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5 Innovative Legal Support Careers

Litigation is on the rise. Legal support services is a multibillion-dollar industry — one that often uses technology to enhance the practice of law.

Careers in this field are sometimes overlooked and not well-known, but they can play a vital role in supporting attorneys' efforts when it comes to efficiency and winning cases. Not only can these careers be rewarding, they can also be a great opportunity for someone who is looking to join the legal industry, especially those who are technologically savvy and searching for a flexible schedule.

Let's take a look at five of the most innovative legal support careers.

1. DIGITAL COURT REPORTER

These keepers of the record use professional-quality recording equipment — often employed in other industries, such as film and TV — to capture the spoken record during depositions, examinations under oath, hearings and trials. While recording, they use specialized software to notate speaker changes, events, spellings and times. Some software uses speech recognition technology to help start the transcript. Ultimately, the recording is sent to a legal transcriptionist to create a certified legal transcript.

Those seeking to enter this career path can get training online, in a classroom or on the job; they may need to obtain certification from the American Association of Electronic Reporters and Transcribers (AAERT), depending on the company and jurisdiction where they work. Generally, it only takes 6 to 12 weeks to complete the training required. Once employed, digital court reporters can expect to make between $30,000 and $60,000 with very flexible schedules and the bonus of meeting new people and constantly learning about the law.

2. LEGAL TRANSCRIPTIONIST

If digital court reporters are the keepers of the record, legal transcriptionists are the creators of the record. Transcriptionists process audio recordings from any number of sources, including courthouses, law firms, court reporting agencies and state attorney offices, and
turn them into verbatim certified legal transcripts. Using a variety of playback programs, transcriptionists listen to every word being said and turn them into words on the page. To be more efficient, many of them employ text expansion software, a foot pedal and special templates to generate the transcript.

This job is normally done by independent contractors working from home and is very flexible. Full-time transcriptionists can expect to earn $55,000 or more. Certification, which may be required by some agencies, jurisdictions or federal agencies, is provided by AAERT — Certified Electronic Transcriber — or the National Verbatim Reporters Association (NVRA) — Certified Legal Transcriptionist.

3. E-DISCOVERY SPECIALIST
With technology a constant part of our daily life, virtually everything we do generates data — and that data can be important to winning a case. An e-discovery specialist collects, sorts and analyzes that data, often using metadata (data about data). Specialists in this field work with computer programs to cull, dedupe, interpret and convert that data into useful information for a case.

This rapidly growing field needs people who are technology savvy but does not require formal training to get started. Specialists can get certified by the Association of Certified E-Discovery Specialists (ACEDS) or seek training online if they want an additional knowledge base. Salaries in this field range from $45,000 to over $100,000, but it can be a high-demand and high-stress career.

4. LEGAL VIDEOGRAPHER
Using professional-grade cameras, microphones and recording equipment ensures that the footage legal videographers record can be used as a valuable tool for testimony review, witness prep and playback at trial. Videographers appear at depositions, inspections, medical exams and other legal proceedings where attorneys want body language, tone and movement captured. Often independent contractors, legal videographers make their own schedule, create their own pricing and can easily expand their business.

Generally, legal videographers have some type of background in video, film or TV before entering the field, but most of the specific training is done on the job, though online training is available. Those wanting to be certified can do so through the National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) — Certified Legal Video Specialist — or the American Guild of Court Videographers (AGCV) — Certified Deposition Video Specialist — and can expect to make between $40,000 and $70,000 a year.

5. TRIAL TECHNICIAN
Unlike on TV where evidence just magically appears on a nearby screen every time it is referenced, in real life, there is often a highly skilled trial technician making that magic happen. These technicians organize exhibits, design demonstratives, set up audiovisual equipment and ultimately facilitate the presentation of the exhibits in trial using specialized software and presentation equipment. The trial technician can also assist in the development of trial strategy utilizing their understanding of how to push the technology while influencing the viewer — in many cases, the judge and jury.

Trial technicians can work directly for a law firm, or for a legal support company or a company dedicated to trial technology. They often have an IT, digital media or video production background. Those interested in the career can expect to make between $40,000 and $70,000 a year but have the potential to make more if they own their own company or specialize in a niche area of the law. Much of a trial technician’s training comes from on-the-job experience and from the software manufacturers, but if someone wants to prove their abilities, they can get certified by the NCRA or AGCV.

Litigation as a field continues to grow and these are just a few of the job opportunities in high demand — some may be worth exploring for your firm, and who knows, others may be worth exploring for you!

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