australian law firm went public and was listed on the Australian Stock Exchange on May 21, 2007. Australia adopted legislation that permits non-lawyers to invest in the ownership of a law firm, and capital to be raised publicly. The 140-lawyer firm, Slater & Gordon, will initially have shares owned by 42 lawyers and staff, according to a June 1, 2007 article in [The American Lawyer](#). Legislation has also been introduced in the United Kingdom to permit law firms there to sell stock publicly.

#### Big Partnerships Taking on Corporate Attributes

The expanding global economy has already fueled corporate-like merger and acquisition activity among U.S. mega law firms, as clients seek firms that can meet their needs across the country and around the world. With more than 75 U.S. law firms growing to over 500 attorneys and 20 exceeding 1000 attorneys, the traditional partnership structure has become less and less manageable.

Very large firms have already adopted many aspects of corporate structure with tiered management through practice group leaders, local office managing partners, and regional directors. Most large firms have non-lawyer executive directors, business managers, and human resource directors who report directly to the executive committee, or even sit on the executive committee. The firms also depend on the capability and

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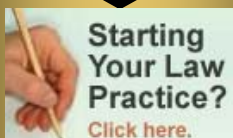
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 your law practice



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experience of information technology experts and marketing professionals to keep pace in the legal world, competing with the corporate world for the best providers. Thus a shift in ownership structure authorized under Australian law in many ways merely formalizes the already accomplished transition of the legal profession to a business.

**Predictable Impact of Legislation**

Although the UK legislation is not without opposition, if it gets adopted it will probably launch a wholesale shift in the legal business. When law firms in two major English-speaking economies have superior access to capital and a mechanism for long-term wealth-building beyond the billable hour, U.S. law firms will find themselves scrambling even more than they already do to compete for talent.

Legions of detractors will resist the change, citing many good reasons for their resistance. They will not be able to stop the wheels of commerce, once set in motion, however. Despite the inevitable lamentations about the "loss of professionalism and the rise of commercialism," there may be a bright side to publicly held law firms, and this article will mention a few.

**The Bright Side**

Few would argue that today's large law firms have a highly desirable culture and working environment. One need only observe the rampant and sometimes crippling associate attrition that most large firms experience, to recognize the dysfunction plaguing their ranks. While I wouldn't suggest public ownership of law firms as the solution to that problem, such a stunning and revolutionary change may have ancillary benefits that affect the firm culture positively.

Shifting mega-firms away from the traditional partnership structure to a more corporate structure with outside investors may generate significant benefits to the firms and even to the legal profession. As Prof. Milton Regan at the Georgetown University Law Center wrote, "Currently, there is no influential stakeholder whose financial stake in the firm encourages profitable lawyers to curb self-interest for the sake of the firm. Those with the most business are the most mobile, and often the least inclined to make this

compromise."

Self-interested behavior threatens the stability of the firm and would make the firm unattractive to investors. Indeed, allegations in court papers relating to the 2003 demise of the mega-firm Brobeck Phleger & Harrison LLP claimed that self-interested behavior destroyed the firm. It was alleged that partners continued taking large distributions even when economic downturns affected the firm, and then a mass defection triggered a freefall.

Prof. Regan suggests that "firms may decide that a compensation system weighted heavily toward 'eat what you kill' is counterproductive in a world in which stability and commitment to the firm are key considerations for investors. This may lead to a more productive balance of cooperative and competitive incentives within the firm, as well as simply a more pleasant and supportive atmosphere." To read more discussion by Prof. Regan on this and related topics, go to <http://www.law.georgetown.edu/legalprofession/documents/firmsethicsequity.pdf>.

**Bridging the Chasm**

As true business managers and marketing experts have the opportunity to share in the profits they generate in a law firm, the great class chasm between lawyers and non-lawyers within the firm may diminish. Firms may develop more balanced methods of valuing the contributions of its employees, as training and mentoring become recognized as being essential to the stability and productivity of the firm. Perhaps even teamwork could become popular. As Prof. Regan puts it, "investor preference for stability thus could temper what some see as excessively individualistic tendencies in modern law practice."

As financial distinctions between lawyers and other contributors blur, the "up or out" cultures that still exist in many large firms due to the stigma of not making partner, will also transform. Law firms will probably stratify more, with associates, paralegals and staff having the opportunity to share in the profits that their efforts create.

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Lawyers who have family or lifestyle reasons for working reduced hours may find a comfortable way to stay with the firm when success or failure is not marked by the bright line of partnership. Stock options and employee stock ownership can provide additional opportunities for all lawyers and other employees to share in the success of the firm as the result of their extraordinary performance, contributing to improved talent retention.

