

Who Moved My Mouse? Technology, Online Legal Services and Lawyers' Ethics

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What is the impact of technological development on the provision of legal services? As in many areas of life, the entrance of technology into the legal field alters the way we understand law, think about it and practice it. Websites offer legal information to the public, as well as quick referrals to expert legal practitioners; accessible software enables us to prepare legal contracts and documents by ourselves; social networks have become a popular platform for lawyers. These developments are taking place rapidly, but existing legal rules cannot catch up with their pace of change. The Israel Bar Association, like other professional bodies, applies the traditional rules of ethics to the new technology; however, by doing so it is missing an important opportunity embedded in technological innovation. Does software that prepares a legal document based on a particular algorithm engage in "unauthorized practice of law"? Are lawyers who receive referrals from a legal website "partnering" with non-lawyers? To what extent are the rules on lawyers' advertising and client solicitation applicable to non-legal websites? In this article I explore the new configurations of the interface between law and technology, and its impact on accessibility to legal services, professionalism and the way we think about law.