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DAILY UPDATE

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Q&A: Mark Cunningham, next president of La. State Bar Association

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Reporter

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Mark Cunningham, a senior partner in the New Orleans office of Jones Walker LLP, will serve as the 75th president of the Louisiana State Bar Association for the next year. He recently discussed the importance of focusing on new technological advances that are making waves in the legal profession and how they can be applied ethically.

This year he hopes to focus on the application of legal technology in the profession as well as tackling the ongoing rates of unemployment among new attorneys. Part of that challenge will be to continue cultivating the Legal Incubators for Tomorrow program, which provides training and technology advice to young attorneys. Here he discusses his goals during his year-long term as LSBA president:

What are your top three initiatives this year?

They are all interrelated to an overall theme. Over the course of the next year the LSBA will roll out services for lawyers to help them

practice more efficiently so they can lower their costs. This can be done by leveraging legal technology. I am looking at this coupled with working with younger lawyers that are currently facing education debt and making sure they have access to financial counseling, capital and banking services as they establish their own businesses.

What programs are in place that can offer these services?

The LIFT (Legal Incubators for Tomorrow) program is a business accelerator program created by the LSBA and the Louisiana Civil Justice Center. It was created to help attorneys figure out new business models to apply in the legal profession. It's the kind of model we are now seeing developed at the law school level as well. It's where students can go and learn different aspects of the law and obtain networking opportunities. A big focus of the LIFT program is on developing ideas that will help them provide legal services to people who need them.

How is technology changing the way legal services are provided?



We are not only competing with other lawyers but with the high-tech industry and consultants. There are more businesses that are trying to step into the area of the practice of law. There are those, for example, developing ways of computerizing dispute resolutions such as divorce proceedings. There is also more demand for these services from consumers that need access to affordable legal services.

What I want to do is really utilize my year as president to help lawyers become more entrepreneurial and savvy.