### **Commoditization of Legal Services**

I confess that I have some difficulty imagining how a public law firm would work in the near term. I can imagine the possibility of a serious decline in the professionalism of law practice and the commoditization of many legal services. Largely due to the Internet, we already see the beginning of the commoditization of legal services. I'm not sure that public opinion of lawyers can sink much lower, so the public may welcome lower prices and fail to notice any decline in professionalism.

One result may be that many lawyers will make less money, with most becoming part of the working middle class, instead of the professional elite, and a few becoming ultra-wealthy titans. When we compare the income of lawyers in mega-firms to those in most of the smaller firms, one could say that trend launched a decade ago.

### **Your Thoughts?**

I suspect that my musings may trigger some heart palpitations. I welcome your thoughts on the potential impact of law firms going public.

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an 8" x10" photo print from your digital camera.

Laser printers statically charge the paper on the areas where the ink should go, pass it by an ink source where the ink sticks to the static charge and then presses and heats the ink to make it stick. There are variations of the basic technology, but it's all relatively similar. I've recently read about a new inkjet technology that prints up to sixty pages per minute utilizing a print cartridge that is the width of a piece of paper. The cartridge is not required to move from side to side so the printing process is much faster. Printers with this technology will be available in a year or so.

Inkjet and laser printers each have their advantages and disadvantages. Inkjets do colors better than lasers. Color lasers are good, but a good photo quality inkjet printer can produce amazing photo quality prints, so much so that the photofinishing industry is in trouble. However, inkjet printers are, on average, slower than lasers and, in the long run more costly.

The purchase price of an inkjet can create the false impression that they are the better value. However, purchase price isn't the whole story. Quoted in the July issue of Small Business Computing.com, Jeremy Shulman, an executive with a company that makes remanufactured ink cartridges said, "What manufacturers of these printers don't fully explain to consumers is the true cost of ownership of a low-cost color printer. The general rule of thumb is that the cheaper the printer, the more expensive the disposable costs for refills and so on." The article goes on to compare the per page cost for a popular inkjet printer to a popular laser. The inkjet's total cost for 2100 pages worked out to be an ink bill of 235.60 for a Canon i320 Color Bubble Jet Printer. Let's say that you print about 40,000 pages a year (3333.3 pages a month). The cost with the Canon printer would be about \$4,487.71 plus the cost of the printer, around \$50 in 2005.

In comparison, an HP Laserjet printer costing about \$400 can do the job for about \$460 worth of toner. As some point the drum will have to be replaced in most laser printers costing maybe \$150. Even with this cost the per page printing cost is

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## Upcoming Events

**Managing Your Real Estate Law Practice in a Changing Market** is scheduled live in San Antonio July 13, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy0.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6996>

**The (Almost) Paperless Criminal Law Practice and Trial Presentation Technology** is scheduled live in Houston on July 24, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit:

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**Disaster Preparedness** is scheduled live in Dallas July 26, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=7076>

**Legal Support Staff Training Seminar (No MCLE)** is scheduled live in Lubbock August 15, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit:

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**Legal Support Staff Training Seminar (No MCLE)** is scheduled live in Laredo September 12, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit: <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=7274>

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**Perfecting Your Estate Planning and Probate Practice** is scheduled for video replay in Dallas August 28, 2007. For more information or to register, call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit:

<http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=6990>

## Law Practice Management Webcasts

**Establishing a Quick and Easy State Bar Compliant Web Site** is scheduled on July 25, 2007. For more information call 800-204-2222, ext. 1574 or visit: <http://www.texasbarcle.com/CLE/AABuy1.asp?sProductType=EV&IID=7245>

**Closing Your Law Practice** is scheduled for August 23, 2007. More information will be online soon at: <http://www.TexasBarCLE.com/> and click on "Webcasts"

## Law Practice Management Special Offers

### Books of the Month

#### Law Office Procedures Manual for Solos and Small Firms

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This new, revised edition of the Law Office Procedures Manual for Solos and Small Firms provides you with everything you need to establish an appropriate organizational structure to allow your firm to operate effectively, efficiently, and productively. It's a step-by-step guide offering advice and ideas for building and maintaining a thoroughly professional staff and practice.

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much less than that of an inkjet.

Of course the technology is getting better and the per page price of an inkjet has come down some since the 2005 article. But, so has the cost per page from laser jets. Basically, the industry is not set up to provide low cost consumables for inkjet printers. For instance the same article quoted above states that the major printer manufactures profit tremendously from the sales of inkjet cartridges. HP, for example, according to the 2005 article, makes over \$10 billion from ink supplies, more than half its total revenue.

