

## Comment

# Why we'll always need solicitors

Despite falling claims numbers, new technology means the need for legal firms will not decrease



There are significant changes afoot in the casualty and motor claims markets that are impacting solicitors and the firms in which they work. The past two years have seen the bedding in of the Jackson reforms, expansion of the claims portal and an increase in the fixed fee regimes across various categories of work. This has reduced the volume of claims for claimant solicitors in several areas, as well as the income that such cases generate.

On the way are other changes that may have even more far-reaching consequences. Disruptive legal technologies are making it easier to automate work previously the preserve of junior lawyers. On the horizon are developments such as online dispute resolution, designed to allow low value claims to proceed through the courts facilitated by officials without the need for solicitors at all. Litigation for the Ebay age.

These changes are also significant for defendant firms. If anything we are further along the curve with fixed fees, commoditisation and consolidation being commonplace for some years now. Young solicitors are starting to ask if there will be good prospects in personal injury work. The answer is a definite yes.

**“** Whatever the future for law firms, there will remain a need for lawyers. Fundamentally, what we do is valuable



Things will continue to change, but change needs to be embraced rather than feared. Change creates opportunities. For example, there has been much comment about how driverless cars will reduce the number of accidents, perhaps avoiding the need for insurance at all because there will be no claims. It is possible this will happen, but more likely is that the law of unintended consequences will kick in. To start

with, the market will have to apply current law to new facts. Then new laws will probably be needed for new situations.

That is where lawyers come in – claimant lawyers running new arguments and defendant lawyers trying to defeat them. Just as technology might appear to close down major streams of work, so can societal change, public opinion or unexpected judicial decisions open other fronts in terms of claims. It is the legal equivalent of the circle of life.

The involvement of claimant and defendant lawyers in lower-value compensation claims is likely to decline. Technology, lower returns

and government policy is likely to see to that. A significant loss of business will put law firm business models under strain.

Not all will survive, but do not bet against the largest and also the best firms continuing to grow. Lower-value work may contract but solicitors are resilient, competitive and – despite their reputation – entrepreneurial. Many firms are becoming alternative business structured, taking the opportunity to add new businesses to their previously legal-only offer. Law firms are investing in big data analytics. This technology has seen the creation and sale of counter-fraud products to insurers. More recently, solicitors have spotted that some of their larger insurer clients have numerous legacy IT systems. They can turn this transactional data into management information and market insights; as one door closes, another opens.

Whatever the future for law firms, there will remain a need for lawyers. Fundamentally, what we do is valuable. We do not just know the law, but are able to apply it and to find innovative solutions. Our integrity and professionalism means we care about the service we offer.

The wise counsel given means the best of our profession are trusted advisers, those turned to when the chips are down. Despite the plethora of lawyer jokes, we offer a service to be proud of.

No matter how technology develops or price is controlled, a complex, diverse and a litigious society needs us. That will not change.

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