The proliferation of automated document review startups, client demands for more convenient and cost-sensitive service and the saturation of lawyers competing in the same marketplace are some of the well-publicized challenges and threats to the legal profession.

However, lawyer adaptability to changes in information technology is one key to profitable and successful law practices in the future, said Jim Calloway, director of the Oklahoma Bar Association's Management Assistance Program, at a Saturday Techshow session titled, “The Future of Law Practice (And, More Importantly, What You Should Be Doing to Plan For It.)”

There will be 10 to 40 percent fewer lawyers in the next decade than there are today, a trend that will effect mostly solos and small firms, predicts Fairfield, Connecticut-based attorney Fred Ury, according to Calloway. And the growing number of venture capitalists throwing tens of millions of dollars at startups automating basic legal services cannot be ignored by U.S. lawyers, Calloway said. However, lawyers can embrace some of those same systems, tools and techniques to boost their own law practices and attract clients.

“If we could magically remove LegalZoom from our universe, all that would do is slow this trend,” Calloway said. “LegalZoom isn’t about some innovative model, it’s about recognizing tools that now exist in society.”

“Lawyers process information, and information technology is a huge part of our future,” Calloway said. “Those who ‘don’t get it’ may soon no longer be doing it.”

Calloway’s plan for successful lawyering includes:

• Great client service in addition to great legal work means no more emails with bulky attachments. Client portals allow lawyers to upload and organize documents that can be viewed easily. Emails should be reserved for alerts to let clients know when the documents in the portal have been updated.

• “Get your conflict checking fine-tuned,” Calloway said. “If the future will be about teaming with other lawyers for specific matters, you cannot do that without easy, automated conflict checking procedures when a matter is tendered or an offer received.”

• Efficiency includes implementing better document assembly methods. “You’ve got to do document assembly,” Calloway said. “The technology is out there and other people will implement it.”

• Calloway also challenged attendees to add value beyond mere preparation of documents, such as a first-year business support plan that includes longer-term advising to accompany the documents needed to start a business.

• “Alternative fee arrangements are a critical part of the reinvention of the law office.” Calloway said. “Especially, if you put a lot of time and money into systems to assemble documents in minutes, you don’t want to charge by the hour.” Lawyers need to be flexible with fee structures in order to acknowledge the cost-savings of technology and account for the experience and training behind the work—and in this case, by-the-hour won’t cut it, Calloway said.