



Legal Tech: How Your Legal User Interface Could Reclaim Productivity

Technology, Privacy, and eCommerce



Isn't it funny how using some legal technology tools can make you feel as if you're struggling to fill out tedious IRS forms all day — yet we can use a different tool to file a tax form with just a few clicks?

You're not to blame when a software application's user interface (UI) delivers a user experience (UX) that makes work difficult. Well-designed UI/UX can go a long way toward helping legal professionals get more done working more efficiently while also enjoying themselves more.

So, what can you do to help your legal team stop pulling out their hair in frustration and start pulling out vacation planners in relief instead?

Prioritize using software with thoughtful UI/UX design

Every software application's UI sets the tone for how we interact with it. How we feel about the software's usefulness, efficiency, and ease of use defines the UX, which significantly impacts the software's overall value.

Much about what makes for excellent UI/UX is subtle. These five questions can help you identify legal software with UI/UX that move your practice forward.

1. Is the legal software intuitive and straightforward?

We may want software that sports the precision, speed, and sophistication of a Mercedes-Benz. But we also need software that operates with the dependability, ease, and utility of a Volkswagen. That means no friction, no clutter, and no ambiguity. You should feel as if:

- You can quickly locate the feature you need. Precise language, clean lines, and lots of white space help you immediately see where to go next.
- You intuitively understand the environment. The design flow is recognizable and icons do what you expect them to do. For example, the hamburger icon takes you to the mobile menu, not something jarring like “share to Facebook.”
- You’re confident that a list includes all the options available for that functional category. You find all the editing functions grouped on a toolbar. The save, print, and preview functions are collectively placed.
- You know what just happened. Indicators acknowledge you’ve taken action. Buttons change color, or progress bars or pop-up messages appear.

2. Does the tool feel natural and steps recognizable?

For better or worse, widely used Microsoft programs and Android and Apple devices have standardized our UI/UX expectations. Natural-feeling dashboards and screens follow a conventional structure with a standard placement of elements. You won’t find a search bar in the middle of the screen or need to click three levels down into submenus to save your work.

Interactive elements should guide users easily from one predictable step to the next. Some legal tools provide recommendations based on user behavior or responses to questions. When UI/UX is so user-friendly and efficient that a salesperson can complete traditionally “legal” tasks such as creating an NDA independently, it frees up even more time for the legal department.

Legal technology tools also increasingly offer role-based dashboards that can be customized for specific needs. UI/UX can save hours when dashboards show priority information such as to-do items and status updates as soon as they log in.

3. Is everything I need accessible?

You might not appreciate the “Help” button or “(?)” icon much — until you can’t find it. Efficient UI/UX lets you quickly find everything you need at a glance.

Okay, maybe an intense glance will be necessary from time to time. The point is, when imaginative software designers follow their muse too far, they may prioritize creativity over functionality.

Some buttons and icons may not offer the prettiest visuals, but you need them quickly accessible. Similarly, clearly labeled tabs and conveniently linked shortcuts enable you to spend less time navigating the software and more time accomplishing tasks.

4. Is my experience consistent?

Imagine if a sidebar swapped sides or suddenly became a footer every time you went to a new page, or the main menu kept changing its pull-down options.

Every page’s layout and design should follow the same, predictable pattern. The fonts and design elements should work harmoniously. If colors or imagery convey meaning, the interpretation must be the same on every page.

Your actions, too, should deliver consistent results. Clicks, double-taps, long presses, and swipes

should work the same throughout. And, of course, you should also expect a consistent experience across desktop or mobile and iOS and Android devices.

5. Do I feel empowered and in control?

Enhanced technical capabilities shouldn't simultaneously enhance human difficulties. Over-engineered technology solutions can lead to disaster (e.g., forms with 25 mandatory fields of highly precise input). Nothing raises blood pressure quite so quickly as that glaring red notification "Please complete all required fields" at the bottom of a screen.

Similarly, when you hit a button, it should do what you expect it to do. On the off-chance that it doesn't, you deserve a warning to indicate the action is final, along with convenient "cancel" or "undo" buttons.

When a tool enables you to work more efficiently but doesn't overwhelm you with options and gives you the chance to undo actions, you feel empowered, unconstrained, and in control of your work. You also feel free to experiment and discover even more efficient and effective ways to work.

It's easy to find beautiful software. Finding beautiful software that is also easy to use and highly functional can be a bit more challenging. Don't settle for anything less than consistently superior UI/UX that moves your practice forward.

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Mack is also an award-winning (such as the prestigious ACC 2018 Top 10 30-Somethings and ABA 2022 Women of Legal Tech) general counsel, operations professional, startup advisor, public speaker, adjunct professor, and entrepreneur. She co-founded SunLaw, an organization dedicated to preparing women in-house attorneys to become general counsels and legal leaders, and WISE to help female law firm partners become rainmakers.

She has authored numerous books, including *Get on Board: Earning Your Ticket to a Corporate Board Seat*, *Fundamentals of Smart Contract Security and Blockchain Value: Transforming Business Models, Society, and Communities*. She is working on her next books: *Visual IQ for Lawyers* (ABA 2024), *The Rise of Product Lawyers: An Analytical Framework to Systematically Advise Your Clients Throughout the Product Lifecycle* (Globe Law and Business 2024), and *Legal Operations in the Age of AI and Data* (Globe Law and Business 2024).