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Symposium: Disruptive Innovation in Law and Technology

The landscape for lawyers is changing. Gone are the days when an attorney could hang up a shingle and count on a steady stream of clients; the ubiquity of online tools means that lawyers can no longer count on familiarity alone to guarantee client loyalty. What is an aspiring attorney to do in the face of these emerging phenomena?

The 2015 *Oregon Law Review* Symposium, “Disruptive Innovation in Law and Technology,” held April 24, 2015, in Portland, Oregon, offered a cornucopia of prescriptions. By bringing together a coterie of experts from around the country, the Symposium sought to answer a fundamental question: What are the skills lawyers will need to succeed in the face of rapid technological and structural change?

Dan Harris is a China-focused international business attorney and a founding member of Harris Moure international law firm. Harris discussed ways in which young lawyers could position themselves in today’s fluid and dynamic legal marketplace. Harris stressed the need to build a practice based not upon general legal practice areas but upon serving the legal needs of a particular type of client.

Peter Vogel, a partner at Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP in Dallas, discussed the importance of cyber security for lawyers. He noted that threats can come from a variety of angles, and that lawyers, as fiduciaries, must be the keepers of the flame. He also assessed tools that lawyers will need to succeed as our economy—and legal practice—becomes ever more digital.

Daniel Martin Katz, an associate professor at Michigan State University School of Law and chief strategy officer at LexPredict, brought the themes of the Symposium to a crescendo: marrying legal services with the emerging digital economy. Katz discussed ways in which legal services could be disrupted by nimble start-ups, and ways in which lawyers could leverage these incipient trends to serve unmet client needs and keep themselves gainfully employed.

Panelists at the Symposium included:

Kelly Reynolds, a law librarian at the University of Oregon School of Law, discussed the importance of exploiting new research tools to more effectively and efficiently address clients' needs.

Achim Reeb, an aerospace engineer by training, and Michael Callier, a legal process strategist at Davis Wright Tremaine LLP, discussed how performance benchmarking—long relegated to manufacturing—can be used to better execute legal projects. They addressed ways in which law firms can adapt to change and incorporate best practices from other disciplines.

The Honorable Ann Aiken, Chief Judge of the District Court of Oregon, hosted the event at the U.S. District Courthouse. The panelists stressed that technology, when used properly and judiciously, can enhance the flow of information and reduce transaction costs.

Lawyers are now at a junction in which it is necessary to change how they practice law in order to stay relevant and effective. We organized this Symposium to answer a fundamental question: What are the skills lawyers will need to succeed in the face of rapid technological and structural change?