

## LEGAL BUSINESS

## Digitally speaking: Firms increasingly move to VoIP

By Paul Lima  
Toronto

At first, partners at McMillan Binch Mendelsohn LLP did not look favourably on a proposal to spend \$750,000 dollars to install a new telecom system, even though it meant they would save money down the line. However, when McMillan Binch moved its premises from one side of Bay Street to the other, Chris Duncan, information technology director with the firm, was able to get approval to upgrade from a plain old telephone system to a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) system.

The firm moved into BCE Place in 2004 and the archaic telecom system would not have survived the move, said Duncan. However, moving to VoIP was a big risk. Duncan knew of companies that had made the move, and then switched back to traditional systems because VoIP proved to be unreliable.

Fortunately, the VoIP system superseded expectations and the firm now has 500 IP phones in Toronto and 50 in its Montreal office.

McMillan Binch initially moved to VoIP to cut communications costs – calls between Montreal and Toronto are no longer long distance, and it is less expen-

sive to run voice and data over an IP network than it is to operate separate voice and data networks – but there was an added bonus, said Duncan. Lawyers who wanted nothing more than reliable dial tone are enamored of the new features.

For instance, the new phones are connected to a computer network directory. Like speed dial on steroids, the system lets lawyers look up and call any other lawyer in the firm, any client or any other contact. The IP phones are connected to the firm's meeting room-booking system. If a lawyer forgets what room a meeting is in, he can use any phone in the firm to look it up. In addition, when it comes to setting up conference calls, on-screen instructions walk lawyers through the simple process. "On the old system, most people didn't have a clue," said Duncan.

The total Canadian VoIP business market was estimated to be worth \$483-million at the end of 2004, and is expected to grow to more than \$1.9-billion in 2008, at a five-year compound annual growth rate of 41.5 per cent, according to VoIP All Over: Canadian Enterprise Voice over IP Telecommunications Market Forecast & Analysis 2004 - 2008, published by IT research firm, IDC

Canada. The number of IP telecom access line-equivalents is expected to surpass traditional circuit-switched access lines in the Canadian business market toward the later part of 2007 or early 2008.



"Canadian firms are more cautious and lag their U.S. counterparts in embracing IP telephony by about two years ... Yet the IP wave is gaining momentum," said Lawrence Surtees, co-author of the

report. He expects this year and next to be watershed years for VoIP implementation in large enterprises.

Migration to VoIP requires careful planning, said Isabelle Courville, president of Bell Enterprise, a segment of Bell Canada that provides voice, data and network management solutions for large businesses and government. "Upgrading data over an IP network comes first. However, VoIP is now mainstream."

Even though the cost of long distance has declined dramatically, long-distance savings are still driving VoIP adoption, at least at Gowling Lafleur Henderson LLP. With offices in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton, Waterloo, Calgary, Regina, Vancouver and Moscow, and with over 2,000 partners, lawyers and support staff collaborating on cases, the company ran up substantial long-distance bills. In addition, long distance calls had to be tracked by case using a manually entered 20-digit case code. In short, long-distance calls, although vital, were expensive and administratively time consuming.

Bell Canada installed a VoIP system two years ago at Gowling's Ottawa office. Now, the company has 2,400 IP phones on its network, so all calls between the

Canadian offices are local calls, said Scott Jolliffe, national managing partner based in Toronto. In addition, the system allows calls to be easily assigned to cases.

It was a "challenge" porting the Ottawa office to VoIP, Jolliffe admits. "By the third office, we had it down pat. We did the 750-person Toronto office last and it went beautifully. It speeds up voice communication so much."

Using a VoIP follow-me system, Gowling staff can forward incoming calls to cellphones, laptops or telephones in other offices. As well, a firm-wide voice-mail system on the IP network lets people forward messages to each other using the firm's five-digit extension system. Voice mail notices automatically show up on BlackBerry devices, and messages can be picked up from any phone or accessed from a laptop or desktop computer connected to the company's IP network from home or the road.

