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Technology closes the book on firm's need for legal library

By Ja'Rena Lunsford
Business Writer

Shawn J. Roberts isn't one of those attorneys who knew at the age of 8 he wanted to go into law.

After getting his undergraduate degree in political science, Roberts said he was looking for something to do after school, and couldn't help but remember the skill many people said he should use: arguing.

"People always told me I should consider being an attorney because I was good at arguing," Roberts said. "I guess I'll consider that as a compliment."

The Lewiston, Idaho, native took the compliment — and advice — and attended law school at Oklahoma City University. Less than four years after graduation, Roberts found himself working for a firm that was about to close its doors.

"At the end of 2001, the owner announced he was closing the firm, which meant my job was going to end," Roberts said.

Instead of working for another firm, Roberts and law school friend Craig E. Brown decided to start their own firm, and Brown & Roberts P.C. was founded.

Roberts recently sat down with *The Oklahoman* to discuss his motivation at that time and what role technology has played in the company.

Q: Why did you eventually decide to go to law school after getting your bachelor's?

A: As I started to look at it, law was something that interested me, not just because you get to argue, but because I like to learn. I enjoy the law, understanding it and being able to apply it.

Q: How was it going from a small town in Idaho to Oklahoma City?

A: I really liked it. I liked having more opportunities to do different things that you didn't have in a small town. I liked the fact that Oklahoma City was bigger, but it's not what I would consider a metropolis. I'd rather live in a place like Oklahoma City that's big enough but doesn't have a lot of the problems that I hear about in bigger cities. I grew up in a town of 28,000 people. We had to drive two hours to get to the interstate and now there are three here.

Q: What motivated you and Brown to open your own firm?

A: We talked about whether we were ready to start our own firm. We weren't sure, but we decided to take a shot at it. We had lots of motivation. My wife was about to have a baby, and Craig was getting married, so we had all kinds of motivation to get out there. We opened the doors to Brown & Roberts Jan. 28, 2002. My son was born the next day and Craig got married three weeks later.

Q: Was it intimidating to open a firm so soon after law school?

A: It was a little bit scary, no question. We saw the numbers about how many businesses fail in the first year, and most don't make it five years, so we didn't know how far we were going to get. At 3½ years out of school, you don't have that much experience. We didn't have an attorney who had been there for 10 or 15 years, but we were fortunate to have a person who supported us, who provided us with guidance and sent some business our way. That was really

EXECUTIVE Q&A

Shawn J. Roberts

■ **Position:** President and shareholder, Brown & Roberts PC.

■ **Birthdate:** July 5, 1972.

■ **Hometown:** Lewiston, Idaho.

■ **Family:** Amy, wife of nine years; son, Sam, 5.

■ **Education:** University of Idaho, bachelor's in political science; Oklahoma City University, juris doctorate.

■ **What you are reading:** "How the Web Was Won: How Bill Gates and His Internet Idealists Transformed the Microsoft Empire."

helpful. Getting involved in things and taking some chances also helped. We weren't taking on a lot of complex things initially. We were doing things that we had experience in.

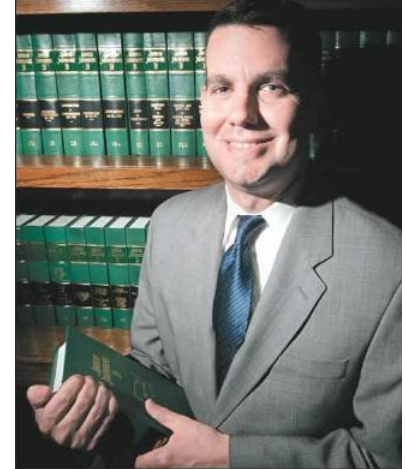
Q: Why did the firm choose to focus on small business?

A: We looked around and tried to figure out where we could fit into the market and from that we could tell small businesses were not always really well-served by the legal communities. A lot of times they are not a good fit with a large firm. We felt like, as a small firm, we could offer something that maybe not everyone was offering in terms of technology to be more efficient and effective. In our two-person firm, we really have to use technology. To me, it's an equalizer to firms who have more resources and people.

Q: What other ways has technology affected your firm?

A: We have no physical library anymore. We don't have any books in the office, everything is digital. There's just no reason to have any books. I think a lot of firms do not have a library, and if they do have one, it's probably because they can't find a place to get rid of the books.

Q: As a technology enthusiast, what do you think about the YouTube phenomenon?



Shawn J. Roberts stands in front of the only books inside Oklahoma City law firm, Brown & Roberts PC.

A: I think that's really interesting. They are going to have issues, they already do. I don't see how they've got far with allowing people to put clips of copyrighted material there. They were just sued recently and there will probably be more. I love following stuff like that.

Q: What do you like to do when you are not working following the technology industry?

A: I have a 5-year-old and I spend a lot of time doing things with him. We like sports, soccer, golf. He's not Tiger Woods but he had a perfect swing at 2 years old. Sam has just to hit the ball.

Q: How has fatherhood treated you?

A: It's pretty amazing. This is such a cliché, but it's how fast time goes by. Sam is going to be in kindergarten next fall. He's a little person; he can have a conversation with you. It's really neat to see him develop and be part of that and encourage him. It gives me some perspective. Work is important, but family is not as important as my family.