

► Preface

Changes in technology have contributed to improvements in the practice of law. This text shows many of the ways that technology has increased the efficacy and efficiency of those who work in the legal field.

Chapter One describes how the growing use of hardware and software have helped to transform how people practice the law. Software can harness a computer's processing power, going beyond the efficient retrieval, modification, and use of information about the law to reducing the risk of mistake in the timely completion of formal documents like a petition for bankruptcy. Hardware, which describes the machinery of technology, can improve office functionality.

Office productivity software, the focus of Chapter Two, expands upon the effective preparation and management of letters, briefs, and pleadings. For example, the software can generate standardized forms from fee agreements to requests for the production of documents for quick modification and use. Spreadsheet software can help a lawyer satisfy an ethical obligation to keep accurate records about clients' funds. During a trial about damages from an automobile accident, slide show software can direct a jury's attention to visual details about the vehicles and road conditions to make a point about who had obeyed the traffic laws.

A legal practice can increase the volume of business it can handle through the use of specialized software, like that reviewed in Chapter Three. Software that can automatically adjust the totals in the RESPA form for a real estate closing, perhaps due to a change in the fees kept in an escrow account, increases the likelihood of completing the sale on time. For a bankruptcy proceeding or a divorce settlement, revising the list of a client's assets can help to resolve the legal issues faster. When incorporating a client's business, software can generate documents critical to the operation of the business, like changes to the Articles of Incorporation. To guide a client about how to manage assets in case of incapacitation, a comprehensive software package can generate an array of important documents, like a durable power of attorney or a healthcare proxy.

Practice-management software can help improve the operations of a law office, as shown in Chapter Four. For example, it can keep track of business expenditures while monitoring the time employees spend working on client matters. Case management software, synchronized with practice management software, can record time spent preparing materials for discovery on a client's case, making it easy to generating a monthly bill.

Access to sophisticated databases and search engines, as discussed in Chapter Five, has improved legal research. Besides not having to set aside space for a law library, conducting Internet-based research also simplifies the process of try-

ing out different research strategies without having to search and thumb through law books.

Using the Internet can pose risks for a legal practice. Chapter Six explores issues related to preserving the integrity of computers and networks to meet ethical obligations about safeguarding client information.

This text looks at how technology has positively improved the practice of law. By looking at how hardware and software can lead to greater efficiency and effectiveness, paralegals and lawyers can better use the law.