Lawyers on the go at McMillan Binch can use their laptops or home PCs to create a secure virtual private network connection to the McMillan Binch network "and you are talking as if you were in your office – getting full functionality," said Duncan. If a call comes in while the user is connected to the network, the laptop or PC rings — just like a phone.

"This stuff does work," said Duncan.

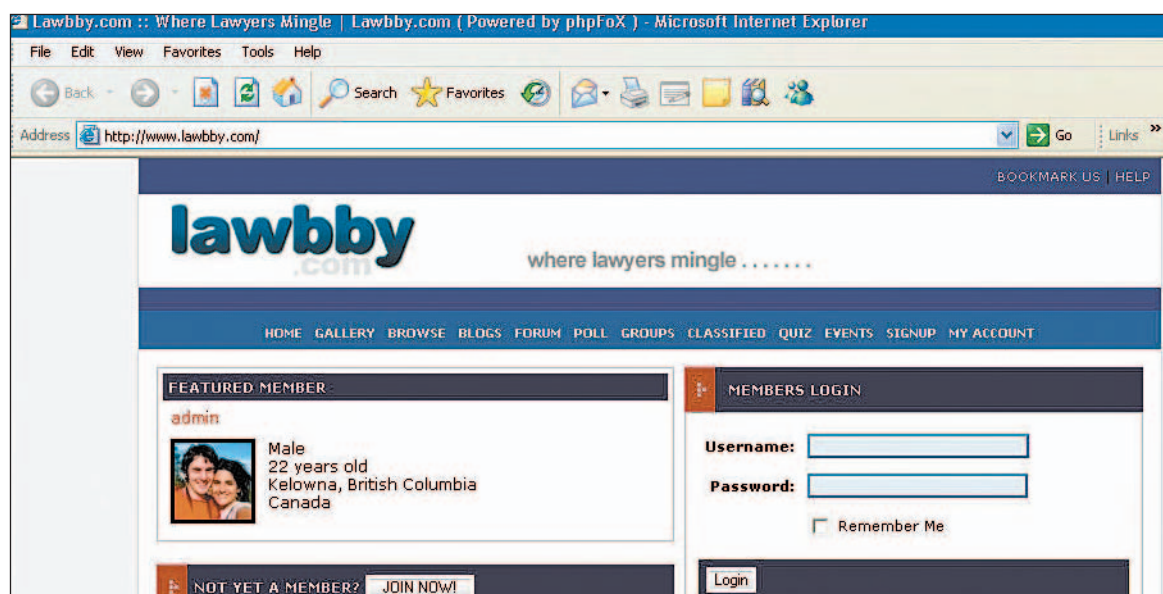
## Lawyers flock to Lawbby for business ... and pleasure

By Kim Edwards  
Toronto

Networking — the word can refer to a connection between computers and a connection between people. The new website [www.lawbby.com](http://www.lawbby.com) does both in a way, and is specifically designed for lawyers.

The Kelowna, B.C.-based company was founded in April 2006, when entrepreneur Chris Rempel felt that there was a niche to be filled in helping lawyers communicate with their peers around the world.

"The legal world online is pretty much untapped in terms of



membership sites that are free. There are some sites, there's one marketing one and a general newsletter, but they are paid sites. There are a couple forums and listserves, but the tech they use and the ease of communication is either outdated or very awkward."

Rempel, a 22-year-old entrepreneur specialized in joint venture development and marketing before starting the site. One of his clients as a marketing consultant is creating a merchant account product that is being marketed through Lawbby.com. He said he started Lawbby, "to create a web portal and to help my client market his products."

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# Website a private way for lawyers to communicate

## WEBSITE

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Lawbby features blogs, a photo gallery, a forum, a poll area, groups for various types of lawyers, a classified section and more content designed specifically for lawyers. "It's an easy way for [lawyers] to get online and express what they want to express with their peers, whether it's business, hobbies, entertainment, whatever. It's a place for lawyers to connect with each other; that's not something I've seen."

