TOP 10 PREDICTIONS FOR THE 2019 LEGAL TECH JOB MARKET

New trends are emerging in 2019 that will change the landscape of legal technology forever
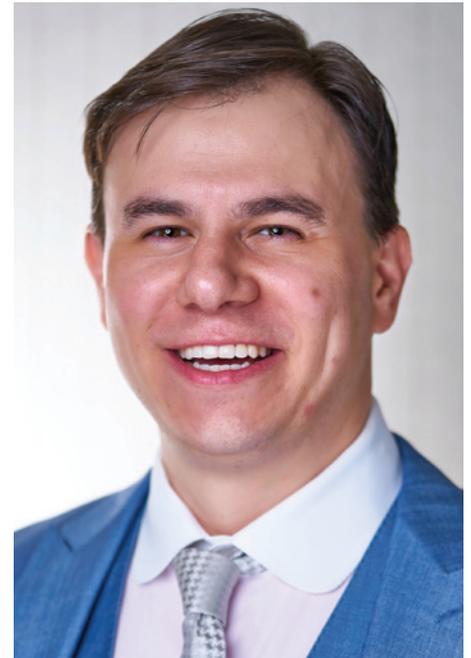
BY JARED COSEGLIA

For the last four years TRU Staffing Partners has given the community our annual "Top 10 Predictions" related to the legal technology job market. Last year's predictions drew attention to new disciplines seeking a place in the legal job market as well as repeat trends building momentum toward becoming new standards in industry hiring practices and talent development.

This year's prophecies reveal a culmination and realization of several forecasts from years past as well as several new developments (or lack of developments) that are shaping the future of staffing in the legal industry. These observations and deductions aim to help employers and employees anticipate how to maneuver professionally and hire the right talent in the year ahead. Here are TRU's top 10 predictions for 2019 and how they will impact the hiring practices of law firms, corporations, consultancies, software companies

and service providers around the globe:

1. Hiring really goes to the cloud—finally! In 2014, work-from-home opportunities constituted 3.6 percent of all job placements made annually at TRU. By 2018, this had climbed to a whopping 27 percent. More than one out of every four positions filled was virtual. The yearning of legal tech professionals to end commutes and balance life more effectively through working from home has finally reached the once deaf ears of employers in the industry. Hiring managers are now wisely using the ability to work from home as a way to attract and retain talent. Conversely, relocation placements reached an all-time low in 2018, dropping from 26.9 percent of placements in 2014 to a mere 7.6 percent of successfully hired professionals in 2018. As virtual employment adoption increases, the need to relocate talent decreases. This trend will dynamically affect employer

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winners and losers in the war for talent in 2019 as competition for precious passive job seekers intensifies and the differentiation between cultures of growing companies becomes more difficult to discern.

2. Privacy job market will be rich with midlevel jobs. Ushered in by the Cambridge Analytica/Facebook scandal in the United States and cemented

by the May 25, 2018, GDPR deadline in Europe, privacy has instantly gone from a niche discipline to a socially understood and valued commodity that is creating jobs, if not careers, for thousands of legal and legal technology professionals. In 2018, there was an explosion of CPO and partner-level placements throughout the Fortune 1000 and Am Law 200. In 2019, there will be a greater abundance of jobs a tier below these executives as corporate legal departments and law firm practice groups, big and boutique, aim to bolster the middle ranks with privacy associates and privacy program developers/executors. Corporations will hire more operational privacy professionals and top law firms will aim to poach associates from each other rather than pull from the privacy ranks of their clients.

3. Consulting firms will focus on consulting to grow. The 2018 FTI Consulting sale of Ringtail, its proprietary document processing, hosting and review technology for over a decade, to ESI software giant Nuix signaled to the market a trend that is permeating many consulting firms: a return to a focus on high-end consulting services in order to grow. Tool agnosticism, cross-functional capability, global expertise and talent bandwidth will be the focus of consulting firm growth in 2019. Tech will mean less, and cost less, than the people

handling that tech. As a result, consulting firms will begin to emphasize diversity (both ethnic and gender), business maturity, likability and the ability to one day drive meaningful revenue when making hiring decisions in 2019.