So why buy an inkjet? The answer is that they are superior in their ability to print color images. I have an HP 6122 Deskjet in my office that we use to print photos. I also used it for several years to print letterhead. It does an excellent job of both. For color printing you can't go wrong with a photo quality printer from HP, Epson, Canon, Dell, or Lexmark. I prefer the HP models because they are extremely reliable. Epson and Canon are rated higher for image quality but I can't tell the difference. The purchase price of a good inkjet printer is so low that having one around just for photos makes sense.

However, for the usual printing in my law office, pleadings, correspondence and miscellaneous documents in black and white, a laser printer is the obvious choice. When I recently upgraded our workgroup printer I looked at cost, of course, but there were other considerations. Print speed was important. While most of the six computer users in my office have a small desktop printer in their offices for quick small print jobs, the large jobs are directed to a workgroup printer. I decided to upgrade because the HP Laserjet 1200 I'd had for years was just too slow. At about 10 pages per minute, it was a bottleneck. Also, in order to be accessible over the network the computer to which it was attached had to be running. That wasn't always the case after hours or on weekends. Also, it is occasionally convenient for me to print a document on both sides of the page so that it can be placed in a notebook and read in book format. Double sided printing was a feature I was interested in.

I settled on the Brother HL-5250DN. It was hard for me to abandon HP after years of faithful service but the Brother printer appeared to be too good a deal to pass up. This model is rated at 30 pages per minute and it will come fairly close to that speed when printing pleadings and other documents that are comprised of double spaced fonts rather than graphics. It will print on both sides of the paper by printing the first side, then sucking the page back into the printer to print the other side. This is a fairly quick process. The printer is network ready meaning that you can plug it into your Ethernet network and it appears as a device like any other network member. The driver for the printer installs on all computers connected to network that will use the printer. Printing goes directly to the printer and it operates without being dependent on any computer in the network for spooling or any other function.

A review of the HL-5250 DN in the December 20, 2005 addition of PC Magazine gives it a four out of five star rating for heavy duty use in a home office or small office. It lists its

pros as "compact size, fast performance. Excellent text and good graphics. Ethernet connections." It lists its cons as "photo quality just fair." I think PC Magazine was really reaching to come up with a negative about the HL-5250. Who would expect a black and white laser printer to have great photo quality?

The article lists the duty cycle for the printer at 20,000 pages per month. That's a lot more than my six user office (three attorneys) will need. The cost per page is estimated at 1.4 cents. I shopped on line for mine and found one for \$250 with an extra 300 sheet paper tray included. The standard setup includes one 300 sheet paper tray.

My experience with all-in-one printer fax copier scanner devices hasn't been especially good. As I've written before, a good scanner is essential to the efficiency of my reduced paper office. I haven't found a small office all-in-one machine that includes a decent scanner. It is helpful though, to have the printing and faxing function combined just to save space. We use the laser all-in-one machine we have as our primary fax and a backup printer. We don't use the scanner function at all.

If your printing needs require more speed, color, greater paper capacity or more paper handling functions (such as collating and stapling) the higher end models such as the high end HP color or black and white laserjets may be the best choice. Also, Xerox and other companies offer document management systems with printing, copying, scanning and faxing wrapped up into one machine that looks like a traditional copier. The scanning function on these machines is first class. These alternatives are a bit pricy for the average small law office but may be a consideration for any office that outputs a high volume of printed material. I would suggest shopping the different brands and perhaps hiring an office technology expert for consultation when choosing one of these high end systems.

The bottom line for the typical small office is that a laser printer is the better choice for production printing. Inkjets are superior for photo printing so you may want to have one around just for that purpose. Color lasers are an option where the quality doesn't have to be the "picture perfect." For most small offices the 20,000 page duty cycle of the Brother HL-5250 DN is more than adequate. The initial cost and the cost per page of that printer makes it an attractive choice. However, HP has a near 50% market share for a reason. HP printers just keep going and going. I have replaced several because of obsolescence, but never because of malfunction. I'll have to see how the Brother printer is doing in ten years before I can pronounce the two brands comparable as far as durability is concerned.

*E. G. "Gerry" Morris is a solo practitioner and has practiced law for over 28 years in Austin, Texas. He is certified as a Criminal Law Specialist by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. His firm web site is at [www.egmlaw.com](http://www.egmlaw.com). Email your comments and questions to Gerry at [tech@egmlaw.com](mailto:tech@egmlaw.com).*