



A New Brand of Lawyer: Are You Ready?

*Written on April 22, 2010 by **Donna Seyle***

I started delving into the theories of Richard Susskind, law professor, revered legal futurist and author of The Future of Law (1996) and The End of Lawyers? (2008), after interacting online with Jorge Colon, technolawyer, pragmatic futurist and international lawyer/entrepreneur. At the end of a 2-1/2 hour conversation with Colon one Saturday afternoon, I can confirm he is all of that and more. He clearly articulates his goal: "My heart," he says, "is in bringing people together, people you can trust, to make money, to work and play together."

But Colon doesn't just focus on people who are within easy reach. This is an international adventure. And if you're up for the ride, you better hop on quick: Colon moves fast.

Maybe that is to be expected from someone who has lived in New York and London, and now practices in Miami, Fla. He graduated from Georgetown Law, and since then his resume reads like someone who knows how to be in five places at one time. Among his many pursuits, his primary practice since 2007 is Colon Partners, a virtual international

law practice with clients and projects in Florida, New York, South Africa, Eastern Europe, UK, Spain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Canada.

But his primary love is establishing and expanding his new website and future legal network, [Online Bar Association](#). OBA is currently operating through a [LinkedIn group](#) of the same name with his wife and attorney, Mayra Colon. Being a member of that group, I can tell you the Colons have a well-defined plan for the expansion and operation of OBA. His LinkedIn profile states: "OBA is designing the blueprint for helping lawyers and other legal professionals organize into Virtual Enterprise Networks (VENs) and build global networks for success".

Colon began experimenting with Susskind's ideas in the early 2000's, when he realized Susskind was making the same projections about the future of law that he had been thinking about. Concepts like (these are taken from [The End of Lawyers](#)):

- The path to commoditization, a continuum of kinds of legal services, from simplest to most complex, as commoditized, packaged, systematized, standardized, and bespoke (original documents)
- Standardization of recurrent legal tasks
- Systemization of repetitive tasks
- Packaged tasks – giving clients access to a firm's systems so they can do it themselves, but with the availability of attorney input as necessary
- Commoditized products – a completely standardized service that can be made available on a mass basis with little or no attorney input
- Proliferation of elawyering, or virtual law firms, that provide services online

and paradigm shifts that include moving legal services:

- From an advisory service to an information service
- From a reactive service to a proactive service
- From time-based billing to commodity pricing
- From a legal focus to a business focus
- From problem-solving to legal risk management (preemptive consulting rather than litigation)

Colon's thought processes easily aligned themselves with those projections. He is a systems guy. He chose law school over business school because the training would enable him to keep asking the right questions. When you ask the right questions, you can design the right systems. If you can design the right systems, why can't you design the right software to carry out the systems?

We are clearly seeing the concepts and paradigm shifts Susskind identified in process, moved along dramatically by economics and technology. The arena of opportunity called the "legal services industry" is growing off the charts. But now Colon is looking down the line and seeing the limits of even these changes. You can put your practice online, change your billing structure, shift your focus to an advisory capacity, take advantage of time and cost-saving technology. . .but you're still only you. Your firm is still just your firm, stuck in the confines and formalities of an entity designed in the past. If and when that business model stops working for you, for any reason, what's next? Within the traditional "firm" construct, when you compete on quality and price, there is no room to scale up

Colon envisions the legal industry moving past even this. Next paradigm shift: moving away from the adversarial to the collaborative. We have the systems, both procedural and virtual, to do this. We have the evolving mindset: providing free information and research online, creating high levels of trust through social media (read [Trust Agents](#) by Chris Brogan) and expanding our relationships are opening the door to collaboration. We don't need structured law firms, we need networks of lawyers collaborating through technology, or [Virtual Enterprise Networks](#) (VEN).

OBA is becoming that network. "OBA is building that culture of global collaboration, friendship and mutual support, a free membership culture of quality and collaboration. The desire and understanding by many lawyers of the need to build trust and relationships on a global scale for their success is driving OBA. As OBA members we can adapt and move much quicker in response to market and client needs.

"We want to make OBA primarily social, a joy to practice law, with a badge of trust between us as OBA members. This will translate into huge leverage for small to solo firms on a global scale not available to them before," Colon says.

Did I hear someone say the words "law" and "joy" in the same sentence? Perhaps there is a means to constructively engage in a legal system that is so broken as to be beyond repair. Perhaps we can put the excitement back in a profession that is dull with drudgery and uselessness. Jorge Colon thinks so, and he wants to take us there.

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