4. Contracting really is what's normal! Contract staffing growth has made the prediction countdown every year for good reason. For four consecutive years over 40 percent of job orders received by TRU Staffing Partners have been contract in nature. Whether it's a spike in e-discovery case work, an overflow of vulnerability and penetration assessment business or an in-house need to shore up an existing privacy program – contract staffing is becoming the chosen modus operandi for employers and employees alike in legal technology. Many assignments are project based, but many organizations are also adopting contract-to-hire as an institutional means of talent acquisition. Furthermore, more and more individuals who feel they have hit a concrete ceiling in vertical and financial growth working in traditional full-time roles are choosing the contract lifestyle to take control of their careers and work-life balance. In 2019, companies and candidates will take broader strides toward overcoming exploring contract employment as a weapon in their service arsenal.

5. Middle catches top in ESI. For the last two years a

powerful triad of e-discovery vendors has dominated the acquisition game: Epiq/DTI, Consilio/Advanced and KLDiscovery. In 2019, the middle market ESI vendors will play a more meaningful role in rolling up and becoming large enough to compete holistically with these once untouchable global providers. Companies like Driven, Xact (XDD) and QDiscovery are buying other companies and/or taking investment to scale toward the size of the aforementioned "Big 3." Pulling a page from the playbook of their larger competitors, acquisition will remain the primary means of scaling in the e-discovery vendor world. Fewer companies will remain immune to being bought or sold in 2019. The buys may not be as big, but they will remain abundant.

6. All hunt. No farm. For sales professionals in legal tech, it is becoming increasingly important to be proven to get a new job. The reason acquisition, specifically in e-discovery, has become the way to scale is because very few, if any, service

or software providers have built robust farm systems for sales talent; instead, the incestuous musical-chair-style sales hiring cycles will continue in 2019 between competitors; however, there will be fewer chairs available in 2019 than there were in 2018.

7. Cyber acceleration means going deep, not wide. As all companies begin to segment their proactive and reactive security experts and larger organizations wildly diversify their security human capital, traditional vertical growth paths where technical hands-on professionals migrate upward to more managerial roles may not apply to cybersecurity professionals. In 2019, the greater compensations and promotional opportunities for penetration testing and the DFIR (digital forensic and incident response) pros will be directly tied to deeper technical skill sets. Managing teams has value, but the hands-on skills are commanding a premium and will continue to do so until there is more commoditization and consolidation of tools in cybersecurity.

8. Certification required to separate from the pack. With vertical growth potential becoming increasingly competitive and requiring more cross-functional skills, getting yourself or your staff certified will be the most universally accepted way to differentiate from the crowd. Certs that matter most to hiring managers will include CEDS and Relativity certs in e-discovery; CIPP/US, CIPP/E, CIPP/G in privacy; and OSCP in proactive security. But there are a wealth of other certs that are growing in adoption and popularity including the Blockchain Certified Pro from EC-Council, programs at Harvard and MIT for cybersecurity savvy and many more.

9. Power balance shift begins. The year 2018 was a candidate's job market. Unemployment was at an all-time low. It was a year where demand outweighed supply and talent often had options when employers did not. In 2018, TRU represented more professionals who received and thus declined multiple job offers than in all seven years prior combined! But in 2019, more professionals will become cross-functionally educated, preparing to compete for new jobs in 2020. While negotiating power will likely balance back toward the employers in 2020, for now expect highly sought-after talent to have confidence in their professional options for 2019.

10. Legal tech pros will want jobs that don't yet exist. Many highly sought-after pros have a great interest in artificial intelligence, blockchain and data science positions, which are actually quite scarce in the current ecosystem. Though the educational ideologies have shifted toward thinking about the use of AI and blockchain in legal, the integration of these techniques and technologies has not proliferated to the point of having a dynamic effect on the amount of positions available. This will not change in 2019. Trickles, not streams, of jobs will exist in these nuance sectors of legal tech this year, but talent would be wise to get educated in these areas as they look for a brighter career path here in 2020 and beyond.

Jared Coseglia is the founder and CEO of TRU Staffing Partners, an Inc 5000 Fastest Growing American Company 2016 & 2017 and National Law Journal's #1 Legal Staffing Agency, and has over 15 years of experience representing thousands of professionals in e-discovery, cybersecurity and privacy throughout the world.