

## Meet Sophia and Jacob, J.D.s (2035)

From HBC's Sound Bites Blog: <http://bit.ly/LfbwTI>

May 17, 2012

The Social Security Administration just released its most popular baby names of 2011—[Sophia for girls](#), [Jacob for boys](#)—and it got us thinking: What will the legal profession look like when a baby Sophia or Jacob, born in 2011, graduates from law school in 2035? That Sophia or Jacob, who might be eligible for partnership in 2047 (given our ever-extending partnership tracks), will:

- **Have a small graduating class:** It's well accepted that there is an oversupply of lawyers in the United States, a fact highlighted, most unfortunately, by the mass layoffs of the recent past. While the economic downturn that began in 2007 is (one hopes) temporary, it gave rise to other trends—like pressure for more transparent employment data from law schools and now-entrenched changes to M&A work that call for fewer associate hours—that should continue to drive down attorney numbers. Coupled with the rise in outsourced document review and services like Legal Zoom for cookie-cutter work, the shrinking demand for expensive associate hours looks here to stay, which ultimately will mean smaller law school classes.
- **Practice law everywhere:** Today's technology already makes it possible for a lawyer in Miami to service a client in Seattle. This fact, together with the national nature of BigLaw practice, will continue to put pressure on states to relax jurisdictional restrictions—whether accomplished through a uniform bar exam or rules that are more permissive of legal practice across jurisdictional boundaries.
- **Get trained differently:** The pushback from clients on paying for first- and second-year associate hours—most notably, though the Association of Corporate Counsel's Value Challenge—will not relent. With firms unable to profit from junior associates (who are very likely to leave within five years anyway), we anticipate an explosion of alternative methods of training junior attorneys. The most likely candidates to fill the void are law schools and corporations, which either in tandem or separately can offer young lawyers exposure to practical assignments at a much lower cost than the rates being charged for first-year associate work.
- **Know about his/her industry:** As a result in part of her practical training, Sophia will be more deeply entrenched in the industry she services than today's legal graduates are. As the legal profession continues to look and behave more businesslike, it will become the norm for even young lawyers to know the ins and outs of the business niche they serve from an early point in their careers.
- **Get public reviews:** This process is already underway—on Yelp, Avvo, and other sites. It's only a matter of time before a go-to forum emerges on which the work of BigLaw attorneys gets reviewed like that of a repair shop or home remodeler.

While the above reflect changes, we expect some things to stay the same. When Sophia or Jacob bring in business, for instance, we expect that business to come, as it does today, through personal relationships—though those relationships are much more likely to have started through web searches and online

communities than they are today. We also expect that Sophia and Jacob will bill a significant portion of her work by the hour.

What does all this mean for HBC? We see our focus on developing campaigns that [position attorneys as thought leaders in their chosen industries](#) as becoming more important than ever. And as the practice of identifying and vetting legal talent online becomes the norm (in many respects, it already is), it will be more important than ever for attorneys to produce content that can be found online and demonstrates their expertise. [Content generation](#) is our specialty, and we expect it to continue to gain in importance.

And there's one last thing that we know for sure about Sophia and Jacob: They're going to grow up fast.