75% OF PARTNERS BELIEVE UPPING IT SPEND WOULD IMPROVE THEIR FIRM

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30%

Proportion of partners in Spain and Portugal who said their firm provides them with tablets/iPads

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Three in four partners in Iberia feel their firm's profitability and efficiency would be enhanced with more IT investment, while half think email poses security risk

The vast majority of partners in Spain and Portugal believe their law firm could increase its profitability and efficiency by investing more in technology and also feel that their firm should provide more technology-related training, according to research carried out by Iberian Lawyer. However, the study also highlighted some issues and habits that could potentially give rise to concern among clients about the security of confidential information. The survey revealed that around half of all partners think that their firm's email system potentially poses security risks, while one in four partners say that their firm does not make it mandatory to use a password to unlock the screen on mobile devices – a finding that may cause concern given that 99 per cent of partners in Iberia use wireless devices to access email.

There appears to be general agreement among partners in Iberia that spending more money on technology would have benefits for their firm. A total of 75 per cent of respondents to the survey said that they thought their firm could increase its profitability and efficiency by investing more in technology. However, 11 per cent said they did not believe increased investment in IT would enhance their firm's profitability and efficiency. A further 14 per cent admitted they did not know what impact increased IT investment would have.

Intriguingly, though three-quarters of participants in the research said more IT investment would improve profitability and efficiency, nearly two-thirds (62 per cent) said that their firm's investment in technology was at the "correct level". This perhaps suggests that, while many partners feel their firm

would benefit from increased investment in technology, many also believe that their firm would possibly be unwise, or unable, to commit more funds to such an end.

The research also threw up some interesting observations with regard to the attitudes of law firm leaders to IT departments and technology in general. While 50 per cent of respondents said the senior partners in their firm viewed technology as "an asset" and 31 per cent said the leaders in their firm saw it as "a way of increasing revenue growth", it seems that some law firm managers are not so convinced about the potential of technology. A total of 14 per cent of respondents said the senior lawyers at their firm viewed technology as an "expense", while five per cent said the leaders at their firm viewed it as "not contributing to revenue growth". As one partner in Portugal remarked: "[Technology is viewed by senior partners at the firm] as something with relevance in order to work, but not anything special that will solve problems or contribute to revenue growth."

Automated file-tracking

Smartphone maintenance is major annoyance for lawyers

It is perhaps attitudes such as this that explain why around one in four partners in Spain and Portugal said that their firm did not use technology to automate the tracking of physical files. One partner in Spain acknowledges that one of the biggest technology-related annoyances at their firm was "not maximising new tools like document automation".

Another partner in Spain remarked that their firm, and its clients, would benefit from the input of an external IT consultant who could evaluate the firm´s technology-related needs. "[Our firm should] find an expert and get a comprehensive strategic analysis of what we do and create a 360-degree plan to tackle all IT issues," the partner said. Another respondent said their firm would improve its service to clients if it used IT for project management rather than taking a "piecemeal approach for different tasks".

A partner in Portugal commented that their firm´s clients would benefit if partners had the mindset that technology is a "top priority". He added that technology was a "tool to improve efficiency and service to clients". However, another partner took an entirely different view: "We should not waste time doing IT-related training." That said, there are other lawyers in Iberia who would see the benefit in sharing best practice with regard to law firms´ use of technology – one partner in Spain remarked that client service would be improved if law firms "benchmarked what technology competitors in the industry are using".

Security fears

Almost half of the participants in the research (46 per cent) admitted that the email system at the firm potentially poses security risks. Other security concerns relate to mobile devices, which are used by 99 per cent of Iberian lawyers to access email. One in four respondents to the survey (23 per cent) said their firm did not "make it mandatory to use a password to unlock the screen on mobile devices". Meanwhile, 42 per cent of participants said that, to their knowledge, their firm did not provide technology security awareness training.

Indeed, when asked to select the three biggest technology issues or annoyances from a pre-determined list, "security/risk management" was chosen most frequently, being selected by 68 per cent of respondents. The management of emails was the second most commonly cited issue or annoyance (selected by 53 per cent), with technology-related training being the third (highlighted by 38 per cent of respondents). Other common problems and annoyances were: keeping up with new versions of software (22 per cent); IT

Which of the following statements would you say best summarises your attitude to the use of technology in law firms?

26%
I have an excellent understanding of technology and am convinced my firm is maximising its potential

30%
I have an excellent understanding of technology and believe my firm could do more to maximise its potential

36%
I find technology very interesting and think my firm could use it much more effectively

8%
I´m not particularly interested in technology, but I´m sure my firm could make better use of it

staffing issues (20 per cent); and the maintenance of mobile devices, such as smartphones (20 per cent).

Regarding the issue of using IT to increase efficiency, of the respondents who said their firm had more than one office, nine per cent said that their firm´s offices used different IT systems. Similarly, with regard to technology´s potential in terms of saving costs, 85 per cent of respondents said that "courier/delivery" services was an expense that was routinely charged to clients, while 50 per cent said the cost of "long-distance charges" was also passed on to clients. A total of 45 per cent of respondents said they routinely passed on the cost of postage to clients, while 28 per cent commonly charged the cost of photocopies to clients.

A total of 135 partners in Spain and Portugal took part in the research, which was conducted via an online survey in July 2015. IL