He added that the site is a chance for sometimes-reclusive lawyers to step out and express themselves. "People say lawyers are a one-man show, they don't want a lot to do with other lawyers, but people use the site to make friends with people who do the same thing as them. It's a casual

approach, but it can be used by lawyers to make some connections in the industry, and for people who want to get online and speak their opinions." For lawyers that need a peer's opinion on legal matters, Lawbby can serve as an information resource. "It is and it's going to become increasingly a place to get instant info; if someone wants to know about a certain practice

students and attorneys would take to it and they do. But surprisingly, the majority of accounts on Lawbby are lawyers and paralegals who are 35 plus, I didn't anticipate it, but that's it. We've got 500 members or so and more than half are over 35, according to their profiles."

Jon W. van Horne is one of those lawyers. This 61-year-old

shore clients, dealing with lawyers from other parts of the world "makes a lot of sense for me," he said. Lawbby, although just starting up, seemed to be a logical adjunct to more traditional ways of marketing online.

Although Lawbby clearly is not limited to professional concerns, it seems to be reasonably well suited to my interest in generating additional business," added van Horne.

Rempel said that people are mainly using the site for blogging. Since Lawbby requires you to register, it is a more private way for its users to communicate about legal and other issues with their fellow attorneys.

"Dealing directly with other lawyers avoids some ethical concerns that arise in more public forums. For this reason, I like the idea that Lawbby has its own internal blogs. I also appreciate

the fact that Lawbby allows members to make clear whether their interests are social or business related," said van Horne.

Rempel pointed out that many people using the site are looking for more social contact than networking. "It's not a marketing tool to get clients, but it can be a networking tool if you are looking for other people in the legal field. People use the site just out of curiosity and relating to people with similar interests, whether it's work related or non work related."

After the site was hacked recently, Rempel is working on improving Lawbby's security features and at the same time improve the user experience. "We are almost done, we have a few more wrinkles to iron out. What you are going to see is Lawbby develop; I don't feel comfortable rolling a site that isn't 100 per cent ready to go. What we are looking at is a way of communicating with our members more effectively."

**"... it's going to become increasingly a place to get instant info; if someone wants to know about a certain practice area, there's going to be someone on Lawbby who knows that area."**

area, there's going to be someone on Lawbby who knows that area," said Rempel.

Rempel said that lawyers over 35 have unexpectedly taken to the site. "When we initially rolled it out, I anticipated that younger law

attorney registered with Lawbby in July to "connect with other attorneys that may need a specialist to deal with issues their clients may have that they are not comfortable handling," he said. As his practice involves dealing with many off-

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Basman Smith LLP



is very please to announce that

**JENNIFER SAMARA SHUBER LL.B M.S.W.**

has joined our firm.

Jennifer brings her family law practice to the  
**Basman Smith Family Group.**

Jennifer is trained in family mediation and collaborative law.

**WELCOME JENNIFER!**

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E-mail: [jshuber@basmansmith.com](mailto:jshuber@basmansmith.com)

### Gowlings Adds Entertainment Law Expert Susan Abramovitch

Scott Jolliffe, National Managing Partner of Gowing Lafleur Henderson LLP, is very pleased to announce that Susan Abramovitch, a Lexpert-rated practitioner in entertainment law, is joining the Firm's Toronto office as a Partner in the Intellectual Property Department.



Susan Abramovitch, Partner

Ms. Abramovitch's entertainment practice encompasses all aspects of music industry transactions, as well as film, television, live theatre, multimedia, video gaming and book publishing. She has drafted and negotiated numerous entertainment-related agreements, both domestic and international, and has advised clients on all aspects of copyright law related to their business.

Ms. Abramovitch co-founded Stohn Abramovitch LLP, Canada's premier entertainment law boutique; and practised at the New York and Paris offices of Debevoise & Plimpton where she managed international M&A and telecommunications issues.

Called to the Bars of Ontario, Québec and New York, Ms. Abramovitch is a recognized leader in entertainment law and a tremendous addition to Gowlings. She can be reached at (416) 814-5673 or [susan.abramovitch@gowlings.com](mailto:susan.abramovitch@gowlings.com).

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