David Hershey-Webb is a partner at Himmelstein, McConnell, Gribben, Donoghue & Joseph LLP, a 10-lawyer tenants’ rights law firm in New York City, New York. He represents apartment renters, co-op shareholders and condominium unit owners in disputes with landlords and the boards of co-ops and condominiums.

The firm has been recognized for its housing court successes and its appellate work. It’s also respected for its expertise in administrative proceedings involving the New York Division of Housing and Community Renewal, and the New York Department of Housing, Preservation and Development.

“We specialize in cases involving rent regulation and affordable housing laws,” explains Hershey-Webb. Since its founding in 1983, the firm has represented scores of tenant associations throughout the city (involving upwards of 10,000 renters), has successfully blocked millions of dollars in unlawful rent increases and recovered millions of dollars in rent refunds.

Hershey-Webb also won a 2013 New York State Court of Appeals decision that made it easier for residents in rent-regulated apartments to take over a lease when the original lessee moves out.

TECHNOLOGY AND YOUNGER CLIENTS

Over the years, practically every aspect of the firm’s practice has been enhanced by evolving technologies. For starters, the firm relies heavily on online legal research. It also files all of its cases online.

The firm’s new business development has been positively impacted by tech too. Small and midsize law firms “increasingly rely on social media for referrals,” Hershey-Webb notes. He adds that many prospective client inquiries now come directly through the firm’s website. That said, Hershey-Webb stresses the importance of keeping your website current.

Going forward, he says interacting with younger generations of clients requires “more use of technology, including FaceTime® and online video services for consultations and meetings, use of chat services and much less paper.”

“Our traditional client base is aging, and we are hearing from younger clients with different issues.”

A HUMAN FACTOR

Despite the advent of the digital age, he says “the fast pace and information overload made possible by technology require discipline. It’s prudent to slow down, to step back and look at the larger picture, whether it concerns a particular case, a client or the practice of the firm itself.”

To encourage face-to-face collaboration, the lawyers within Himmelstein, McConnell, Gribben, Donoghue & Joseph LLP work together over lunch almost every day. “We discuss cases and share insights,” says Hershey-Webb. “It’s important to talk to other attorneys, to get different views and think in terms of narratives—stories.”
THE PROOF IS IN THE RESULTS

Sure, using technology to enhance human capabilities sounds good on paper—but how about in actual practice? Himmelstein, McConnell, Gribben, Donoghue & Joseph LLP certainly has its fair share of success stories.

Hershey-Webb is proud of his firm’s support for the New York State Tenant and Neighbors Coalition, and the Metropolitan Council on Housing. In 2019, these and other advocacy groups helped win a package of new rent laws that affect some 5.4 million residents in the city.

“I love relieving someone’s anxiety about their housing situation,” he says. “Being a lawyer for me means using my natural and learned skills to help people face challenges—and keep people in their homes.”