



The Tools You Choose, The Tools You Use

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



“Get to know the business.” That bit of advice is repeated in just about every article written on how to flourish in a new in-house counsel role, and justifiably so. In order to best serve our clients, we must deeply understand what our businesses are fundamentally about to better inform the decisions we make and the advice we give, and to facilitate acceptance of that advice from our business partners.

Fortunately for me, my current employer really gets this. We are a national seller of complex rehab technology — sophisticated, custom-configured power and manual wheelchairs and related devices — and one thing we do to ensure new employees who work directly with our customers and medical professionals to configure and fit these devices is to enroll them in an intensive workshop for training on making careful measurements and assessments of our customers. Though my roles in legal and compliance don’t have me out in the field fitting chairs, my boss saw the benefit of having me learn firsthand how this process works, so off to class I went.

Getting the measurements spot-on is critical to a great outcome. A few millimeters here or there can mean the difference between the perfect balance for effective self-propulsion and a debilitating repetitive motion shoulder injury, or between a stable and comfortable support surface and a life-threatening pressure ulcer. My classmates and I each received folding yardsticks for measuring seat depth, height, and width for our instructors in the classroom. Such measurements are possible with such an instrument, but imagine for a moment approaching a seated colleague and using that to measure the precise distance between the back of their knee joint and the hindmost point on backsides. Our bodies aren’t shaped to align to straight edges, so better tools were developed to pinpoint such distances to a far greater degree of accuracy than a yardstick ever could. If you can picture one of those metal instruments with the multiple sliders used to size your shoes, but one you can sit in, you have the general idea. The results one can achieve with such a tool are more consistent and more reliable, but only if the operator is properly trained in its use.

This experience came to mind when I learned that this issue of the Docket is devoted to technology. Every day, we hear of new advances in technology of benefit to the in-house community, and no doubt, you'll be able to read more about that, and the challenges that arise from it, elsewhere in this issue. Meanwhile, look around your desk, and perhaps in your pocket, purse, or briefcase; even in small departments with limited budgets, we're all already surrounded by sophisticated tools that evolve in their utility even after we take possession of them.

We're also surrounded by (and some of us may even be) folks who are mostly oblivious to the potential of these tools. Ever receive a copy of a lengthy contract for review, in the form of a PDF attached to an email? You open it (perhaps after a little wait, because the file's so big it barely made it under your IT department's attachment size restrictions), only to discover the text of many of the pages is about 30 degrees away from horizontal (perhaps the sender's scanner guides were set to "foolscap") and the words on the pages aren't searchable? Did you know that with a standard copy of Acrobat (or several competitively priced alternatives such as FoxIt, Nitro, and others), you can align that text, make it searchable, and add headings navigation, all while reducing the file size significantly? If you're going to be cuddling up to that contract for a protracted bit, and referring back to it often, how much nicer would that be than endless scrolling in hopes you'll spot the section you care about at the moment? Chances are, that option is already (or could easily be) in your hands; you need only take a few minutes to learn how.

This is true of most applications we regularly use on our laptops, phones, tablets, or the cloud (looking at you, hyper-expensive legal research platform I'm locked into a long-term contract with); we just need to invest a little time upfront to leverage their full potential. So, give yourself permission to play with and explore the tools right in front of you; pull down every menu, click on every icon, see what happens. The minutes you spend could return hours to you down the road.

[Jeffrey W. Wheeler](#)



Associate General Counsel

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